

A REPLY TO CLOVIS MAKSOU ON THE ISSUE OF ISRAEL AND ZIONISM

The MISTAKES of the ARAB SOCIALISTS

By HAL DRAPER

In the last two issues of LABOR ACTION we have published an article by a representative Arab socialist spokesman, Comrade Clovis Maksoud, giving the Arab socialist position on Israel as he sees it. That article was, moreover, written at our invitation. And we welcome this opportunity for such an exchange of views.

The fact that we disagree quite vigorously with its central thesis on Israel does not, to us, lessen the value of bringing such a discussion out into the open.

It is easy to understand Comrade Maksoud's resentment at the treatment of this question by most European and American socialists. It is not simply that the latter often tend to be pro-Zionist. That is a point of view to which they are entitled. But Comrade Maksoud writes us, and he has indicated in his article, that it has been virtually impossible for the Arab socialist viewpoint to get itself heard in these quarters. Their press has refused to print any articles by him or his comrades. The Arab viewpoint has been dealt with by simple suppression. This applies to the British Labor press as others, he charges.

It is no surprise to us that the press and leadership of the social-democracies behave this way, for all their talk of being "tolerant" "democratic socialists" who have a very special horror of "Bolshevik" suppression of opinion. On the contrary, it is typical. They will often give space to minority points of view when these represent internal forces strong enough so that they cannot be ignored. But they have no or little concept of the inherent educational value of an open counter-position of views.

The attitude of LABOR ACTION and the ISL on this matter has always been different, almost distinctive. We have gone out of our way, when in our opinion the ends of political education would be furthered, to publish points of view with which we disagree. To be sure, we have always stoutly defended our own position against these; and we always will, because we are not a characterless "open forum" but a socialist movement; but the openness of our columns to political dispute and disagreement of an educational nature is a nearly unique feature.

In view of the Arab socialists' experiences with the European social-democracies and laborites of the Socialist International, we make the above clear in order to leave no uncertainty as to why we have given their position so much space, and also why we believe it necessary to criticize it.

Our Alternative to Chauvinism

In fair-sized passages throughout his article Comrade Maksoud felt it necessary to devote a good deal of attention to the attitudes of European socialists, as he found them, even though these remarks did not bear directly on the mooted question of Israel. We quite sympathize with his feeling that the Socialist International is shot through with opportunism, confusion, and unsocialist policies and practices. In our resolutions we have ourselves expressed the hopes which we have for the further progressive development of the Asian socialists who federated at Rangoon, separate and apart from the effete reformists of Europe. We would share the resentment which he expresses at the condescending paternal attitude of the Europeans to most Asian socialists—we would call it bluntly chauvinistic. Comrade Maksoud's general remarks on such questions as "practicality" (when he polemized against the European socialist attitude) were in our eyes absolutely sound and indeed elementary precepts of genuine socialism.

In Britain, where he is now studying, Comrade Maksoud has clearly gotten a heavy dose of that thoroughly chauvinistic attitude toward other peoples (including the socialists of other peoples) which is so heavy an element in British Laborism as in continental reformism and in other types of social-democrats, who have always been alien to Marxist internationalism.

Thus, he is absolutely correct in pointing with special indignation to the pro-Zionist argument that "Arabs were incapable of developing their areas," presumably inherently, and that therefore a Jewish state was necessary to "civilize" the Middle East. This is absolutely nothing else than a Zionist version of the notorious white-man's-burden theory; and if it was so easy for European social-democrats to agree with the Zionists on this, that was so because of their common ground in imperialistic chauvinist attitudes.

In our present discussion of (and argument against) the Arab-socialist view, the whole basis of the question will, I think, be quite different from that which Comrade Maksoud and his comrades are accustomed to meet and deal with.

As we see it, for one thing, ours is an attempt to develop a position from a Marxist internationalist standpoint. And above all, we approach the problem as opponents of Zionism and of Zionist ideology and politics.

As I read Comrade Maksoud's article, my feeling is that he has not appreciated the full force and potentialities of a socialist anti-Zionist position like ours, perhaps because of its unfamiliarity; and we will have to devote some space to presenting it as an alternative to the Arab socialists' grievous mistake in calling for the overthrow of the state of Israel.

That is what is in question here, and nothing else; although of course there is a long list of related ideas in dispute that lie behind such a conclusion.

Theirs Is No Solution At All

Comrade Maksoud's conclusion is to demand "the emasculation of Israel's sovereignty," to do away with this state's "sovereign, separate, isolated and independent existence." Instead, the Palestinian Jews are to be given merely "cultural autonomy."

