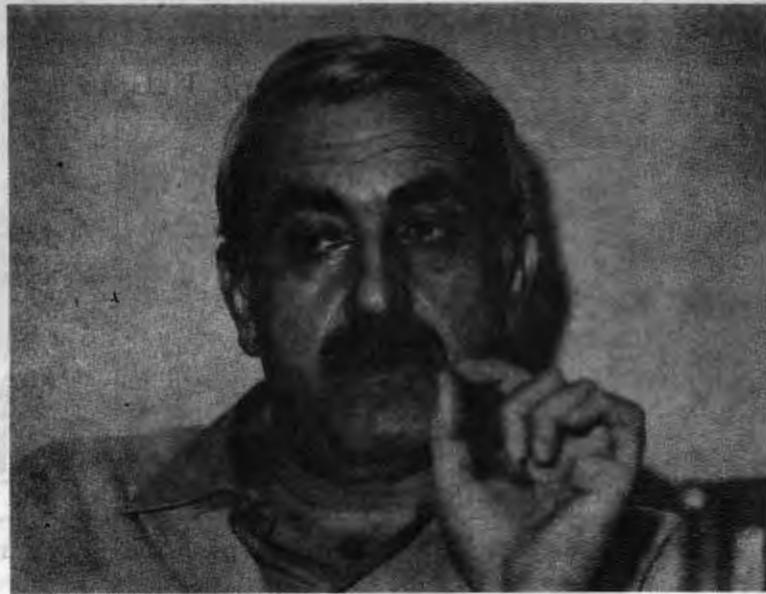


Comrade Habash:



The Crisis Roots and Solutions

On October 31, Dr. George Habash, General Secretary of the PFLP, delivered a lecture to a group of Palestinian and Arab cadres and intellectuals assembled in the building of the General Union of Palestinian Writers and Journalists in Damascus. This was part of a series of lectures, delivered by a number of leaders of the Palestinian revolution, sponsored by the Union with the theme: THE CRISIS IN THE PALESTINIAN REVOLUTION: ROOTS AND SOLUTIONS.

First of all I want to thank the General Union of Palestinian Writers and Journalists - not because they gave me the opportunity to speak today, but because of the subject they specified for discussion at this critical time. Regardless of the controversy about the primacy of the word or of matter, I believe all of us are in agreement about the role of the word - the role of theory and analysis, the role of determining programs based on this analysis.

In this critical period of the revolution, the task shouldered by the General Union of Palestinian Writers and Journalists is that of the word. The role of the word is to find a way out of the crisis we are currently facing in the Palestinian revolution, in the PLO, in Fatah and, if I am not mistaken, in all the organizations of the Palestinian revolution. Afterwards, I hope that my talk will be viewed as a humble contribution to the subject we are discussing. I don't say this out of modesty, but based on my understanding of the size and importance of this question, which requires the collective Palestinian mind and consciousness to find answers to the subject at hand: The Crisis of the Palestinian Revolution - Roots and Solutions.

Before dealing with the essence of the question, I emphasize that there are no rapid, magical solutions to the crisis. After providing the clear vision and analysis, and determining the roots and solutions, the Palestinian revolution will not be able to find its way out of

this crisis without a long process of accumulative struggle. The outcome of this would be a change in the class structure of the leadership of the Palestinian revolution, a correction of its political line and in its organizational and military programs.

I know very well that all the diseases in the Palestinian arena - in the fields of finance, administration and discipline - are now the subject of intense discussions among our people. But allow me to say that all these diseases will be corrected in the process of reform we are working on in the political, organizational and military programs.

Permit me to talk in the language of the concrete political situation we are living in, instead of speaking theoretically, without this being interpreted as an underestimation of the great importance of theory. I feel it is preferable to concentrate our talk on the political implications.

