

X: PC + NFO's

Dave Frankel
New York, N.Y.

January 19, 1977

Mikado
P.O.B. 2234
Jerusalem

Dear Comrade Mikado,

Thanks for your letter of December 13--I'm a little late in answering it, I know, but I don't read French. As you probably know, I do hope to come to Israel this spring, and I am looking forward to meeting you and talking with you and the other comrades there. (You may be interested to know that I had dinner with Jacob Pipman just a week or two ago. He was in New York for the SWP plenum, and we had a good discussion. He will be doing some translation for IP--a welcome addition.)

I read your remarks on the interview with Langer and Zayyad with interest. In 1971, we in the SWP had a discussion on the Middle East in which many of the questions that you raise came up, and I was aware at the time of the position of the Israeli Trotskyists. However, I had gotten the impression--erroneously, it turns out--that you had dropped the position in favor of self-determination for the Israeli Jews following the destruction of the Zionist state.

In any case, I think we are in agreement on most of the points that you raise. It is true that not all of them were included in the article, such as the demand for a united socialist Palestine integrated into an Arab Socialist Union, but we in the SWP are certainly in favor of that demand. I simply chose to limit the scope of the article on the CP, concentrating on their position in favor of Israel's right to exist. (The article was three pages as it was!) Of course, had I been attempting to

give a rounded presentation of the Trotskyist position on the Middle East, I would have had to include much more.

I am also in agreement with you on what the immediate axes of our propaganda in the Middle East should be. But your point on the right of the Jewish population to self-determination in a liberated Palestine seems very abstract to me. I believe that a section of the Jewish population will be convinced in the course of the struggle for the liberation of Palestine that the maintenance of a separate Jewish state is not in their interests. If this section of the Jewish population agrees that it does not want a Jewish state, why should we expect that it will change its mind after the liberation of Palestine?

Others, of course, will never be convinced on the issue of the Jewish state. But as long as they feel this way, they will support Israel, not the promise of a state of their own sometime in the dim future. We have to ask: In a liberated Palestine, who would demand a separate state, and why?

We could speculate on whether the Jews who remain in a liberated Palestine would suffer oppression for some reason. If this happened, then the ~~question~~^{demand} of self-determination could be appropriate. But what is the point of raising this question at the present time--especially as one of the basic points that should comprise a revolutionary position on the question of Israel and the Palestinians?

I do not believe that the demand for self-determination has any progressive content in and of itself. What determines its progressive character is the context in which it is raised. It is progressive if the demand is a rallying cry for a people fighting against oppression, and it is reactionary if, as in the case of Israel, it is raised by those fighting to perpetuate national oppression.

If the question of self-determination for the Jews should become an issue in the liberated Palestine of the future, then revolutionists will be required to handle

the problem at that time. There is no reason to predict today that this question will arise, and even less reason to insist that anybody should take a position on a purely hypothetical possibility.

Finally, if the issue should arise, then I think that the Marxist approach depends not on the assertion of the universal democratic right of self-determination of nations, but rather on the question of whether this right can be applied in the specific circumstances without violating the rights of another people. When the demands of two nations are in conflict--which sometimes occurs--then I believe it is necessary to support the oppressed over the oppressor. In the case of Israel, I doubt very much that the mere abolition of the Israeli state will immediately lead to a situation of equality between the Arab and Jewish communities there. It will take a long time to overcome the historical legacy of Zionist oppression. From that point of view, it seems to me more likely that it is the Palestinians who will require guarantees for their rights, not the Jewish population.

Gus Horowitz treated this question in greater detail in the SWP educational bulletin on Israel and the Arab Revolution. (Pages 30-35 especially) Perhaps if I get to Israel we can discuss this some more. Anyway, thanks again for your letter.

Comradely,

Dave Frankel
Dave Frankel

[This is a translation from the original French letter.]
[First English paragraph in original.]

Mikado
Jerusalem, Israel
December 13, 1976

Dave Frankel
IP
New York

Dear Comrade Dave,

I have just received the last issue of IP, and though I think it's a good interview, which reflect correctly the Israeli CP positions, I have nevertheless some remarks to add. I will do it in French. But before, I have another thing to arrange with you.

P. O. B. 2224
Jerusalem
December 1966

~~David Ben-Gurion~~
~~New York~~
~~1000~~
~~(P.O. Box 2224, Jerusalem, Israel)~~

Israel Shahak told me he had contacted you about the need for an article about the Israeli colonization of Cis-jordan. Such an article would be important not only from a journalistic, but also from a political standpoint: the real situation in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 is not known, making much of the discussion about the solution to the Palestinian state abstract and far removed from reality. To write such an article, journalistic experience and a political understanding of reality are necessary. It would be good if someone on the IP staff could do this article. This would also be an opportunity to report in greater depth on the political situation in Israel, and to encounter our organization, which has developed greatly over the last year.

Now let's talk about IP.

As I wrote in the beginning, the reformist positions

of the CP and its conciliation of the Zionist state are clearly and correctly stated. Your critique of Langer and Ziad's "realistic" arguments and their acceptance of the state of Israel's existence, using the false, pseudo-Leninist argument about the right of nations to self-determination, is absolutely correct; so is the rejection of the Palestinian state as it is put forward by the Israeli Communist Party and as it is presented today in this region.

What must be explained more concretely, and perhaps differently, is the revolutionary Marxist position. This must be composed of three elements:

-- Rejection of the state of Israel and the fight to destroy it, as well as unconditional support to the struggle to liberate Palestine, all of Palestine;

-- The revolutionary Marxist struggle for the class independence of the Palestinian workers, for a united struggle of Jewish and Arab workers against the state of Israel, and for a united socialist Palestine, integrated

into an Arab Socialist Union, with recognition of the national rights of national minorities such as the Jews;

-- Envisioning, in the context of a Palestine liberated from the Zionist yoke, the right of the Jewish minority to self-determination -- within the limits of respect for the rights of the Palestinians, of course -- in other words, a solution that is mutually agreed to, not forcibly imposed by imperialism.

Because of the fact that the CP and the left Zionists place an equal sign between the state of Israel and self-determination, we refuse to uphold such a slogan today, centering our propaganda around "destruction of the Jewish state," "liberation and unification of Palestine." But we cannot exclude the hypothesis that it is then, upon the ruins of the state of Israel, that the question ^{will arise} /of self-determination for the Jewish masses, who will have ceased to be the oppressors and will have become a national minority in a liberated Arab part of the world.

Briefly, your correct criticism of the positions of

the Israeli Communist Party is lacking, first of all, in a class alternative around a slogan like, "For a socialist Palestine" (which in no way contradicts the support that revolutionary Marxists must give to nationalist leaderships and to the bourgeois democratic aim of a democratic and secular Palestine); secondly, you have a static, and thus non-Marxist and ineffective conception of the "Israeli-Jewish" or Hebrew national question, reducing it to a question of "oppressed minority versus oppressor minority" rather than looking at the dynamic of the problem, namely, the place that Jews will occupy in a liberated Palestine. Without a clear answer to this question, we are unable to debate the traitorous and social-chauvinist positions of the capitulationists in the OLP, the CP, or the left Zionists.

Fraternal greetings,

Mikado