Plainly, it would be simpler to make clear that the state of Israel is to be conquered and crushed, by force of arms in a war, annexed to some Arab state or group of states, and thus wiped out. This is the "solution" to the Israel question of which Maksoud speaks.

We will argue that it is no "solution" at all, since it will solve nothing and mean merely the continuation of the present impasse in a different form. That it cannot bring the peace of which Maksoud speaks. That it will not save the Arab peoples from being pawns of imperialism. That it will not be the key to unlock the revolutionary energies of the Arabs, as Maksoud thinks.

In fact, we have here, I think, a typical example of bisymmetric mistakes. Maksoud has this in common with the Zionist ideology: the insistence that the fate of Israel as a state is inseparable from the fate of Zionism. His insistence that Israel must be forcibly overthrown is the "other side of the coin" of the Zionist-chauvinist concept of the "Jewish state" and policy of persecuting the Arab minority.

At any rate, that's the way we see it, and so will we argue. This bisymmetric pattern has certain inevitable consequences. It is well-nigh inevitable that we will be denounced by Zionists for even printing Maksoud's article. And I'm afraid, under the circumstances, that it was just as inevitable that Maksoud should wind up by charging that we are not really anti-Zionist (because we won't go for the overthrow of Israel); that we may be against Zionist "excesses" but accept "basic Zionist theory."

Thus Maksoud hurls into the same (Zionist) camp all those who would oppose his "solution" of war against Israel.

That is not an advisable thing for him to do.

If the Arab socialists insist that pro-Zionism is the only alternative to their call for war against Israel, they will surely help to convince a great many waverers that the Zionists are the preferable side.

Thus bisymmetric mistakes always feed on each other. (It works the other way too. When the Arab socialists meet only chauvinistic arguments against them, they are reinforced in their mistake.)

Here then is the central point at which we differ:

We draw a firm line between (1) fighting Zionism, its ideology and politics; fighting against the Zionist policies which are the official policies of the state of Israel, and against the Zionist leadership which is the official government of the state of Israel; and (2) fighting to overthrow the state of Israel as such.

Now, this distinction is simple as ABC. It may be wrong in Maksoud's eyes. It may be a mistake in his opinion. He has a right to argue that we should be against both, both Zionism and the state of Israel as such. But he should not close his eyes to the fact that this distinction must be made.

Yet he insists on doing so. On June 7 last, we had explained the difference by referring to an analogy with Stalinist Russia. We stressed that there was a big difference between being anti-Stalinist and anti-Russian. (Or being anti-Nazi and anti-German). So also, we said, one must not mix up anti-Zionist and anti-Israel, in exactly the same sense.

In each case, it is plain, you have a political movement (with its accompanying ideology, philosophy, program, institutions, "organizational formulas," economic theories, etc.) and at a given time this political movement (Stalinism, Nazism, Zionism) is in control of a state—to the disadvantage of the people of that state.

Everybody knows how easy it has been for reactionary varieties of "anti-Communism" to pass over into anti-Russian fulminations. It was easy for anti-Nazism to mask a chauvinistic anti-Germanism, and it does so to this day all over Britain and France and in the British Labor Party. It was easy for reactionaries, in the U. S. after Pearl Harbor, to whip up lynch sentiment against all Japanese people, even against Japanese-Americans, with filthy phrases like "yellow monkeys."

In the case under discussion, we also have a relationship between a state and a political movement which dominates and controls its government today. As we said, this political movement Zionism (like the analogy of Stalinism) has its own distinctive "philosophy," program, etc.

Basic Distinction

Maksoud rejects the comparison. I confess that I cannot even follow his reasoning at that point. With regard to Communism (Stalinism), he agrees that—

"... the opponents of this system must distinguish between the structural, institutional and methodological features of Communism, or for that matter any other system, and the people who live under that system."

But it is "different" for Zionism, he argues—

"Zionism is not an institutional or organizational formula. It is not a theory of how a state ought to be run or the economy organized. It is a movement to create a state for a 'Jewish nation.'"

But Stalinism is not an "institutional or organization formula" either—not simply, and not even mainly. To be sure, it has its characteristic "institutions" (like the MVD) and its characteristic "organizational formulas"—but Zionism has its characteristic institutions, etc., also.

Above all, Stalinism arose as a political movement, with a certain political "philosophy," which captured a state. It proceeded to "create" a new state in its own image.

