

The PFLP, while highly praising the firm and principled positions of the USSR concerning our people's struggle, appreciates the peaceful Soviet initiatives leading to the agreement to eliminate medium-range and short-range nuclear weapons, as the first step towards protecting humanity from the dangers of a nuclear war.

The success of the imperialist-Zionist-Arab reactionary aggression in this region is not inevitable. In contrast to the official policies' decline, bright signs have emerged and proved the Arab nation's capabilities. Our Palestinian people's upris-

ing in the occupied homeland the heroic struggle of the Lebanese National Resistance Front, and the Palestinian military operations in the occupied homeland, the latest being the heroic hang-glider operation, all these facts point out the possibilities of success in foiling all hostile plans.

On the 20th anniversary, the PFLP promises to continue the struggle until total victory and the achievement of the national goals of the Palestinian people of return, self-determination and the establishment of an independent state on Palestine.»

Interview with Comrade George Habash

On the occasion of the PFLP's 20th anniversary, Secretary General Comrade George Habash gave an exclusive interview to *Al Hadaf* and *Democratic Palestine*

Twenty years after the PFLP's establishment, can you describe the circumstances in which it was formed. What were the expectations that motivated the decision to establish the Front?

The idea to establish the PFLP arose due to the results of the 1967 war, when the Zionist enemy succeeded in occupying the rest of Palestine, in addition to the Sinai and the Golan Heights. This made the Arab and Palestinian masses disillusioned with the nationalist bourgeois regimes, headed at that time by Nasser's regime in Egypt. The masses were shocked by the defeat and the new Zionist expansion, and by the failure of the nationalist bourgeois project spearheaded by the Egyptian regime. The question was what to do to restore our masses' self-confidence and restore the credibility of our slogans.

In order to liberate Palestine, struggle by all means was needed... at that time, the PLO was not the same as it is now - it was not a front-like framework led by the armed resistance organizations, it was only a few years old. The masses had no confidence in it. It did not represent the Palestinian people's will. Nor was it a suitable framework for mobilizing their capabilities for the liberation struggle. It had been established by the Arab regimes, which made it difficult to imagine that it could escape their control. This is not meant to belittle the importance of the PLO's having been established... But the requirements of truth make us point out the many reservations and questions that remained... Faced with this situation, we made our decision to initiate new revolutionary action whereby the Palestinian people could practice their will by fighting to liberate their homeland.

In these circumstances, it was natural to think of establishing a national front, representing the vanguard Palestinian forces, to restore the prominence of the Palestinian role which had been overlooked from 1948 until 1967. The time had come for a new revolutionary response, with a different class nature, capable of facing the new challenges. We saw the Algerian people's revolution as an inspiration, as well as the experience of the Yemeni masses in the South, who achieved independence in 1967.

A POPULAR FRONT

We engaged in contacts with all Palestinian forces and organizations that were preparing for armed struggle to liberate Palestine through protracted people's war. The most important organizations were Fatah, the Palestinian branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement, the Heros of Return, the Palestine Liberation Front, the Palestinian branch of the Baath Party and more than twenty smaller factions. This abundance of factions reflected the Palestinian people's awakening.

The name, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, did not emerge at that time, for the negotiations which were held among Palestinian organizations in Damascus aimed at forming a fighting, nationalist, people's front. We wanted to include all Palestinian forces, also Fatah, but the dialogue did not end in agreement to form such a front. Fatah refused to participate, so the only choice then was to work with the organizations that agreed to forming a unified front. Thus, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was formed from the Palestinian branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement (the Youth of Revenge), the Heros of Return, the Palestine Liberation Front and a number of independent nationalists.

