

Dr. George Habash Address to the Sixth Convention of the PFLP - June 2000

Thursday 31 January 2008, by [HABASH Georges](#) (Date first published: 2000).

Comrades! What I have lived through over the course of these militant decades, and the rich experience I have acquired is not a matter to be taken for granted. It is your right, and the right of coming generations to review the content and lessons of this experience with all of its many successes and failures. We cannot seize the future without having read our history well, not in order to be enslaved by that history, but in order to benefit from it as a necessary precondition for dealing with the future. The present is a qualitative extension of the past, while at the same time, it constitutes the material and intellectual foundation for the building of the future.

Because of this, I have much to say, and I can say it better if I am free from the chains of leadership. Reading history requires an objectivity that is impossible as long as one is encumbered by the burdens of the details of daily party life. . . . For example, as we look deeply into past experience, and in spite of all of our sacrifice and achievements — and they are not few — our experience has been characterized by frequently giving precedence to slogans and emotion in many of the positions we have taken. Even though, at times, catch-phrases and words were relevant, they were not sufficient in leading to ultimate success. Scientifically we know that slogans and strategic goals by themselves are not enough to direct the struggle and bring about victory. On the contrary, profound intellectual analysis of the actual social, economic, and political movement is required. Such an analysis should not only take into account our own party and our own people, but must also be attentive to the changes experienced by our opponents. In this way we can come to know the reasons for and factors contributing to our opponents' strength and victories, as well as their weaknesses . . . in order to be able to construct the ideal mechanism to implement our vision, our programs, and our ideals.

Recognition of this reality led me to the idea of establishing a center for studies. Such an institute, while helping to confront these shortcomings, would by no means provide answers to all our questions. It would be an appropriate step, however, at a propitious time. Clearly, the success of such a project depends on the availability of funds, ideas, and organization, and I hope I will be able to provide the bases for its success. For me, this issue is an organic component of political and militant national work, that could be integrated into the present efforts of other similar Arab and Palestinian institutions — with the necessary addition here that the aim of this center would be focused on studying past Arab nationalist and Palestinian patriotic experience, with special emphasis on the reasons for defeat and failure, alongside a similar emphasis on the experience of the Zionist movement and reasons for its continuation and victories.

A basic question that continues to beat upon the wall of our reality, that comes from our past to reach our present and travel into our future is: "Why have we been defeated — as a Front, as a liberation movement, as Arab states, and as the Arab Nation as a whole — in spite of our sacrifice, our pain, and our suffering?" Although this is an important question, for it means a readiness to look critically at ourselves and re-read our history; it will only take us half way. Preparing to respond to the question is what will pave the rest of the way.

Let no one imagine that this is an easy, mechanical matter. It is a matter with complex and dialectic dimensions surrounded on all sides by difficulties and dangers. In itself, the question opens up the spheres of politics, the economy, and the organization, just as it opens these spheres in turn to their relationship with the overall social movement. It comes back to address the dialectic of thought, vision, and practice.

On the one hand, the answer becomes a matter of thought with both social and practical depth, not merely an intellectual luxury or a response of superficiality. On the other hand, the effort to answer the question must be linked to our national aims, tasks, and aspirations. If it is not, it will easily fail, and dissolve into the current torrential flow becoming just another, indistinct part of it. At the same time, however, this effort must remain linked to reality, lest it turn into a socially-isolated effort of utopian fantasy.

In light of the above, the three-dimensional nature of the answer takes form: vertically, horizontally, and in depth. It is an embodiment of the interaction of thought with reality and of both with social practice, whether on the level of the movement of society, or on the level of the movement of political parties. In this sense, although an individual or individuals might take part in answering the question, it is not only the effort of one individual or one organization, or of one front. Rather it is a Palestinian-Arab effort. Indeed, it is, in part, an effort of all the world progressive and liberation forces. It is everybody's effort. And it is an on-going, cumulative effort, to the extent that it answers some of the questions posed by reality, and precipitates the emergence of new questions. Practice enriches it with new visions and studies. We must encourage our intellects, therefore, to take part in this dynamic social, intellectual, and dialectic operation. Recognizing the reasons for our defeat is a beginning step on the path toward the sphere of success and achievement, leaving behind the realm of failure, and getting closer to victory.

Here I feel I must point out the particularly important role played by thinkers in one way or another. The time has come for the Arab and Palestinian mind to play its role as it should. But this will not happen unless this mind becomes a part of the movement of socio-political reality. Personally, and after this long militant experience, I shall be trying in my own way, to participate in the attempts to answer this central question.

In that context, I would like to make the following points:

1. We must review the course of a century of struggle, in particular the last fifty years. I have already treated this subject in "al-Hadaf" magazine in two articles. The first attempted to describe the type of review required and how we should carry it out. The second treated the basic mistakes that accompanied the course of the experience of the Arab liberation movement and the Palestinian revolution, on the one hand, and the patriotic regimes on the other.

