

Theses on the revolution in the Arab East

dimanche 14 juillet 2024, par [NICOLA Jabra](#), [SAID A.](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 14 septembre 1972).

This was a discussion document. It was written not long after the secession from Matzpen (The Israeli Socialist Organization - ISO) of a Trotskyist group that called itself ISO-“Marxist” and later on the “Revolutionary Communist League” (RCL) and published a journal calling itself “Matzpen-Marxist”.

Jabra Nicola - then living in London - was opposed to the split, but his hand was forced by the majority of the leadership of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International in Europe, and by the sectarian leaders of the Trotskyist faction in the ISO. However, a loyal Trotskyist, Jabra had little choice but to side with the latter. The political position on the Arab Revolution, Zionism and the right of the Hebrew nation to self-determination expressed in the Theses was at that time common to both the old ISO and the Trotskyist group.

It is also reflected in a joint article by Jabra (again using his pen-name “A Said”) and Moshé Machover in the following year (“[Arab Revolution and National Problems in the Arab East](#)”).

However, after Jabra’s death in 1974, the RCL adopted a different line, which was much less critical of Palestinian nationalism.

A.

1. The revolution in the Arab East cannot be a “Democratic” national or bourgeois revolution but a Proletarian Socialist one. It is possible only as a permanent revolution. Without the conquest of power by the working class supported by the poor peasantry, and the institution of socialist-measures, neither national democratic tasks nor rapid industrialization can be achieved to meet the pressing economic needs of the masses.

2. The experience of the “progressive” bonapartist regimes testifies to this fact (limits of industrialization, failure to achieve national unification, inability to lead effective struggle against imperialism and Zionism). Nevertheless, real socio-economic changes produced under those regimes - especially the degree of industrialization, agrarian reform and expansion of education while not at all sufficient to meet the needs of the masses, have greatly strengthened the potentially revolutionary forces (increasing the number and weight of the proletariat).

3. The necessity of a permanent revolution is a consequence of :

- the failure of an urban-based national bourgeoisie to develop in pre-imperialist Arab Society ;

- the complete absorption of the traditional ruling classes into the world capitalist system in the imperialist epoch ;

- the inability of those sections of the petty-bourgeoisie that, through control of state power, have attempted to consolidate themselves as a national bourgeoisie, to free themselves from the

overwhelming might of imperialism, and at the same time to remain in firm control of mass mobilization against imperialism.

- Thus, the struggle against imperialism - inseparable from all democratic struggles - can only be a struggle against all the existing dominant classes and regimes in the region. Those classes are junior partners of imperialism ; through them imperialism dominates the region and their regimes are the political form of this imperialist domination. Anti-imperialist and democratic struggle is possible only as class struggle of the workers supported by the poor peasants against landlords, clerical comprador classes, and the new bourgeoisie in the Arab world as against Zionist bureaucracy and capitalists in Israel.

B.

1. The permanent revolution in the Arab East can be carried through to victory only on a region-wide basis. As a consequence of the unevenness of development throughout the region, revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situations are likely to arise at different times in different places ; but whenever and wherever such a situation arises the struggle in that certain place should be a part and parcel of the Arab revolution as a whole, directed by an all-Arab East revolutionary strategy supported directly by mass struggle throughout the whole region, led in such a way that could combine them in one struggle for the needs of the masses in the region as a whole which tend to raise the question of power in the whole Arab East. Only in this way will the most advanced struggles at any given moment find the maximum possible protection against the intervention of the armies of the Arab States, the Zionist State and possibly imperialist intervention. Only in this way will the seizure of power in one country in the area be able to spread and to prevent its crushing by the reactionary forces.

2. This strategic unity of the revolution corresponds to the most general national task of the revolution - Arab national unification.

C.

But the struggle for national tasks, including Arab national unification, cannot be waged under the banner of nationalism. Nationalism today is the ideology of the Arab ruling classes and a means by which those classes manipulate the toiling masses by blunting their class consciousness, mystifying the source of their oppression and diverting their indignation from the real enemy. A distinction must be made between the objective historical significance of a mass struggle and the various ideological and theoretical currents competing for the allegiance of the society : and the oppressed people involved the struggle of the Arab masses against imperialism and Zionism for national unification and an end to foreign economic domination etc is progressive and must be supported ; but nationalism as an ideology can no longer play any progressive role in the Arab East : it is reactionary. All national tasks in the Arab East can be achieved only by conscious class struggle, optimally in unity with the exploited classes of oppressor nations, whereas national ideology blinds the masses to the reality of the class struggles and to potential allies in the oppressor nation.