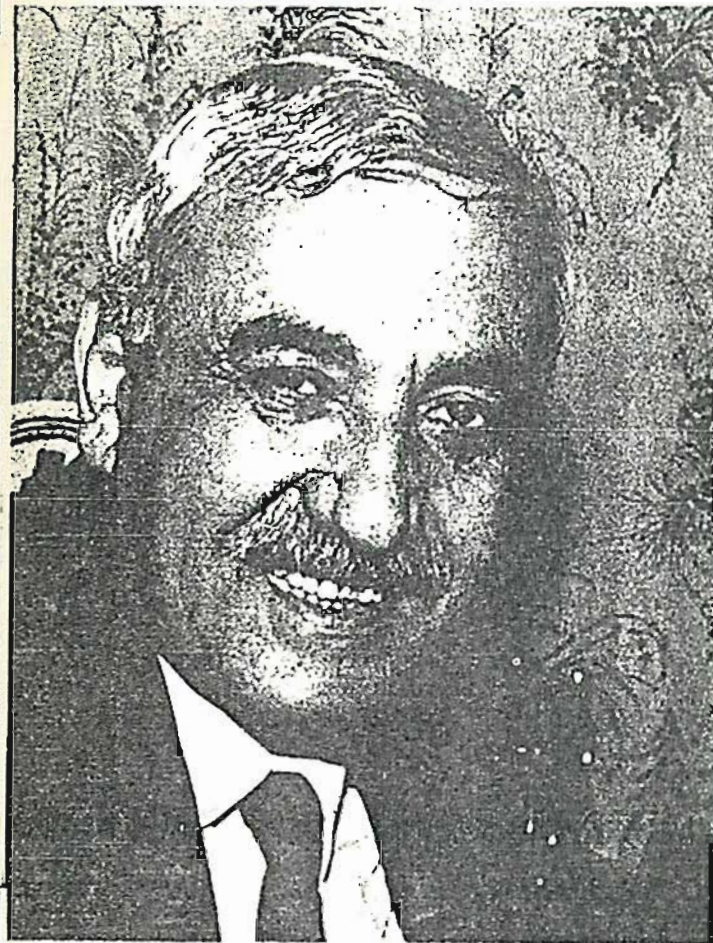
When we first thought of establishing the PFLP after the June defeat, the expectations were that this front would include all fighting Palestinian organizations, as had happened in Algeria (the Algerian National Liberation Front) and the National Liberation Front that achieved the independence of South Yemen. We never thought that we would be building a Marxist-Leninist party. The idea of transformation was not introduced at that time. When the PFLP's establishment was declared, it was clear that it was a front including the greatest possible number of existing Palestinian fighting organizations, and which aimed to continue working with Fatah in a unified front. This is what happened in 1968, when we reached an agreement that made the PLO a front-like framework led by the fighting organizations, without losing the PLO's representative capacity as a member of the Arab League.

From the start, we didn't plan to form a party called the PFLP.

We wanted to form a broad national popular front including all fighting Palestinian organizations. Since we were not able to achieve this aim due to Fatah's rejection of this formula, the ensuing developments, like the Palestine Liberation Front's withdrawal and the withdrawal of some independents, served to advance the idea of transforming the PFLP into a working class party, and making the PLO the broad popular framework.

Concerning our aspirations and expectations, we didn't imagine that liberating Palestine would be a short picnic.

Based on our understanding of Zionism, its ideology, practice and alliance with imperialism, we knew well that the liberation process would be tough, bitter and historic. Experience has proved the importance of constantly clarifying



this fact to our masses, so that they understand the complexity of this process and are prepared to fight a long-term battle until liberating the homeland

Do you think that the initiative to form the PFLP was correct at that time? Did you arrive at a correct balance between the Palestinian and the Arab nationalist dimension in the Palestinian struggle. Or did the decision come too late?

I think it came late. We, as the Palestinian branch of the Arab National Movement had thought of practicing armed struggle and people's war against the Zionist enemy since 1964, as evidenced by the 1964 of the martyr, Khaled Abu Aisha, whom the PFLP considers its first martyr.

We deeply believed in the necessity of armed struggle as a method for which there is no substitute in liberating Palestine. At the same time, we saw the need for coordinating with the Nasserite leadership, because we could not envision a comprehensive confrontation of the enemy camp without a connection between Palestinian action and the Arab national liberation movement which was then headed by Nasser's Egypt... We prepared to start the armed struggle, but at the same time we understood that this was subject to coordination with Nasser's Egypt.

I remember a meeting with Abdel Nasser in early 1964, when we as vanguard forces had started to realize the dilemma of Nasserism despite the masses adherence to Nasser's leadership. I had two proposals at the meeting, after presenting a long analysis of Nasserism's. The first suggestion dealt with the armed struggle in South Yemen where the October revolution had started in 1963. At that time, we did not envision its triumph without Nasser's support... I reviewed the early period of the armed struggle and the need for supporting it. The second suggestion dealt with the Palestinian armed struggle, the necessity of initiating it.

Nasser's response to the first suggestion was that he expressed readiness to give support; he suggested starting gradually, after having seen if the conditions are suitable... Concerning the Palestinian issue, I still remember his exact words. He said that «the issue of «Israel» is more complicated than many people think. As I have said on many occasions, I don't have a plan to liberate Palestine, for the battle against Israel is at the same time the battle against US imperialism.» The discussion between us was honest, clear and cordial. Nasser stressed that armed struggle against the Zionist enemy needs deep and long thinking, and finding suitable conditions. It was obvious that he was not enthusiastic or approving of my suggestion to initiate armed struggle against the Zionist enemy. But to us, this issue was very important, so we arrived at a formula with Nasser allowing for preparations for armed struggle.

To us, this meant to start training, reconnaissance, moving arms, etc.

Over the past two decades, the Front has passed through several stages. Can you evaluate these?

The first stage was the formative one which I spoke about when telling how the PFLP was formed as a framework for the Palestinian people's movement, not only as a political party, and how the circumstances following the 1967 defeat gave birth to this idea.

