

TOWARD A UNITARY DEMOCRATIC STATE

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Some have criticized the Palestine Liberation Organization for its impractical views on the future of the Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews. Others feel that the PLO should introduce new, more realistic concepts, that is, concepts that are compatible with the currently acceptable proposals for a solution of this seemingly insoluble problem. In this connection, we must state categorically that the critics of our formula have failed to present viable alternatives which we might study, evaluate and consider in the light of our situation.

In all candour, the only alternative which has been put before us up to now is the Zionist solution, which negates the existence of the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination. These “moderate” Zionists who have belatedly recognized our existence as a result of our determination to fight for our rights, and as a result of world recognition of the justice of our struggle, have, nonetheless, stopped short of recognizing our national rights in our national homeland. Instead, they urge our people to search for the solution outside the proper political context and away from its national environment. The liberal Zionists have not even recognized the national rights of those Palestinians who have not been expelled from the land, as is the case with the Africans in Rhodesia and South Africa.

Perhaps the only serious solution that has been proposed for the Palestine problem is the one proposed by the Palestinian Arab and Jewish Communists. These Communists call for the partition of Palestine and the creation of two states on the soil of Palestine, one Jewish and the other Arab. This plan is the result of their own evaluation of the existing balance of forces and the historical phase in which we find ourselves—that is, according to Marxist analysis. We find this Communist solution more political than ideological. I will not go into details of the analysis but it is pertinent to point out that all the Communist literature that was produced in Palestine before the Zionist occupation points in this direction. Nor will I go into the reasons why we Palestinians re-

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jected the original United Nations recommendation of partition in 1947. I need only to remind the Communists how they voted on partition and how they persisted in their attitude on partition, claiming that the objective political situation then demanded such a solution.

Is implementation of a partition plan less realistic than the creation of a secular democratic state? Let us see.

1. Since the Zionist position, which is dictated by Zionist ideology, rejects democratic coexistence within the borders of one state, it no doubt also rejects democratic complementary coexistence in separate states existing side by side on Palestinian soil.

2. The Zionist acceptance of Israel as a Jewish state on only part of the land of Palestine for the past 28 years must be seen as a tactical step. For Zionist occupation policies in the occupied territories clearly show that the Zionists aim at the usurpation of all of Palestine—and the annexation of large parts of Egypt and Syria as well.

3. Israel's rejection of even the idea of creating a Palestinian state, and her insistence on negotiating only with the Arab states and not with the Palestinians, is an attempt to deny the existence of the people of Palestine, and to destroy the legitimate claims of this people. But it is perhaps understandable that Israel should take this stand, for the creation of a Palestinian state—even in part of Palestine—represents a threat to Israel and her rulers, because that state would be a *democratic secular* state and, as such, poses direct challenge to Zionist exclusivism.

If there is any hope at all that two separate states could be established in the same country, this will have to be preceded by the establishment of a progressive regime in Israel. Such a regime does not necessarily have to be Communist or socialist; but it will have to be, at the minimum, non-Zionist. If such a transformation does occur, Israel's Jews and Palestine's Arabs will discover that partition will be nothing more than a transitional step toward the establishment of a unitary democratic state. A truly democratic state is the only effective guarantee for political and economic independence.

You may ask after all this—and it is your right to do so—whether or not what I say now is at variance with the stated position of the Palestine Liberation Organization. My answer, quite simply, is: Yes, it probably is. But I cannot ignore the reality of my situation, or the fact that we exist in a constantly changing world. Ours is a world characterized by revolutionary mobilization, contradictory strategies and manoeuvres. Revolutionary wisdom therefore compels us not to reveal all of our cards. But we will not deviate from our

principles, and we mean what we say concerning the future relations between Palestine's Arabs and Israel's Jews.

These principles, which derive from an assessment of objective realities, are coupled with revolutionary visions for a better future and a true lasting peace. We believe in the right of the individual Israeli Jew to live in peace and security, in spite of the oppression which his regime has inflicted on us, and in spite of his government's total disregard for the rights of our people.

We believe that the aspirations of the common people and their right to a secure and dignified life is a sacred cause. These aspirations belong equally to the Muslim, the Christian, the Jew and the non-believer. Our belief in the sacredness of these aspirations is more profound since it is derived from our deep recognition of the tragedy which affected the Jew historically in racist societies and from the suffering which is inflicted on the Palestinian by racist Zionism.

Thus, we do not see in the current partitioning of Palestine, as our Communist colleagues perceive, a fundamental contradiction with our position. We perceive it rather as a necessary transitional phase leading one day to the establishment of a unified democratic state.

I cannot conclude these remarks without saying a word about the fact that we are meeting here in this hotel. You will recall of course that in 1942 the World Zionist Organization held a meeting in this very same Biltmore Hotel, a meeting at which was formulated the programme for an exclusive Jewish state in Palestine. The results of that programme have been tragic, both for the Arabs of Palestine and for the Jews. It divided our region. It remorselessly subjected innocent people to the terrors of war, racial oppression and national humiliation. We are all aware that such a programme as the Biltmore Programme of 1942 was not a programme for life but for death. Let us then, on this occasion, and in this historic place, put forward a programme for life, unity and democracy. Let us replace the old Biltmore Programme with a *new* Biltmore Programme: a secular democratic state for all Palestinian Arabs and all Israeli Jews.