D.

The solution of the problem of ethnic and national minorities in the Arab East will be a central task of the victorious Arab revolution, and correct policy on this question is essential not only for winning the exploited layers of those minorities to active participation in the revolution, but also for educating the Arab masses in internationalism ; helping them get rid of racial and national prejudices and, of the influence of their ruling classes who strengthen their hold on them by nationalist indoctrination. The Arab Revolution must recognize and defend the rights of all non-Arab

nationalities in the Arab East, that is to say to recognize their right to self determination.

The Kurds and the South Sudanese both are oppressed national minorities, oppressed by the Arab nationalist regimes in Iraq and the Sudan. Therefore revolutionary Arabs must support unconditionally the fight of those minorities for their national rights, and their right to secede, if they express the wish to do so, at any time.

E.

The question of the Israeli Jews differs from that of the Kurds and Southern Sudanese. The Jews living in the Zionist State of Israel today are not oppressed by any Arab government. Their existence within the borders of this state is the product of a chauvinist colonialist operation, realized by means of oppression and expulsion of the Palestinians from their country. However it should be recognized that those Jews who live in Israel now have become a nation, distinguished from the Jewish community all over the world and from the Arab environment around them. But the national expression of this nation has been reactionary and counter-revolutionary. It has usurped the Palestinian land, identified itself with Zionism and has been playing the role of an imperialist gendarme against the Arab revolution. To speak about granting the right of self-determination to such a nation now in these circumstances, seems ridiculous. An oppressing nation is not in need to be granted such a right, it had not only acquired it, but is denying others such a right. Neither the Israelis nor the Arab revolutionaries can fight or raise the slogan now of self-determination for the Israeli Jews. The Israeli revolutionaries must fight now for the self-determination of the Palestinian Arabs under Israel's occupation, for the restoration of the Palestinians to their national rights and for their return to their country. Yet the programme of the Arab Revolution should include a clause on the right of self-determination of the Israeli Jews after the victory of the revolution.

The Israeli Jews are now an oppressing nation because they constitute the Zionist State of Israel, which is an outpost of imperialism in the region, and which plays an oppressive and counter-revolutionary role against the Arab Revolution. But the victorious socialist Arab revolution means the defeat of Zionism and the overthrow of the whole structure of the Zionist State, the liquidation of imperialist domination, and influence in the Arab East, and the restoration of the rights of the Palestinian Arabs. In those circumstances the Israeli Jews will no longer constitute an oppressive nation but a small national minority in the Arab East. Then it becomes possible to speak of the equality of nations and the rights of every nation to self-determination. The right of self-determination will not be granted to Israel but to the Israeli Jewish national minority on the territory in which, after the return of Palestinian Arabs to their country, the Jewish Israelis will constitute the overwhelming majority.

The problem posed to the Arab revolution is that of the future status of the Israeli Jewish national minority. It is a matter of respecting the fundamental national democratic rights of that minority ; but at the same time it is also a matter of preventing the creation of a now separate state capable of serving anew as a base for Jewish exclusiveness utilized by imperialism. It is true that after the defeat of imperialism in the area as a result of a victorious revolution, such a situation is unlikely to arise, but, nevertheless, it should be taken into consideration. However, the right of self-determination does not necessarily mean separation. It only means that the decision to separate or integrate should be left to the national minority concerned and not imposed by the majority. Neither economically nor politically can the Israeli Jews constitute a real independent and neutral state. They have to be, economically and politically, in close ties either with the Arab Socialist State or with imperialism against that state. Therefore, while the Arab revolution as a whole should grant the Israeli Jews the right to separate, the Israeli Jewish revolutionaries should struggle for the integration within the Arab Socialist State.

The task of the Israeli revolutionaries, and of the revolutionary Arabs, now, is to demonstrate that the democratic future of the Israeli Jews is contradictory with the maintenance of Zionism, and that the only way to secure their future, even physically, is for Jewish working people to join the Arab revolution as a part and parcel thereof.

In this framework the inclusion of the right of self-determination to the Israeli Jews in the program of the Arab revolution can help to bring about the development of an internationalist consciousness among the Israeli, working masses. Denying this right would carry with it the obvious risk of pushing the Israeli masses more and more into the arms of Zionism.

The development of revolutionary struggles of the Israelis working masses will not occur organically. It will depend, primarily on the political and organizational development of the revolutionary forces in the Middle East, and, on the other hand, on the capacity of the revolutionary vanguard in Israel to convey the political significance and role of the struggle.

F.