The second stage started with the withdrawal of the Palestine Liberation Front, to establish what has become the PFLP-General Command As a result of their withdrawal, the PFLP became the Palestinian branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement, because the remaining component (Heroes of Return) was a secondary organization with origins in the ANM as well. As a result, a qualitative transformation occurred in how the PFLP viewed itself. It was no longer a united front of all the classes and stratas of the revolution, like the Vietnamese or Algerian models. Instead, this chance receded, and the Front became mainly an essential organization among the organizations of the Palestinian revolution. One can ask why we maintained the same name... In its first year, the Front succeeded in accumulating a big record of political and military struggle, and it acquired the people's trust.

We aspired to maintain this record, but we realized that we

were one organization of the revolution and behaved in this way.

The biggest question we asked ourselves at that time was: What is the political, ideological and social nature of our organization? We outlined our answer in the light of developments experienced by the Palestinian branch of the ANM, ideologically and class-wise. We considered ourselves an organization of the Palestinian working class, i.e., the organization that represented the ideology and political thinking of the working class. In short, the second stage meant keeping the name PFLP, despite the realization that we were an organization of the working class...

The third stage witnessed intensification of internal discussion between the leading figures of the Palestinian branch of the ANM.

These discussions focused on whether or not the PFLP, given its new situation after the PLF's withdrawal, could be transformed into a working class organization. There were two viewpoints. The first viewpoint was held by those who still lead the PFLP. They maintained that the PFLP could be transformed into a leftist, Marxist-Leninist party, representing the Palestinian working class. They held that in the transformation process, although it might be long, the PFLP would be able to acquire Marxist-Leninist theory.

The second viewpoint maintained that this was impossible, that PFLP, as a petit bourgeois party, could not be transformed into a working class party. The maximum they thought could be reached by the PFLP was to have leftist elements, but not to become a Marxist-Leninist party. This stage ended with the group holding this view splitting from the PFLP in February 1969, to form the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. DFLP

Naturally, this was not the only issue of contradiction that caused the split. There were many political and organizational differences, but the main issue that led to the split was the issue of transformation. I thought that we could have managed to solve the political and organizational differences had the viewpoints on the transformation process been reconciled.

The fourth stage: After the DFLP's split, the PFLP entered the fourth stage in its development - the stage of transforming into a Marxist-Leninist party, a party for the Palestinian working class. We are still in this stage which is near successful conclusion. This stage, which started after February 1969, is divided into several substages, which we can review through our national congresses: The second congress, which was held in February 1969, issued «The Strategy for the Liberation of Palestine», which outlined the PFLP's aspirations and future (organizational) form.

a. Between February 1969 and March 1972, the PFLP's leadership worked to crystallize the Front's leftist nature through its political positions and slogans, whether concerning the position on the Jordanian regime, the Jordanian masses and nationalist forces, or the PFLP's understanding of the concept of Palestinian national unity. In all these positions, we worked to crystallize our leftist political identity as a Palestinian organization for the working class.

In the third congress, in March 1972, we reviewed the organizational structure of the PFLP and outlined the big shortcomings in this. We examined the factors of this shortcoming and outlined organizational guidelines to overcome this. The congress adopted the internal rules and regulations of the PFLP, which are the rules for a communist party. Then started the long, hard process of advancing the organizational

situation of the Front to the level outlined in the internal rules and regulations, particularly to enact democratic centralism which is the basis for all working class parties. This was one of the most difficult stages through which the Front has passed, and many questions were raised about its capability to succeed in the transformation process. However, around 1979, we began to feel that we had successfully passed this stage.

In the fourth congress, April 1981, we were able to register our satisfaction with the progress we had achieved in the transformation process, on both the political and organizational levels. We outlined the headlines for our future tasks: to conclude the transformation process by strengthening the theoretical knowledge of our leadership and cadres.

These are the stages undergone by the Front in its transformation into a Marxist-Leninist party. As you noted, they were intertwined. It is difficult to totally separate the one from the other. I have simply distinguished them in terms of our main concern at each stage...

THE PFLP AND THE SPLITS

Who was responsible for the splits in the PFLP? What caused them and were they inevitable or not? To what extent has the Front overcome the possibility of splits in the future?

First, let us distinguish between what happened in 1968, when the PLF withdrew, and what happened in 1969, when a group split to form the DFLP. In the first case, it was not split, but the termination of a partnership between several organizations, exactly like when the PFLP terminated its partnership with the Salvation Front in April 1987... As for the second case, it was a real split. A group from our ranks split and formed a new organization, after it was impossible for them to coexist with the mother organization, especially since the differences focused on a central issue, that of transformation.

In 1972, the PFLP again faced a split by a group which called itself the Popular Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Palestine, but this was of little importance in terms of this group's size or political-theoretical ideas. The disappearance of this organization from the Palestinian political scene proves its weakness, but in any case, it was a split.