Historical achievements not subject to discussion

Before talking about the crisis, allow me to speak about the great achievements of the Palestinian revolution. I believe that we as Palestinian people, as Palestinian organizations, and as Palestinian and Arab intellectuals, commit a mistake if we don't see the other side of the march of the Palestinian revolution, i.e., its achievements. The Palestinian revolution

has made great and historical gains. I will mention the ones I believe are accepted without any discussion:

First: Crystallization of the militant, national identity of the Palestinian people, and their rallying their struggle around the PLO, their sole, legitimate representative. Whoever experienced the history of the Palestinian question after 1948, realizes the significance of this point. The PLO represents the national entity, embodying the Palestinian national identity which encompasses all Palestinian nationalist classes, groups and personalities. Thus, the PLO constitutes a great historical achievement we must preserve. Is this fact open to discussion? Perhaps, but to me it is indisputable.

Second: The battle of Beirut, where the great steadfastness provided an example by bringing about the longest war in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This example must not be dismissed. The war in Lebanon revealed the deficiencies of all the Arab regimes. I say this based on our deep interest in serious Arab-Palestinian confrontation. The purpose of this is to make these regimes stand with full responsibility against the Zionist danger, and to make use of the lessons of the battle of Beirut. The battle of Beirut and its aftermath revealed not only the crisis of the Palestinian revolution; it also revealed very clearly the impotence of the Arab nationalist regimes - their inability to combat the enemy even after, with 90 days of fighting, the Palestinian revolution provided the opportunity to do so.

We in the PFLP endeavor to strengthen the alliance among the Palestinian revolution, the Lebanese National Movement, the Syrian regime, and all Arab nationalist regimes, based on our view that the conflict in the area is between the forces of Arab national liberation on the one hand, and imperialism, Zionism and reaction on the other.

I am not advocating a narrow Palestinian approach, saying: "This is what we did as Palestinians. Where were you as Syrians, Libyans or Egyptians?" I condemn this approach very seriously. What is required is an examination of all the lessons of the battle of Beirut. We are required to deal with the following: One - the crisis of the Arab nationalist regimes - roots and solutions; and two - the crisis of the Arab national liberation movement - roots and solutions. It is totally unacceptable to lose sight of this question, to lose the lessons of the battle of Beirut, which were a source of pride for all the Arab masses. I know how the masses, in every country without exception, welcomed the Palestinian fighters when they evacuated Beirut. This was not merely an emotional position; it had great significance. The battle of Beirut revealed the deficiencies of the Arab

governments first. Second, it revealed the deficiencies of the Palestinian revolution.

The crisis of the Palestinian revolution

Did the crisis of the Palestinian revolution begin after our departure from Beirut? No, the roots extend farther back. Knowing the Palestinian situation, with all its primary and secondary contradictions, I can say that after Beirut this crisis reached a qualitatively new stage. The major reason for this crisis is the rightist political line which emerged and reached a peak, especially after Beirut. At this time, it began to seriously threaten the Palestinian revolution with involvement in the US-reactionary plans proposed as solutions to the Palestinian problem. If we try to escape from this fact, we will not grasp the destructive effects of this political line. Let us take some examples to show what we mean...

Despite the great moral and political victory we achieved after Beirut, the great defect that had taken place in the balance of forces was apparent to any political observer or Palestinian leader. Accordingly, we can conclude that the Palestinian revolution is unable to achieve our national objectives by depending on forms of political struggle as the primary and basic method. Unfortunately, the influential elements in the PLO leadership laid down their answers to all the problems that confronted us after Beirut, and pointed out the real perils threatening the Palestinian people and vanguards. Based on their assumptions, these influential elements reached the following conviction: "We did everything possible; this is the outcome of 18 years of struggle; let's take what can be taken regardless of the size of our share." How can we otherwise explain the position towards the Reagan plan.

From when the Reagan plan was proposed on Sept. 1, until the Palestine National Council was held, all of you read statements saying: "There are positive points in the Reagan plan" and "The plan can be discussed". In spite of the dialogue that took place during the PNC session, and the emphasis on the importance of a clear political line, Brother Yasir Arafat went to the political committee meeting and said his famous word: "Say 'laam' to the Reagan plan", which means don't say 'yes' and don't say 'no'. After that, we said: Our masses cannot understand such a position; we cannot mobilize them on this basis in order to continue the revolution and overcome the difficult circumstances; therefore, such a position is rejected.