The Arab revolution is a political struggle with the goal of the seizure of power by the working class throughout the whole Arab East. It requires an ever rising degree of organization of the masses and an ever rising level of mass political consciousness, variety of tactics selected and combined according to concrete situations : street demonstrations, strikes, electoral activities, armed struggle, etc. All this should be dictated by two strategic considerations - does a particular action tend toward raising the level of mass consciousness ? Does it objectively weaken the ability of the ruling classes and imperialism to rule ?

This requires the formation of a revolutionary party ideologically fighting against reactionary ideology, politically counterposing its revolutionary socialist program to every nationalist current, tactically able to select and combine tactics and progressively able to lead the masses in action.

Because the Arab East is a unity, and because its revolutionary dynamics are indivisible, the objective of the revolutionaries in the region is to form such a party as an organizational instrument for the revolution in the whole area, Therefore it should be one single revolutionary party, on the basis of single global strategy for the revolutionary struggle in the different countries of the region. This is the task which the revolutionary Marxists of the Arab East must set for themselves.

It is through constructing the revolutionary party of the whole region and through giving authentic revolutionary orientation to the struggles of the Arab and Jewish masses - and the masses of other non-Arab nationalities - that it will become possible to succeed in the fight for a socialist Arab East against imperialism, Zionism and the Arab ruling classes.

The rise and defeat of Palestinian resistance

The Palestinians are the Arab people who have borne the brunt of the Zionist colonization of Palestine. Their reaction to this monstrous injustice arose as a distinct Palestinian phenomenon but not an isolated one ; it was interlinked with the general Arab reaction to the penetration of imperialism in the Arab East.

A separate, independent Palestinian nation-state never existed in the Arab world, not even as a separate administrative unit within the Ottoman Empire. Palestine as a separate unit in its known frontier is a creation of British and French imperialism after World War I. The struggle of the Palestinians against Zionism and imperialism during the mandate was part and parcel of the struggle of the whole Arab East for national independence and national unification. There never developed a Palestinian national identity.

In 1948 the settler-colonial Zionist state of Israel was created through the expulsion of the Palestinians from their homes. They were dispersed into the neighbouring Arab states where their social conditions were epitomized by their consignment to refugee camps. Although the regimes of the Arab states proclaimed their opposition to the Israeli state, in practice nothing was done by those regimes to regain the right of the Palestinians to their homeland. Because of the political weakness and economic impoverishment of the Palestinian refugees, the regimes of the Arab states tried to avoid taking them into consideration, regarding them instead as an embarrassing and onerous burden.

When Nasser came to power, his attempt to substitute state apparatuses in place of the masses against Israel kept the Palestinians, as well as the Egyptians and other Arab masses immobilized.

For more than twenty years the Palestinian masses watched impotent attempts at their own "liberation" without participating in any way therein.

The defeat of the Arab armies in June 1967 was a grave blow and shock to the Arab masses. The Nasserite leadership, upon which the Arab masses, including the Palestinians, pinned their hopes in their struggle against imperialism and Zionist Israel, was exposed by the debacle and proved incapable of leading the struggle either against imperialism or for regaining the rights of the Palestinians for their homeland. As a result those regimes were shaken and felt the danger of being overthrown by the masses who began to awaken to their bankruptcy. Thus, when an "independent" Palestinian movement of struggle against Israel began to develop, it was encouraged and supported by all Arab regimes, with the aim of (a) getting rid of the "responsibility" for the Palestinians, leaving them to solve their problems on their own and (b) to side-track the wrath of the masses from themselves and let them concentrate their attention and efforts on the "liberation of Palestine", and (c) to see them as a pawn or a trump card in international bargaining with American imperialism, Israel and the USSR for a compromise and "peaceful" settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Palestinian leadership, because of its class origin and petty-bourgeois nationalist ideology, was not reluctant, consciously or unconsciously, to play this role, and by its own policy, strategy and tactics lead the struggle to defeat. (a) It failed to recognise in theory and practice the regional (all-Arab East) scope of the revolution. It separated the struggle for the "liberation of Palestine" from the struggle against all Arab regimes. This leadership did not represent any basic break with Arab nationalism ; politically, the dominant programs, policies, strategy and tactics represented the culmination and the dead end of the whole current represented by Nasserism and Ba'athism.

This programmatic inadequacy was by no means "accidental" ; it is a reflection of the Palestinian bourgeoisie and upper petty-bourgeoisie, which throughout the Arab world play an important economic and political role but still remain subordinated to the already established ruling groups in the Arab countries : The slogan of a "democratic, secular, Palestinian state" is the ideological reflection of their objective, contradictory, social position. But from those layers most of the leadership and much of the funds of the resistance were drawn.