The PFLP has constantly reviewed this issue of splits. In the past, we laid all the blame on the group that split. We used to study the reasons behind the split, as claimed by the splitting group. We blamed left opportunism or selfishness or factionalism, etc., as the causes for the split. However, with the advance in the transformation process, we have changed our way of analyzing this issue and its causes. In the organizational report of the fourth national congress, we said that in addition to the factors for which the splitting group bears the main responsibility, the internal situation of the PFLP's leading bodies at that time was also partly responsible for the splits.

I believe that given the state of the Front's leadership at the time, the splits could not have been prevented. Had the situation been different, we might have succeeded in containing and minimizing them. Today, after two decades, history has given us an answer to the outcome of this experience. Had the PFLP disappeared or shifted to the right or remained in bourgeois ideology and practice, we could say that the viewpoint of the comrades of the DFLP was correct. However, since the contrary has occurred, and the Front has made great progress in the transformation, to a Marxist-Leninist party, the PFLP's viewpoint was proven correct. I don't want to go into details in

this evaluation of the outcome of the split, but I have two questions. The first is: What was the qualitatively new thing which the DFLP represented in the Palestinian arena? The second is: What was the effect of that split on the conflict between the Palestinian left and right, at that time and today?

As for the future, I can say with confidence that the PFLP has overcome the experience of splits. The greatest proof of this is that all the rumors of impending splits in the PFLP over the past ten years, and especially after 1982, have proved to be mere illusions on the part of those who spread these rumors. Having courageously studied the experience of the past split, the PFLP today views with great satisfaction the high level of political, organizational and ideological unity in our ranks. We are confident that all these illusions and rumors will be shattered on the rocks of our unity.

TRANSFORMATION

How far has the transformation process come?

I believe that our coming fifth congress will deal with the big question: Did we conclude the transformation process, or do we still need more time to achieve this goal? Personally, I will be supporting the viewpoint, based on knowledge, that the transformation process has proceeded successfully, and that we have become one of the models for the transformation of a revolutionary democratic organization into a communist organization; that we have concluded or are near the conclusion of the transformation process.

The yardstick for measuring the correctness of this judgment is how the Leninist principles are practiced. The most important of these principles concern the party's ideological and class nature, its adherence to the principle of democratic centralism, the practice of criticism and self-criticism, etc. Evaluating the PFLP by this scientific yardstick, I can confirm that we have concluded, or nearly concluded the transformation process, and this will be my viewpoint at the fifth congress...

The process of concluding the transformation over the coming years is intertwined with two main tasks. The first of these is to consolidate relations between the Palestinian revolutionary democratic forces, so that they become the guarantee of the revolution... We deeply believe in the necessity of unifying the Palestinian left in order to build the united Palestinian communist party.

The second task is to struggle on two fronts. The first front is to strengthen the political line of the PLO in order to maintain its nature as a liberation movement opposing imperialism and Zionism, and to confront any deviationist trends. The second front is to consecrate democratic principles in the PLO's institutions and bodies. These tasks may need several years to achieve.

Does the role played by the PFLP today measure up to the original expectations at the time of its foundation?

I want to answer this honestly and clearly. We have hoped to have a bigger role among the masses and in the revolution and the PLO. However, there are reasons for the gap between our dreams and the reality.

First, in Jordan, the revolution was made up of two main groups, and we succeeded in making the left a competitive and

equal pole in relation to the right. We have worked so that the positions of the working class in the revolution would be distinguished in programs, organization and behaviour, in contrast to the bourgeois program represented by Fatah... Despite the bitter experience of the splits, we succeeded in maintaining this competitive pole... This was expressed spontaneously in the slogan shouted by the masses at that time: «For national unity - Fatah and Popular Front.»

Second, in Lebanon, the situation was somehow different, especially with the PLO's achievements, like its gaining Arab and international recognition. This helped the influential (bourgeois) pole in the PLO to exploit these achievements to its own advantage. Here we should point out that the alliance between the Palestinian right, which was leading the PLO, and the Arab right is organic. It stems from many factors, mainly the Arab right's need for a Palestinian cover for its capitulationist policies. Naturally, this alliance provided the Palestinian right with great material support, including arms, which helped the balance of forces in the Palestinian arena to tilt in its favor.

After 1982, the importance of the Palestinian revolution's primary operation base, i.e., occupied Palestine, was increased. The PFLP gained more strength in the Palestinian balance of forces, due to its influence in occupied Palestine, which gave it a bigger role among the masses and in the revolution...

The important thing here is that we have always hoped the Palestinian left would have a bigger role in the revolution, because we believe that the left is the guarantee for protecting the Palestinian national achievements and for the revolution's continuation... Again, I want to reaffirm that the Palestinian right and left are in a state of national unity in confronting the enemy camp, and especially the Zionist enemy.

THE PLO

The relationship between the PFLP and the PLO has fluctuated over the years. Can you describe the most prominent stages in this relationship and explain these fluctuations?