Yet some people registered their reservations on the text of the resolutions adopted by the PNC session, because these do not give them the freedom of political movement and maneuver they wanted.

We in the PFLP made our reservations from the other angle, because the text was not sufficient. We believe that it is better to totally reject the Reagan plan, instead of rejecting it only because it is not a sound basis for a solution to the Palestinian problem. You all know that the resolutions of the PNC did not deter those who think about dealing with imperialist schemes. All of you know of the negotiations that took place in Jordan after the PNC. As a result of the broad opposition, including the Central Committee of Fatah, a joint statement with the Jordanian regime was not issued. Still, isn't it our right to question what it means that the chairman of the PLO Executive Committee approved the proposed statement and said to King Hussein, "Give me the opportunity to consult my colleagues."

The examples are many. Everyone can ask himself: What is the meaning of the series of political positions taken by the influential forces in the PLO after our evacuation from Beirut? On the Reagan plan? On strengthening relations with the Jordanian regime? On continuing relations with the Camp David regime of Egypt? What is the meaning of the contacts with Zionist forces undertaken not only by Issam Sartawi, but by the Chairman of the Executive Committee? Does all this have a political content or not? Certainly, it exhibits a political line. I'll give a final example about this political line:

The relationship with the Syrian regime

I want to be courageous and clear on this subject. I hold the official leadership of the PLO responsible for a big part of the deterioration of the relations with the Syrian regime. There are some Arab nationalist regimes who are waiting for the opportunity to contain us, but this is one thing; how the official leadership of the PLO dealt with the relations with the Syrian regime is another. Prior to the battle of Beirut, there was a delegation from Fatah to discuss the strategic relations between Fatah and Syria. Why didn't this step succeed? The point lies in the leading circles. The delegation reached an agreement with Syria, but the individualist leadership put this agreement in the bottom drawer. Later the Israeli aggression took place.

During the war, all the Palestinian organizations, without exception, had a united view about the impotence of the Arab regimes, but we in the PFLP furthermore distinguished clearly between this fact and on the other hand opening a battle with the nationalist regimes, Syria in particular. In spite of the pain we suffered during the battle as a result of the nationalist regime's shortcomings, we did not lose sight of the constellation of contradictions, that there are nationalist regimes with short-

comings on one hand, and reactionary regimes directly or indirectly participating in the plot on the other.

How did the influential leadership in the PLO act on this question? It started to shun the Syrian regime and daily made contacts with Saudi leaders. Afterwards, the idea of all the leaders of the Palestinian revolution was to go to Damascus and discuss all issues, and intensify the alliance after reviewing the previous stage. On the contrary, the individualist leadership decided that Brother Arafat should be in Greece. This was a clear affront to the Syrian regime.

Thinking responsibly concerning the relation with Syria requires evaluating not only the geographic factor, but also the constellation of contradictions and the position and role of Syria in this context. In light of the importance of relations with Syria, the PFLP raised two main slogans after our evacuation from Beirut: To deepen national unity, and

To strengthen relations with Syria. Without this formula, we saw no possibility for finding a way out of the situation in the aftermath of the battle of Beirut. On this basis, we invested all our efforts for Brother Arafat to come back to Syria and make Syria his headquarters for leading the work.

Brother Arafat returned to Syria, but what happened then? A series of decisions were made, whereby Abu Zaim was appointed deputy commander and Abu Hajem responsible of the revolution's forces in Lebanon! Does this stem from responsibility towards a decisive point in the march of the revolution? Does this exhibit vigilance concerning the independent Palestinian national decision-making? We struggle for the independence of Palestinian decision-making based on our understanding of the dialectical relationship between our independent decision and the Arab nationalist and progressive forces and regimes.

Palestinian rightist policy entered a qualitatively new stage

We must now carefully determine how to classify these positions taken after Beirut: Do they signify the Palestinian right wing's definitive shift into the enemy camp? Are these positions merely a continuation of the unprincipled maneuvering we have known in the Palestinian arena since 1970?