The contradictory character of the resistance determined the shifting attitude of the Arab regimes towards it :

- Because of its degree of mass mobilization and the sympathy and support it had in the beginning among the Arab masses they feared it, and
- Because of its policy of nationalism, "classless" struggle and "non-intervention", they could use it to divert the Arab masses from the struggle against those regimes.

- Because of those same policies, which in the long run antagonised the Arab masses, and isolated the Palestinians even from their Jordanian brothers, those regimes felt certain of their ability to crush it as soon as international politics or internal security made that course desirable, and that is just what happened. Hussein slaughtered the Palestinians when the Rogers plan was on the agenda, while Iraq, Egypt, Syria and all the other Arab states stood by and the Arab masses were already antagonized and neutralized.

The reasons for the Palestinian defeat can be summarized as :

1. The failure of the leadership to recognize in theory and practice the regional (all-Arab East) scope of the revolution ; the separation of the struggle for the “liberation of Palestine” from the struggle against all Arab regimes for a proletarian Socialist revolution in the Arab East as a whole which alone can defeat Imperialism and Zionist Israel.

2. Its adoption of the theory of “revolution in stages”, and the theory of “primary and secondary contradictions”, subordinating the class struggle for “a certain period” to “national, unity” and thus considering the Arab regimes and the Arab ruling classes as allies in the struggle against imperialism and Israel, and not as class enemies that should be struggled against and overthrown.

3. Its acceptance of the theory of the “focus”, placing almost exclusive emphasis on the military aspect of the struggle, and refusing to recognize the need for an all-Arab revolutionary vanguard organization, and subordinating the military operations to political strategy and political leadership. Thus it made no effort to politicise the masses in the various Arab countries and mobilise them for a revolutionary struggle, not only for the “liberation of Palestine”, but for the liberation of the whole Arab East from imperialist domination and from the Arab rulers and regimes through which it dominates. Its emphasis on the separation of the Palestinian struggle from the local struggle in the Arab countries lead it to the adoption of such a policy vis-a-vis the Arab masses that it even demoralized and antagonized the Jordanian and Lebanese masses among which it acted and had its base.

Israel

The development of a mass revolutionary movement in Israel depends on the rise of the Arab revolution, both politically and as a material force, that is on the growth of an Arab movement of increasing credibility of actually being able to impose its will, based on a program that is both absolutely intransigent toward all Zionist institutions and recognizing the national rights of the Israeli Jews. This latter point will become significant in Israel only when a movement of revolutionary socialism in the Arab countries begins to gain mass influence so that Israel's revolutionaries can point to it as an actual real program on which the Arab masses are fighting.

No struggle in Israel is possible which is not explicitly anti-Zionist. Although under the impact of intensifying world capitalist economic crisis the exploitation of the Israeli workers will be intensified and the economic and social gap between Ashkenazim and Sephardim may tend to increase, no purely economic or limited political struggle may lead spontaneously to the formation of revolutionary consciousness among the Israeli workers. Such struggles may do so only if they are presented as elements of anti-Zionist struggle. It is impossible to fight capitalism in Israel without fighting Zionism, for Zionism is the specific form of capitalist rule in Israel.

The I.S.O. (Marxist), through a process of political clarification has based itself on the clear political perspective of building a Leninist party in the entire region ; the orientation of revolutionary activity in Israel on the Arab revolution ; and the construction of the revolutionary party of the region as a section of the Fourth International.

The I.S.O. has developed a programme of democratic demands, that, in the Israeli situation, assumes a transitional character. This de-Zionization program includes :

- immediate elimination of all laws, policies and practices conferring privileges on Jews, particularly the law of return ;
- immediate opening of the borders to all displaced Palestinians who wish to return and compensation, for their losses to all those who do not.
- complete separation of religion and the state.
- the building of a genuine independent trade-union in opposition to the Zionist pseudo-union, the Histadrut and based on rank-and-file committees in places of work throughout the country.

These general demands, if fully realized, would break the domination of Zionism in Israel. They have a basic democratic meaning ; they can be related to every progressive social struggle so as to demonstrate that the way forward in those struggles depends on intensifying the attack on the Zionist establishment. They cannot be fully realized without the overthrow of the Zionist state and the seizure of power by the proletariat.

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- Matzpen. September 14, 1972 :
<https://matzpen.org/english/1972-09-14/theses-on-the-revolution-in-the-arab-east-a-said-jabra-nicola/>