Participating or not participating in the PLO institutions and leading bodies cannot be the only measure of the PFLP's relationship to the PLO, although it is an essential measure. This phenomenon, connected to the political and organizational conflict in the PLO, was never an expression of change in the PFLP's position towards the PLO as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Participation in the PNC is among the essential criteria for adherence to the PLO, but it should be clear to all that the PFLP participated in the PNC except for a few specific occasions and for specific reasons that had nothing to do with the PFLP's conviction in the importance of the PLO. We did not participate in the 5th and 17th sessions of the PNC; we participated only symbolically in the 6th session. In all others, we participated, which shows that our lack of participation has been minimal.

In fact, our literature has always outlined the reasons for our not participating in these sessions. Concerning the fifth session, we proposed during the discussions to include Arab reaction in the enemy camp. We had in mind the upcoming battle with the Jordanian regime and the need for a scientific understanding of Arab reaction's position on the Palestinian revolution. To us, this issue was not superficial or unimportant.

tant; nor was it an issue that could be discussed with the same ease that we now discuss things. Despite our not participating in this session, I remember that we organized forty seminars in Jordan to explain our position, saying that we are replacing our non-participation in the PNC session with forty «PNCs».

Concerning the 17th session, everybody knows that other organizations, including the Democratic Front, joined us in boycotting this session, for reasons which are well known, particularly in view of the dominance of a particular political line at this session which was held in Amman (1984), which led to the rightist trend's continuing its political option which ultimately led to the signing of the Amman accord with the Jordanian regime.

Concerning the Executive Committee, we boycotted it during the period between the PNC's 12th and 14th sessions. During this period, we all remember the slogan raised by Fatah, which controlled the PLO leadership, for keeping things as they were, i.e., keeping us outside the Executive Committee.

The question might be raised as to the reasons for the PFLP's non-participation... What were our aims with non-participation on certain occasions, and what were the real reasons for this behaviour? A review of the PFLP's literature shows that our non-participation was due to our convictions concerning essential political and organizational issues. We felt we had to use all methods available in order to have certain issues adopted in the PLO in a manner that would consolidate national unity and promote the PLO's goals. Despite our constant adherence to the process of political and organizational reform, we were not the decision-makers in the PLO.

Everybody talks about hegemony in the PLO leadership and the absence of democratic practices in its institutions. What then could we do when we face a serious political or organizational issue not approved by the hegemonic leadership. The fact was that after expending all efforts, and failing to have these positions adopted, we used this tactic of non-participation in order to bring the discussions being held behind closed doors out in public. This was a way of saying to our masses that there is an important question which keeps us from participating in the PNC, or the Executive Committee, and this question concerns not only us, but concerns first and foremost the Palestinian masses. We were seeking to draw the masses' attention to the problem presented by the hegemony in the PLO leadership, and the political and organizational results of this hegemony.

Forming the PLO's institutions and leading bodies on democratic front-like principles, that guarantee collective decision-making, is the only way to prevent the occurrence of this phenomenon. The continuation of the hegemony does not preclude the PFLP from using this tactic again.

If the PFLP's non-participation is disturbing, the hegemony and non-democratic methods used in the PLO are more disturbing. Consolidating Palestinian national unity requires a radical treatment of the political and organizational misconduct.

Concerning the PFLP's mistakes in dealing with the PLO, everybody knows from experience that we are not among those organizations that claim to always be correct. Our literature includes a review of the mistakes we have committed.

Could we say that after 20 years in the PLO, the PFLP's use of the weapon of non participation produced the desired results?

Theoretically yes. During the period that preceded the convening of the April 1987 session of the PNC, the front succeeded, by its decisive adherence to some political and organizational issues, in having the PNC cancel the Amman accord. In addition to some other resolutions that opposed the imperialist solutions and rehabilitated the PLO's alliances and national program.

We have also won the political battle when the Rejectionist Front was formed. We won by interconnecting the transitional solution with the strategic solution of the revolution.

But winning a battle comes only as a result of the political developments which force the influential rightist trend in the PLO to correct its political stands. For example, when the issue of classifying the Arab reaction in the camp of the enemies was subject to discussions at the 5th session of the PNC, we succeeded later in having the PNC adopt this classification only because the Jordanian regime had started its war of attrition against the Palestinian resistance movement. But naturally winning theoretically is different from winning practically. The rightist trend in the PLO never adhered to the resolutions.

The issue of the Palestinian national action leadership's crisis has been raised for years. Aren't you a part of this leadership? Does this crisis apply to the Palestinian left's leadership as well?

There is a difference between the bourgeoisie's dilemma in leading the national work and the difficulties that face the working class when leading this work. The dilemma of the Palestinian national movement is a part of the Arab Liberation movement's crisis. The crisis lies in both movements in the class nature of this leadership, and in the particular dilemma of the revolutionary alternative to this leadership. The continuing difficulties the Left faces contribute to extending the Palestinian national action leadership's dilemma. The historical role of the bourgeoisie has declined. It is no longer capable of continuing and concluding the national and democratic liberation tasks. At some times this class can't even maintain what was achieved. Concerning the Palestinian struggle, the great difficulties we face in this stage, could lead the Palestinian bourgeoisie to favor a political settlement with the enemy before concluding the political liberation stage. This could be seen in the political position taken by the rightist trend following the Palestinian forces' withdrawal from Beirut in 1982.