Of course, there are several thousand differences between Stalinism and Zionism which could be mentioned to confuse the analogy; but none of them are relevant to the very, very simple point:

It is possible to be anti-Stalinist without being anti-Russian. It is possible to be anti-Nazi without being anti-German. It is possible to be anti-Zionist without being anti-Israel.

When Comrade Maksoud denies this, then we feel that he is failing to see the very problem, let alone the correct socialist solution to it.

If he denies that it is even possible to be anti-Zionist without being for the overthrow of Israel, then it is indeed difficult for him to grapple with the issues as they present themselves to the minds of most socialists, and not only those with a pro-Zionist bias.*

In our view, this distinction between being anti-Zionist and anti-Israel is the nub; but we must still

*In fact, one could raise a question about what Maksoud means by Zionism. In his article in LA for June 7, he wrote: "Zionism is a movement which seeks to make religion the rallying factor of a nation. As such it is self-contained, mystical and intolerant of other religions or races (cf. the treatment of Arab minorities in Israel)."

It is just not true that Zionism makes religion the "rallying factor." Surely Maksoud must know that for the majority of Zionists it is a secular movement; many if not most Zionist leaders have even been atheists or agnostics, or at least quite unreligious; etc. Here Maksoud misses the whole point about the Zionist mystique and the Zionist form of Jewish nationalism: the Zionist looks on Jewry as being united not by their religion (if any) but by their inherent Jewish "nationality," and this goes for all Jews everywhere by virtue of birth and "tribal" blood.

And Zionism is not necessarily intolerant of "other religions or races." Within Israel it does not advocate discrimination against Christians, for example. The one religion of which it is most intolerant is—reform-Judaism (and not Islam)! and that basically for reasons of state and not theology. Its disgraceful and criminal persecution of the Arab minority is based on political reasons; it is a political and social persecution, not a religious persecution.

Maksoud here sounds as if he thinks the Zionists are religious fanatics or zealots! Nothing could be further from the mark, or be a grosser misunderstanding of what the fight is all about.

Their Call for War on Israel Is a Grievous Error...

go on to discuss Comrade Maksoud's positive reasons for being in favor of wiping out Israel as a state. The first of these is bound up with his argument that Israel had no right to existence in the first place.

At this point Comrade Maksoud's article presented a rebuttal to the ISL resolutions, which we had sent him for his information. But his presentation of our position was both inaccurate and inadequate, we think. In any case, it will be useful to sketch our point of view in at this stage of the argument. As we see it, Maksoud's error will be most apparent when it is seen on the background of our own approach to the question.

Zionism and Imperialism

We have always been opposed to the Zionist program of setting up a "Jewish state" by carving it out of another people's country (Palestine) against the will of the latter.

During most of the history of Zionism, it has sought to become the willing tool of some imperialist exploiter who would foist the Zionist aim upon Palestine for its own imperialist reasons. Zionism began in the 19th century by offering itself to Turkey in that role. After the Balfour Declaration it willingly prostituted itself to British imperialism, in the hope that the lion would set up its "Jewish state" as a fortress for the empire.

During most of its history, what it had to aim at was the setting up of a rule by a Jewish minority over an Arab majority, the Jewish minority coming into power and staying in power as the tool of an outside imperialist force.

Therefore our resolution spoke of "the criminal policy of Zionism toward the Arabs, a policy which was based on the aim of minority rule by the Jews in Palestine under the wing of British imperialism."

This political character of Zionism was not changed by the events of the last two decades; but at the side of the Zionists' reactionary aspirations there also developed a different, a new, an accompanying factor which did not owe its motive force and impact to Zionism.

Our comrade Maksoud sees only the impact of Zionism. We would like to call his attention to this other explosive development.

This was the exterminationist fate which loomed before a whole people in Europe, the Jewish people.

The Fate of a People

First, there was the wholesale persecution of the Jews before the war. During the war there took place an event never before seen in the world—at least not in our civilized days—the unprecedented physical extermination of 6 million Jews. This was the Nazi "solution" of the Jewish problem. Not only Germany became untenable: mass anti-Semitic persecution was spreading to Italy and to France under the Nazi occupation. Then after the war, a new wave of anti-Jewish persecution arose in and engulfed the Stalinist empire, the satellites as well as Russia itself.

A whole people was being murdered and driven out of Europe. Driven—where? Where could they go? Even fleeing for their lives; where could they flee?

Why to Palestine? asks Comrade Maksoud in effect. This is a problem for the whole world, not just our responsibility. Why should we have to bear the burden alone?