2. We must attempt to set up a center for study, when all the preconditions for this are available. The importance of this center will lie in its ability to attract Arab and Palestinian intellectuals interested in the causes of the Arab Nation, chief among them the Palestine cause, so that the center with its abilities, activities, and work will constitute an extension of the organizations of the Arab and Palestinian liberation movement, and of course of the Popular Front. As I see it and imagine it, this center will provide intellectual input to these organizations and parties in the hope that they will be helped in their articulation of relevant and sound resolutions and positions. The center's preparation committee has tried for some time to hold a conference in Egypt to address the question: "Why have we been defeated?" but it has not succeeded in holding the conference there. We hope that the studies presented at the conference would contribute to attempts to answer this very important question. The studies that were prepared on this subject are ready, and we will publish them whether we succeed in holding the conference or not. It is my hope to be able to lay

the foundation stone for this center. After that, the continuity of this project and this effort will be the responsibility of those Palestinians and Arabs who believe in this idea, both present and future generations.

It is imperative that we use all the weapons at our disposal — first and foremost, the weapon of the intellect - in order that we emerge victorious. Indeed, we are obliged to win because our cause is just.

On the Subject of Women. The Palestinian woman, throughout the course of the long struggle, has played a pioneering and enlightening role. She has been mother, sister, wife, and comrade. She has carried weapons and fought. On many occasions she has been a model, more than the men. I am reminded now of the image of the Palestinian woman during the heroic Palestinian Intifada in the occupied homeland. The Intifada released the creativity of the woman and her hidden and repressed energies. She has an enormous strength that rises from the field of battle to take shape in epic examples of resistance, steadfastness, production, patient perseverance, giftedness, and martyrdom.

Now, in spite of that, the Palestinian woman is subjected to all sorts of oppression — Palestinian and Arab oppression, class oppression, and male social oppression. What have we done in defense of the cause of the woman, her rights and freedom? On the theoretical level we have said much. But in practice there was a yawning gap in general between what we said and our actual practice. All of us have heard or know of unfortunate stories about our treatment of the women in our midst.

The liberation of women and the release of their energy is basically a socio-economic, historical matter. Things like this don't happen just because we preach them. It is, in a reality, a matter of struggle to the end. Although it is linked with social structure and the development of productive labor, what have we, who call ourselves the progressive and leftist vanguards, done? Have we been able to present a higher example in our daily social practice? Have we succeeded in freeing ourselves from our role of masters over women? How can we attain real progress and approach the attainment of our national goals while we enslave and ignore the energies of half of our people? I don't want to review here the experience of other peoples and revolutions that have been victorious. Suffice it to remember the pioneering experience of Cuba in this area. This is a broad subject and a complex challenge. Indeed, it constitutes a criterion of the credibility of our program and our social vision. Any failure here shows that there is a structural failure and crisis in our vision and institution.

On the Subject of Youth. Youth are the generation of the future, the generation of victory. As statistics demonstrate, more than half of our society consists of young people. How we deal with youth is an indication of how serious we are about the future. It has the potential to be an expression of our continuity and development, or of our stagnation and annihilation. The subject of youth is also a great challenge lying before us. Young people are the leaven and energy of our society, who are characterized by their vitality and zeal. Let us remember the following examples:

- The role of the young generation, in fact of children, during the Intifada.
- The role of the student movement (the General Union of Palestine Students) and the student movement in the occupied homeland. It was consistently a factor heating up and enflaming the confrontation.
- The role of student and youth movements in the 1960s in Europe, which changed the face of the movement of societies at that time.

Young people, therefore, constitute another field where our program, institutions, and practices are to be tested. Will we be able to meet the needs of this vital group?

Let us now look at our situation in the Front. Let us try to assess the proportion of our members who

are young and the extent that they are reflected in leadership bodies. What do we see? Comrades, both men and women, do not ever allow the party to grow old, for, in reality, that leads to death. You must never allow despair to seep into the younger generation, if we really want to secure the preconditions of ultimate victory.

These two subjects are simply examples of a comprehensive social vision which includes, among other issues, workers, education, democratic demands, our developmental outlook, the rights of professionals and peasants, human rights and freedom of expression, in particular, within the context of globalization that I alluded to earlier in my speech.

Dealing with these issues and with dozens besides them is what reflects the dynamism and creativity of the Popular Front and its ability to renew its programs, structures, and institutions. This subject has come to occupy an important position at a time when grievances and criticism among the people are increasing, especially with respect to the example set by the Palestine Authority through the content of its program as well as its institutions. We must advance boldly in order to participate actively in the social movement of rebellion against all that could harm the interests and rights of the people. This demonstrates the dialectic nature of our understanding of progressive thinking.

The Significance of Financial Matters. You know, comrades, that since the 1990s we have been faced with a severe financial crisis. This is not the first in the history of the Front, but this time it has been exceptionally long, and it has left its deep and negative mark on various aspects of our lives and our work as a party. To a great extent it has severely impeded our ability to carry out our tasks and programs. Permit me here to record my pride and high esteem for your steadfastness and endurance in spite of the exceptionally hard conditions that we have been facing. Naturally, financial matters require treatment in depth. Although I am aware of all the difficulties that surround us and of the serious attempts and efforts we have made to increase our capacity, I believe nevertheless that the financial blockade will continue for political reasons. This requires that we rely on ourselves and concentrate our efforts in using the collective intelligence of the party to put an end to this crisis, drawing on the lessons learned from our past negative experience. I want to note that I don't want the Congress to stop and come up with a solution to this issue. This is one of the tasks of the new incoming leadership. I very much hope that the incoming leadership will consider the financial situation as their priority, and I hope that they will succeed in finding an effective solution to bring us out of this crisis because the subject of finance, as practice has shown us, has a clear effect on one's political stance.