The concept of the crisis as talked about does not apply to the Left. Despite the difficulties the Left faces, the future for the Left is wide open. The Palestinian Left, due to its ideological and class nature, will continue the battle against the enemy until total victory.

It is worth pointing out that the Palestinian Left was not born as materialized Left. The process of transformation governs the Left's development. This means that the Left could have many mistakes and shortcomings which could delay reaching its historical status as the leader of the Palestinian national action.

The scopes for the Palestinian Left to take control of the revolution's leadership are subjected to several factors. First, this process is a historical one. And during this long process the achievements of the Left are accumulated until reaching these goals. Second, taking control of the revolution requires the consolidation of the Palestinian revolutionary democratic forces' efforts on all levels, ideological, political and

organizational to achieve the unity of these forces. To that end, the Front has expended great efforts since the 4th national congress (1981) to pave the road for the Palestinian Left's unity.

The Islamic trend is growing fast inside and outside the occupied territories. Do you think this trend will have the chance to control the PLO?

First I would like to express my deepest appreciation for the phenomenon of the «Jihad Islami» (the Islamic Jihad) in occupied Palestine for the many painful blows it dealt to the Zionist enemy. And we extend our hands for cooperation against the Zionist enemy. I agree with the evaluation that this trend is growing inside and outside the occupied homeland. And this phenomenon does not apply only to the Palestinian arena. It is rather a phenomenon that is extending to many areas in the Arab world and some developing countries.

The causes for this trend's growth lie in the problems and difficulties that face the socio-economic liberation process, the development problems and the weakness of the working class parties. This situation forces the masses to turn to any path they think could achieve their aspirations. During the Nasserite era, this trend had no chance of growing this fast, because the masses saw in Nasser's leadership the mean to achieve their aspirations. But when this leadership failed to conclude the socio-economic liberation process, the masses turned to other trends.

We could add to these factors the victory achieved by the Iranian revolution. This experience was an inspiration to the masses, and its effects extended to parts of the Arab and Islamic world. Another factor was the imperialist and Arab reactionary encouragement of the fundamentalist forces to serve their interests, mainly to face the growing influence and strength of the nationalist and Marxist forces in the area. Saudi Arabia poured material support to these forces. The Egyptian regime of Anwar Sadat encouraged the Islamic force's growth for some time in Egypt. The Jordanian regime facilitated the activities of the Islamic Brotherhood and other forces in Jordan. But it is worth mentioning that the Islamic Jihad is different from those other forces. While the other Islamic forces direct their activities against nationalist and progressive forces in occupied Palestine, the Islamic Jihad concentrates its activities against the Zionist enemy.

In the light of the results of the April 1987 unification session of the PNC, the PLO should continue the political and organizational reforms. This would promote the PLO's role, status and forms of struggle, namely escalating the armed struggle. The Islamic trend has the chance to control the Palestinian scene once the PLO stops the armed struggle and deviates from its nationalist program. In addition to the working class inability to be an alternative leadership, Palestinian masses would undoubtedly turn towards the forces the masses think could achieve their aspirations.

What is the PFLP's understanding of the «Palestinian Entity» and «independent Palestinian decision-making»?

Concerning the Palestinian Entity in this particular stage of our struggle, the PFLP views that confronting the imperialist-Zionist-Arab reactionary plan requires emphasizing the in-

dependant Palestinian entity and identity and insisting on establishing the independent Palestinian state on our national soil. The Zionist project is based on negating the existence of the Palestinian people and to assimilate the Palestinians in the state of «Israel» to become Israelis, while those Palestinians in the 1967 occupied territories be assimilated with Jordan. As for the Palestinians outside the occupied Palestine, they should according to the Zionist plan, assimilate in some Arab society or other societies. Confronting this project necessitates emphasizing the independent Palestinian identity and entity.

Despite our deep convictions that our fight against this Zionist enemy has pan-Arab national dimensions, there remains the peculiarity of this Zionist danger against the Palestinian people. This peculiarity resulted in the materialization of a Palestinian national identity and entity. And this can be clearly seen in the Palestinian masses', whether in the 1948 occupied territories, 1967 occupied territories or elsewhere, adherence to the PLO as their sole legitimate representative. Thus, safeguarding the PLO as the materialization of this Palestinian entity becomes a necessity.

Concerning the slogan of the independent Palestinian decision-making, it was raised in contrast to the strategy of the Arab regimes, the classical war strategy and against the Arab regime's logic of waiting until preparations for this war are completed. Despite that, the Palestinian people realize well that liberating Palestine is a task for the whole Arab nation. And that the process of liberation could only be developed through the joint efforts and capabilities of the Arab nation in this struggle. Therefore, the decision of peace or war is an Arab national decision that is taken by the Palestinian revolution in cooperation and coordination with all sincere Arab forces.