My answer to the first question is no, the Palestinian right did not move to the enemy position. Why? For two reasons: First, due to the nature of the proposed US solution for the Palestinian problem; second, due to the extent of nationalist and popular opposition to the US solutions.

My answer to the second question is also no,

this is not a mere continuation of the unprincipled maneuvering we have seen in the past. For the first time, we are facing real willingness to cooperate with the US solution at the time when a share is offered the Palestinian bourgeoisie in these solutions. Therefore, we are facing a qualitatively new stage which began after our evacuation from Beirut, but with roots extending back to the seventies.

The Palestinian bourgeoisie took up arms, having ambitions and dreams which I believe were genuine. They began to face difficulties as well as becoming a politically recognized force on the Arab and international levels. Based on these conditions, the Palestinian bourgeoisie adopted the position that corresponds to its class nature, to accept a share in the settlement. The rightist approach is greatly responsible for the outcome of two main stages: Our experience in Jordan, and the stage of settlement.

One: The Jordan experience

For a period of time in Jordan, we experienced the phenomenon of dual power. For a while the power of the resistance was stronger than that of the Jordanian regime. Dual power is a temporary phenomenon, later to be decided in favor of the revolution or the Jordanian regime - Why was it settled in favor of the regime? Because of the political line adopted by the influential leadership. At the same time, the Palestinian left bears a share of the responsibility commensurate with its size, weight and participation in the leadership of the revolution.

Our experience in Jordan clarifies the necessity of defining the enemy camp and the camp of friends. Concretely, it disproved the possibility of neutralizing Arab reaction. I remember well that in Jordan, a number of Palestinian fighters refused to fight the regime, because they were not mobilized on this basis: that reaction is a part of the enemy camp.

Two: The stage of settlement

The settlement path is a destructive one in the Palestinian arena; we find it at the roots of the crisis.

This requires a few short words about the struggle between the Arab people and the Zionist movement. How do we view this conflict? What is its nature? Can it be settled without one of the parties to the conflict being eradicated? Will this area be a Zionist empire or a united, progressive society in which Arabs and Jews can live in peace? How do we view Zionism? Can we, if we wanted, coexist with Zionism?

At a time when the Soviet Union has formed a committee of scientists and representatives of

public opinion to expose Zionism, it is peculiar and to be condemned that the Palestinian right establishes contacts with Zionists.

Can we separate 'Israel' from the Zionist movement? Isn't 'Israel' the material, economic, military and political embodiment of the Zionist movement? Is it possible to defeat Zionism without defeating 'Israel'? Was Nazism defeated without the defeat of Hitler's regime?

These issues have been raised without receiving sufficient attention, but now we understand that they lie at the heart of the roots of the problem we are facing today.

Two approaches to fighting the Palestinian right

During this period, it has become clear that there are two approaches to fighting the Palestinian right. One approach is to wage this battle, while at the same time concentrating on the importance of the PLO's role and the necessity of adhering to it as a main weapon in the face of the enemy. The second approach shares with the first approach an awareness of the dangers of the right-wing and the necessity of confronting it. Beyond that, there are several points of difference on theoretical, political and organizational issues. Although we assign primary responsibility for the crisis to the Palestinian right, we will not make the mistake of being unable to correctly determine the constellation of contradictions in the Palestinian arena.

Next we must examine these secondary contradictions, which I hope will not become primary contradictions, between the forces that want to save the Palestinian revolution through an organizational and political reform. The first point of disagreement, which I begin with because it is dangerous, is on using the method of armed force. We disagree totally with this method, because we see its destructive effects in the Palestinian arena. We cannot find any justification for it. Whatever the intentions and desires for reform, the effects of this method are destructive to all; this will lead, whether we like it or not, to divisions and containment. This error is comparable to a crime - whoever begins it is criminal; whoever thinks of it is criminal; whoever plans it is criminal; whoever fuels it is criminal.