He is absolutely correct.

The one country that was indicated in the first place as a haven was not Palestine but the United States; not the Arabs' land but ours. Any socialist, any half-decent democrat, who failed to cry this out—Open the doors of the U. S. to the Jewish refugees!—was a fraud. Our resolution said:

"The elementary democratic demand of free emigration and immigration, long part of every genuinely democratic program, must be most vigorously fought for in the specific case of the European Jews. All barriers to immigration to the countries of their choice must be broken down. For socialists in the U. S., the richest country in the world and the one capable of absorbing the largest population, this means the struggle against the exclusion of the Jews from this country. For this reason, independent socialists raised and continue to raise the slogan 'Open the doors of the U. S.!'"

Socialist Position on Immigration

We should like Comrade Maksoud to note that it has always been the elementary democratic duty of every genuine socialist to fight for this untrammelled right of free emigration and immigration, by anyone to "the country of his choice." It has been called into question in the socialist movement, historically, only by the extreme chauvinist wing.

The American socialist movement has gone through this. Before World War I, to its everlasting shame and disgrace, the American Socialist Party took the position of supporting the Oriental-exclusion laws. The same socialist leaders who led in this move were those who betrayed socialism in the later war, and who betrayed socialism daily in their reformist politics. They were chauvinists.

At that time the Socialist International repudiated the American SP position and called for the genuine socialist position. We stick with this socialist position.

We had another reason for raising the demand "Open the doors of the U. S." Not only because the U. S. is the richest country; but also because it happens to be the country we live in. Every decent socialist in (say) Britain would be equally duty-bound to demand "Open

the doors of Britain," even though Britain is not as rich as the U. S. The same goes for every socialist in the world, bar none.

It is no argument to prove that the influx of such immigration might harm the standards or otherwise impair the situation of native labor. That was the rationale of the American SP chauvinists (mentioned above) and they were right up to a certain point. They were chauvinists nonetheless. If such immigration did not create such problems, then anyone (and not only socialist-internationalists) could easily come out for a humane and internationalist position.

We trust, then, that Comrade Maksoud now understands what we (at least) mean by the right of the Jews to go to "the country of their choice." It is a right we would fight for, for anyone, anytime. How much more so in view of the explosive situation we have barely sketched, the extermination of a people?

The Post-War Dynamic

In this writer's opinion (though it can be mooted) by far the greatest portion of Europe's persecuted Jews would have preferred to come to the U. S. and not to Palestine, given free choice. The influx of Jews to Palestine was not primarily due to a sudden increase in the pro-Zionist sentiments of Jews, out of love for Zionism. But the U. S. banged its doors shut, while pretending to express its horror at the anti-Jewish crimes of others. Other countries banged the door. A steel ring of national boundaries encircled the Jews, while, for many of them, the need for sheer survival forced them or seemed to force them outward.

Something had to give.

International reaction forced the fleeing Jews into the bag set up by the Zionists. Here was one direction in which they could go with some outside help—the help and machinery set up by the Zionist movement. It was the path of least resistance for them, and the pressure could relieve itself (partly) only in this direction.

This is what set up the dynamic push behind the post-war influx of Jewish immigrants to Palestine.

It is in this connection that we come to the passage in our resolution part of which Maksoud quoted, with obvious misunderstanding. The part which Maksoud quoted is italicized:

"The post-war influx of European Jews into Palestine greatly exacerbated Arab-Jewish relations in the country. The Zionist leaders looked upon this influx of refugees as a means of imposing all-Jewish rule upon the whole country. *The Arab effendis demanded that the Jewish people, hounded in Europe, be deprived of the right to found a new life in the country of their choice.*"

It should be clear to Comrade Maksoud now that what we are talking about is the right to free immigration. Just as we raised the demand "Open the doors of the U. S.," so also we believe it was the duty of socialists to support the right of Jews to immigrate to Palestine.

For Arab-Jewish Unity

In our view, as in Maksoud's, it was a misfortune that the Jewish exodus was channelized into Palestine to the extent it was. That is one of the crimes for which world capitalism and imperialism ought to answer some day. But it was a fact, and not a Zionist plot.

The Zionists were able to take advantage of this anti-Semitic windfall—in general, Zionism has always fed on anti-Semitism—but the problem that was created had to be faced by socialists and everyone else. It could not be faced merely by yelling against Zionism.

We had a program. It was a proposal for a revolutionary solution. It was what we counterposed to the Zionist solution, on the one hand, and to the Arab states' policy on the other.