Now, as I come to the end of my speech, I would like to remember the martyrs of the Front, the martyrs of Palestine, and of the Arab Nation. I remember Wadi` Haddad, Ghassan Kanafani, the Guevara of Gaza, Shadia Abu Ghazzala, and Abu Jihad Khalil al-Wazir. I remember each of the martyrs, one by one, and without exception — those martyrs to whom we are indebted, for whom we must continue the struggle, holding fast to the dream and holding fast to hope, and protecting the rights of the people for whom they shed their blood. Their children and their families have a right to be honored and cared for. This is the least we can do for those blazing stars in the skies of our homeland.

I also remember now the heroic prisoners in the jails of the occupation and the prisons of the Palestinian Authority — those militants who remind us morning and night of our patriotic duty by the fact that they are still there behind bars and by the fact that the occupation still squats on our chests. Each prisoner deserves the noblest signs of respect.

I conclude my work and duties as General Secretary, but this does not mean that I will be far from you. Rather I will remain with you, following your march. The Popular Front has given much and

accumulated much. It has the energy, the potential, and the brains that enable it to overcome the difficulties it is facing in order to remain a valiant and progressive organization with initiative, working toward securing the rights and interests of the Palestinian people wherever they live.

I have given my life and energy to the Front for many long years, and I am content that the Front will continue along its path, that its track will cross the field of reality and that it will renew itself. I know well what material its members are made of, the value and the depth of its traditions, and the ethics and values that the Front has adhered to all these years. I have faith that you will not squander these national treasures, in order to ensure that the generation of the future that will carry the banner and continue the march forward will be able to attain its goals. Be assured that you are not beginning with nothing. On the contrary, you have an accumulation of energy and power than cannot be underestimated. Hereby I shift the burden of responsibility to you to preserve this militant inheritance which will remain a trust upon your shoulders.

Now permit me to express my gratitude to all the comrades who have worked with me and helped me, whether in the Arab Nationalist Movement or in the Popular Front. They stood beside me during the hardest conditions and the darkest of times, and they were a great help and support for me. Without them I would not have been able to carry out my responsibilities. They have been true comrades, in all that the word implies. Those comrades helped to create a congenial atmosphere, an environment of political, theoretical, and intellectual interaction that enabled me to do all that what required. Those comrades have a big place in my heart and mind. I offer all my thanks and appreciation to each one of them by name. In addition, to the comrades who vigilantly guarded me, looking out for my safety, all these long years, I offer my gratitude.

Permit me also, and in keeping with what I have said in this speech on women and their role, to single out particularly the woman who has been my patient and persevering companion for nearly forty years, through all the big events, crises, and difficult times, and at enormous sacrifice. She has been up to the responsibility. Um Maysa' shares my life and my path of struggle, and has remained proud and enduring with her defiant spirit. She still stands with me and gives me the determination and energy to persevere, through her faithfulness, self-denial, and sincerity. I offer her all my love, esteem, and respect.

As a last word, I feel it necessary to say that I know well that the goals for which I worked and struggled have not yet been attained. And I cannot say how or when they will be attained. But on the other hand, I know in light of my study of the march of history in general, and of Arab and Palestinian history in particular, that they will be attained. In spite of this bitter truth, I leave my task as General Secretary of the Front with a contented mind and conscience. My conscience is content because I did my duty and worked with the greatest possible effort and with complete and deep sincerity. My mind is content because throughout my working years, I continually based myself on the practice of self-criticism. It is important to say also that I will pay close attention to all your observations and assessments of the course taken by the Popular Front while I was its General Secretary. I must emphasize that with the same close attention, if not with greater attention, I will follow and take to heart the observations and assessments of the Palestinian and Arab people on this course and my role in it.

My aim in this closing speech has been to say to you — and not only to you, but to all the detainees, or those who experienced detention, to the families of the martyrs, to the children of the martyrs, to those who were wounded, to all who sacrificed and gave for the cause - that your sacrifice has not been in vain. The just goals and legitimate rights which they have struggled and given their lives for will be attained, sooner or later. I say again that I don't know when, but they will be attained. And my aim, again and again, is to emphasize the need for you to persist in the struggle to serve our people, for the good of all Palestinians and Arabs — the good that lies in a just and legitimate cause, as it

does in the realization of the good for all those who are oppressed and wronged. You must always be of calm mind, and of contented conscience, with a strong resolve and a steel will, for you have been and still are in the camp of justice and progress, the camp whose just goals will be attained and which will inevitably attain its legitimate rights. For these are the lessons of history and reality, and no right is lost as long as there is someone fighting for it.

P.S.

*originally published on the website of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine:

www.pflp.ps/english/