There is no example of how another national democratic revolution solved its contradictions which applies to our revolution. The contradictions inside the Palestinian revolution must be solved through democratic dialogue and struggle on the political and mass levels. Others may give some examples to say that this is not an uncontested principle; the Algerian revolution may be mentioned in this context. But allow me to ask: In light of the particularity of the Palestinian problem, the presence of the Pales-

tinian people in the occupied territories, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the diaspora, is it possible in the present situation to solve contradictions through internal fighting?

Let us suppose for the sake of discussion that the situation in Tripoli ends in favor of the protest phenomenon (led by Abu Musa and Abu Saleh). Is this going to solve the question in the occupied territories or in Jordan, and in what way? It is preferable to deal with these questions now. This is the first question concerning the differences between the two approaches for confronting the right.

The downfall of the right or of its programs?

Then comes a theoretical question on the basis of which we can determine many issues: What is the position of the right in the Palestinian arena? Did it become non-nationalist? Is the non-nationalist right merely some individuals or strata of the bourgeoisie? What do we mean by the downfall of the right? Does it mean we are in the process of a complete political and class polarization? Or do we mean the downfall of the program of the right? Assuming the programs of the right are abolished, can the revolution continue with the same leading elements? Or must a change take place in the PLO institutions commensurate with the size of the national democratic forces? Can we dodge these questions? If we do so now, can we dodge them after one month, or one year?

I believe, for example, that there is a difference between a reform movement inside Fatah, which will automatically reflect itself on the PLO, and a movement that seeks to conquer Fatah. If the protest phenomenon faction says: We are Fatah, and there is no other Fatah but the traitors, this raises a series of questions. If they say: We want a radical change in Fatah, this would be another issue.

There are two factions in Fatah; this is the reality. The Central Council (August session that dealt with the internal crisis) distributed its document to both factions.

Recognizing the existence of another faction requires a dialogue; it requires stopping the fighting. If the answer is: We are Fatah, then we ask which Fatah? Nationalist Fatah? Or national democratic Fatah? Or national democratic revolutionary Fatah? For each of these cases, there would be a distinct political line.

If the other faction adopts the view that they are Fatah, then they must specify which Fatah. If they answer nationalist Fatah, then their alliance policy is understandable. (The reference here is primarily to alliances within the Palestinian revolution.) If they answer progressive nationalist Fatah, then their alliances are no longer understandable. If they answer national democratic revolutionary Fatah,

then they must radically deepen their alliances (with the left forces).

Therefore, despite our agreement on fighting the right, the other part of the problem remains: There are two approaches in dealing with the problem in Fatah, and two approaches to reforming the PLO. Concerning the crisis in Fatah our position excludes fighting and relies on democratic dialogue; it is necessary to recognize that there are two factions; the crisis could be solved on the basis of the Central Council's document. Concerning the PLO, I fear that the Palestinian arena will become even more complicated than it is now if the approach that says: We are the PLO, prevails. If the issue concerns the PLO, then we would become a party to the political battle taking place. How do we understand the PLO's crisis? How do we understand the solutions?

When one party or leader, outside the legal framework of the PLO, declares the downfall of this or that leader, we say this is a dangerous method and totally rejected. (This is a reference to statements such as those made by Tareq al Khudra, commander of the Palestine Liberation Army in Syria, that Arafat no longer represents him.)

Program of unity and democratic reform

How do we understand things in the PLO? Allow me in this context to emphasize the program for unity and democratic reform presented by the PFLP and DFLP. I hope the motives for presenting this program are understood. Our motives are deeply national and stem from a deep sense of responsibility. I fear that in the poisoned atmosphere now prevailing in the Palestinian arena, some might suspect other motives. It may be said that it is an attempt to inherit Fatah, or that the two fronts are trying to promote their own role. However, no one who feels the reality of the danger threatening the Palestinian revolution could have such intentions.

The program for unity and democratic reform has two aspects: political and organizational. I have spoken about the political aspect. Now I want to point out the importance of the organizational aspect.

Previous experience in political work in the Palestinian revolution has taught me that even if the political program is adopted unanimously by all bodies of the PLO, one cannot be sure it will be implemented if organizational guarantees are not provided. This requires deciding on the organizational program which is supposed to include collective leadership and the participation of all nationalist forces on the basis of relative representation. It also requires determining precise guidelines for the decision-making process and for how the program should be executed.