The PFLP is viewed as a hard-liner towards the Palestinian positions. It is also viewed as an organization that accepts what has been rejected in the past. What is your explanation?

As a national liberation movement, all Palestinian classes and strata, and the nationalist political forces representing them, join in the battle against the common enemy. But there is a law that governs the relationship between all these forces. It is the law of conflict and alliance. Understanding this scientific law draws to the conclusion that we as a national liberation movement have our internal differences, but are united against the enemy.

I agree with your question that the PFLP is a hard-liner towards the Palestinian positions. The Front attempts by that to gain the broadest mass support in order to steer the conflict in a direction that would achieve the minimum level of success. But after that, the circumstances force the Palestinian forces to unite. Misunderstanding this law sometimes makes the PFLP's positions unclear, and thus questions are raised.

It should be understood, that by joining the unity framework, the PFLP does not accept those policies it had rejected in the past. An example to this is the conflict period that the Palestinian political arena had lived through from 1983 until the PNC's unification session in April 1987. Is it true that the PFLP accepted in April 1987 the policies it rejected before that? The answer naturally is no. The Palestinian national unity achieved in April 1987 was based on the cancellation of the

Amman accord, specific organizational reforms and other PNC resolutions. The PFLP wages the conflict on strength and principles, and unites on the same basis.

In addition to the law of conflict and alliance, another reason lies behind this phenomenon. The PFLP sometimes makes mistakes and misjudgements, and based on these misjudgements the Front takes wrong stands. The PFLP courageously admits those errors, unlike other organizations which have the illusion that they never make mistakes. We make mistakes, but when we discover them, we correct them publicly.

An example was our stand after the rightist trend in the PLO signed the Amman accord with the Jordanian regime. We thought that the rightist trend had accepted the Jordanian conditions and that a bilateral settlement with «Israel» was destined. But after King Hussein's February 19th 1986 speech, in which he ceased the coordination with the rightist trend, we realized that the settlement road was a rocky road and that the new objective conditions have paved the road for restoring the PLO's unity on clear political and organizational lines.

I would like to clarify another point. The political movement is a vacillating one. Consequently the PFLP formulates its stands with the new political developments in mind. This vacillation requires that the PFLP's stands change as well.

What became of the slogan «liberating all of Palestine»? What are the prospects for such a slogan given the fact that «Israel» now is a nuclear power?

The world has known for a long time that «Israel» owns nuclear weapons. We also realize the great development in the Zionist military strategy and technology. And we realize that these facts will reflect themselves on our struggle and would add more obstacles.

The most important goals of this nuclear blackmail is to create the willingness to surrender in the Arab and Palestinian minds. But at the same time several considerations should be taken into mind. First, the US nuclear deterrence strategy failed in Vietnam. And Washington failed also in preventing other nations during the detente era from gaining their independence and liberation. Second, the Israeli nuclear blackmail strategy will become not only a problem for the Palestinian people but an international problem as well, threatening world peace. Third, «Israel» realizes that using nuclear weapons would undoubtedly be a threat to itself as well. I am not playing down the danger of this situation, this weapon or the obstacle it adds to our struggle path, but I believe that this threat will never prevent the process of liberating all of Palestine. This is our principle line, but at the same time we cannot be dogmatic in our analysis. We cannot predict the solutions for future problems. We are dialectical, and we take stands in accordance with the circumstances.

Don't you think that there is a big difference between the US military presence in Vietnam and the Israeli presence in Palestine? The US had two choices, either stay or withdraw. But «Israel's» two options are survival or death. Don't you think that these options would prompt «Israel» to use the nuclear weapon?

As I said before it is a difficult task to outline a precise scenario for future events. But there is a possibility that «Israel» might find itself one day faced with a big question: faced with the options of death or life, what kind of life do you want? Is it the expansionist presence or the peaceful coexistence? Isn't it possible, given the possibility of shifting the balance of forces in the area in the Palestinian people's favor that a change in the present thinking of the Zionist state might take place? Where it will consider maintaining its «citizens» a democratic Palestinian state might be the safest method to survive.

These and other questions emphasize the difficulty of giving detailed answers in advance. These questions after all belong to a future era in the Arab—Zionist conflict. And given the present decline in the official Arab policies, one cannot give answers in advance. For this will certainly lead to mistakes and misjudgements.

How can the Palestinian people's inalienable national rights be achieved given the present world formula that seeks to solve the Palestinian problem in a way that might bypass the minimum level of these rights?