As concisely summarized in our resolution (directly following the last quotation given), it was:

"The Marxist, firmly opposed to both, advocated a policy which would bring together the Arab and Jewish peoples in a joint fight against British imperialism in the first place, and, necessarily bound up with this, against Jewish capital and Arab landlordism, for a Palestine freed from all foreign rule and governed by a democratic Constituent Assembly based upon equal and universal suffrage.

"Such a fight was desired least of all by the Jewish and Arab upper classes. In the course of a joint struggle from below, cemented by common national-revolutionary aims and common social interests, Marxists aimed for a free and independent state of Palestine, based on the coexistence of two equal peoples, with national and cultural rights and autonomy safeguarded for both. This was the only progressive solution of the Palestine question. It looked not only to revolutionary struggles in Palestine but to the upsurge of anti-imperialist, and revolutionary strivings in the whole Near East, on the road to a Near East Federation of socialist republics."

This is highly compressed, and we shall have to come back to some points, but certain things should be immediately clear.

Against a "Jewish State"

In the first place, it should be plain that we oppose, above all, the basic idea of Zionism of building a "Jewish state." The idea, the concept-aim of a "Jewish state" and all that it implies is central to the Zionist ideology. As long as the people and government of Israel, follow-

ing the Zionist road, continue to try to build Israel as a "Jewish state," there can be no peace between Jew and Arab. So we believe.

For this period when Palestine's imperialist controller was still Britain, which stood over both Jew and Arab, the class-oriented revolutionary proposal which we made was one which would have necessitated freeing the Jewish workers from the bonds of the Zionist ideology as well as mobilizing the Arab masses free from Arab landlordism.

There was an Arab majority in Palestine. A democratic Palestine ruled under universal suffrage meant a Palestine whose Arab majority would decide. This was anathema to every Zionist, and exactly what he would never accept. But on the other hand, it could be accepted by the Jewish masses only in the context of an entirely different relationship between the two peoples. Both sides would have to view the new independent state as the home of two peoples in which both were free.

As we saw it, such a development could come about only through the rise of revolutionary class-consciousness from below. As Maksoud well says in his own article, it is in times of revolutionary stress and uplift that men begin to think differently, and then everything is possible.

Of course, we did not have any illusions about the immediate "practicality" of this program. We knew very well that on both sides the minds of the people were stuffed with chauvinist antagonisms. It was long plain that some reactionary "solution" was more in the cards, and not a revolutionary solution that could have been possible only with the existence of advanced revolutionary-socialist movements in the region.

After Partition . . .

The "solution" that was pushed through was partition.

We were against the partition as a "solution." Our resolution said on this point:

"For the Marxists, the partition was and is no solution for either the basic problem of Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine, or, still less, for the Jewish problem in the world. As against partition, we advocated a different course . . ." (as already discussed above).

" . . . As compared with the program we advocated, partition represented a setback on the road to greater understanding and cooperation between the Jewish and Arab peoples; it did indeed lead to a bloody fratricidal war in which and after which national feelings were inflamed even more and state-boundary walls were set up between the two peoples."

And we were right, we believe, in our view that the partition was no solution. Time has shown that. But then our resolution proceeds to make a point which we cannot emphasize too strongly to Maksoud:

"But, if partition and the subsequent setting up and consolidation of the new state of Israel did not and could not solve the basic problem, or advance its solution, it did pose entirely new conditions under which that solution had to be sought."

From my point of view, I would repeat that to Maksoud a thousand times:

Partition was no solution. The setting up of Israel was no solution. Your program to destroy Israel would be no solution. The problem is how to bring together the Jewish and Arab peoples on a revolutionary democratic basis, and this problem has to be dealt with on the basis of the conditions that exist. Israel is a fact. Nothing will be gained by an Arab-Jewish war against it, whether it wins or loses. There is a way to bring peace and a united life to the Near East, but it is not as simple a way as the mere proposal, "war against Israel."

We have outlined the point of view of our resolution as a background for taking up Comrade Maksoud's arguments for war, and as the background for counterposing this other solution of which we speak.

(Continued next week)

WHAT IS INDEPENDENT SOCIALISM?

In five special pamphlet-issues of Labor Action, the basic idea of Independent Socialism are vividly and simply explained.

No. 1—The Principles and Program of Independent Socialism

No. 2—Independent Socialism and War

No. 3—The Fair Deal: A Socialist Analysis

No. 4—Socialism and Democracy

No. 5—What Is Stalinism?

10 cents each
Copies are still available.