It is said that the Palestinian arena is an oasis of democracy. This is true in the field of talk. In the past, it was said to us (by the influential leadership): Say what you want, and we do what we want. This is freedom of speech, but not of democratic decision-making and participation. Whoever thinks that the organizational question is isolated from the political one is mistaken...

One more point remains: Whether the reform should take place through the legal institutions of the PLO. The following big question might be raised: What are the guarantees that this reform will take place through the legal institutions?

The guarantee will be by reviewing the leading institutions of the organizations...Our program includes this point, and on this a decisive battle should be waged to guarantee the process of reform. This program has no value unless it becomes the program of all nationalist groups, forces and individuals because it correctly poses the issues. This is the challenge that awaits us all.

We propose this program for discussion, and we shall listen carefully to all views. Then we can determine the points of agreement and differences without any detours or evasions. Then we begin by executing the points of agreement in the PLO. Without this, we will find ourselves facing a destructive right-wing and destructive inter-Palestinian fighting.

Someone might ask: What is the significance of this program at a time when the situation is worsening around Tripoli? The fighting there might reduce the weight of this position to that of a feather. Our duty is to make this position as weighty as possible by crystallizing a broad mass current with extensions in the occupied territories, Jordan and all places where the Palestinian people are present, in order to become a large force capable of cornering all deviations in the Palestinian arena.

The Arab national liberation movement's support

We will put this program to every group in the Arab national liberation movement. After we listen to their views, we will demand their support, because what is taking place in the Palestinian arena affects the entire Arab area. It is the duty of all Arab nationalists to participate in stopping it.

The course we are advocating is not the path of the PFLP-DFLP Joint Leadership, but the path of salvation for the Palestinian people. We are part of the Palestinian revolution. Our opinion was sought. We are presenting it in the program of unity and democratic reform.

The Arab national liberation movement and the socialist countries are torn over what is taking place in the Palestinian arena. If some-

one says, the socialist countries support the legitimacy (the present leading bodies) and nothing else, we say this is not true. If it is said that they support reform and nothing else, we also say, no. These countries see the importance of the PLO's role in confronting the US schemes, and also want unity and reform. Moreover, they think that any change should take place through the legal framework.

Whoever wants to oppose US imperialism to the end has to adhere to the PLO as a political weapon and defender of Palestinian national rights: the right of return, self-determination and establishing a Palestinian state on the national soil. The USA and 'Israel' say: No to the PLO, no to the Palestinian state. We want the united PLO which adheres to the national political line. Why unity? Because if one group can assemble 100 members of the Palestinian National Council, the next day the other group can assemble 200, for example. Somebody might say that this is blackmail in the name of unity but I say no.

Finally, let us assume for the sake of discussion that the subjective factor with respect to the Palestinian revolution is correct and strong. Let us go even farther and assume that the democratic forces in the PLO hold the leading positions, led by a person like Ho Chi Minh. Is this enough for implementing our national rights? The answer is no. Why? Because there is a particularity of the Palestinian cause in view of the Zionist settlement in Palestine and the organic relationship between the Zionist entity and imperialism. This means that the Palestinian revolution cannot achieve its objectives without a dialectical relationship to the Arab revolution. Palestinian land cannot be liberated without bases for the Palestinian revolution in the surrounding countries. If we want the occupied territories to be liberated, we must create a significant shift in the balance of forces militarily. Through diplomatic struggle, we have gained the support of 120 countries, but this is definitely not enough to liberate the occupied homeland.

Thus, the Palestinian revolution must concentrate on its relations with the forces of Arab national liberation, especially in the surrounding countries, in order to become a factor for change in these countries. In the case that this change takes place, these countries will become bases for the Palestinian revolution through which it can lead the struggle for liberation. On this basis, the inter-connection between the Palestinian crisis and the crisis of the Arab national liberation movement becomes clear, as does the relation between bringing about an advance in the Palestinian situation and for the Arab national liberation movement.