I strongly believe that the Soviet Union is committed to the Palestinian people's inalienable rights as the minimum level required for any solution to the Palestinian problem and the Arab—Zionist conflict. The Soviet Union will continue adhering to these rights as long as the Palestinian side maintains its adherence and struggle. During my last visit to the Soviet Union, this commitment was clearly outlined. A senior Soviet official said that the only change in their stand is the willingness to talk with the Israelis. The official added that in these talks the Soviet Union has reaffirmed its well-known positions towards the Middle East crisis and the Palestinian problem, which emphasize the Israeli withdrawal from the 1967 occupied territories, self-determination for the Palestinian people and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, through the international peace conference with the participation of all concerned parties, the permanent members of the UN security council and the PLO on equal footings.

During the past 20 years of Struggle, to what extent did the concept of operational bases prove itself scientifically sound?

By no way, should the concept of operational bases be assessed in the light of the present conditions of the Palestinian Revolution outside occupied Palestine. The difficulties and the obstacles facing the Revolution's second base, in Lebanon should not be taken as evidence to the *fall* of this concept which is scientifically and practically correct and appropriate for the Palestine question, with the Palestinian people's status of «diaspora» and the nature of the battle mounted against the Zionist-imperialist enemy, kept in mind.

The major part of the Palestinian people are living outside their homeland, and that is why the concept of operational bases was adopted. It was further crystalized and developed by our deeper understanding of the nature of the enemy and our determination to achieve victory.

The Palestinian Revolution has faced a great deal of dif

difficulties. This concept might be viewed as a failure, because our experience in Jordan failed to establish a sound and solid base. At present, the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon faces so many difficulties created by several sides. However, there are insisting questions; namely: What tasks should be shouldered by over 1.5 million Palestinians in Jordan and about 500,000 Palestinians living in Lebanon? Would the Palestinian Revolution inside Palestine be able to go on with such a great effectiveness and vigour without the support and the backing of the second base abroad?

The long experience of the contemporary Palestinian struggle made it clear that to keep the dialectical link between the Revolution's forces inside and outside occupied Palestine, it is essential to establish operational bases for the Revolution in the front Arab countries, particularly in Jordan, due to its specific significance and peculiarity. Occasional failures and difficulties should by no mean make us give up these facts, which were developed into rules through the experience of the Palestinian struggle.

This is our outlook of the issue. Furthermore, our political and organizational strategy laid down by the second Congress in 1969 called for the creation of an Arab Hanoi. With this frankness, we addressed our masses and our revolution forces. In no way should we adopt empiricism as a law. It is essential to have a workplan and to lay down a strategy. Such a strategy might be modified, re-considered or developed, but there must be one.

The difficulties that confronted the Revolution's second base in Jordan and Lebanon did not urge us to re-consider the concept itself, because it is completely right, rather urged us to find out why did we fail to establish invulnerable operational bases outside Palestine. Our thorough review of this experience allows us to attribute this failure mainly to the failure of the Palestinian Revolution to establish the proper relation with the Jordanian masses and their revolutionary forces before 1970 and to the non-establishment of sound relations with the Lebanese masses and their revolutionary forces between 1971 and 1982.

In Jordan, the Palestinian Revolution disregarded and replaced the Jordanian people and the Jordanian national movement. Misled by the illusion that it can neutralize the regime by raising the slogan of «non interference in its internal affairs», the Revolution did not participate in the Jordanian masses' social-national battles.

In Lebanon, the relationship was confined to containing the National Lebanese Movement. It confiscated their role, revived opponent traditional reactionary forces, and moved behind the scenes to contact their fascist enemies, including the government.

Had the Palestinian Revolution enjoyed clarity of vision and had it known how to establish good relations with the Jordanian and the Lebanese people, had it supported them against their national and class enemies, the situation would have greatly altered.

Prospects of struggle inside the occupied homeland

What are the limits of the Palestinian struggle inside Palestine? What is the exact task of this struggle and what is the actual capability to upgrade this struggle? To what extent have the slogans on this level been translated into concrete accomplishments?

The struggle of our people inside the occupied homeland is strongly linked to the struggle mounted by their fellow people in exile. These ties were marvellously manifested through the uprisings staged by the Palestinian people inside the occupied territories to back and support their revolution abroad in time of need.

Undoubtedly, there are wide prospects for this courageous struggle, as resistance ways are being continuously developed. The recent uprising staged by the Palestinian people in the occupied homeland in protest to the visit of George Shultz, the US secretary of State, provided undeniable evidence to their absolute and non-controversial rejection of the Camp David Accords, and of the Jordanian regime's option. Their uprising, which lasted for months, provided evidence to the fact that collective unified action could crystalise and safeguard against the capitulationist plans masterminded by the US-Zionist alliance, and accepted by the Amman and the Cairo circles.

The collective Palestinian will, demonstrated during Schultz' visit, is a good example to follow in the future. It might work as a first link in the chain of the Palestinian counter-attack against the deterioration and retreat scheme targeting the entire Arab World.

It is high time to accord sufficient attention to the Palestinian Revolution's first base, inside the occupied territories. This is a lesson we learnt from the past experience. In the past, the Revolution leadership did not work effectively to develop national struggle, it has rather involved itself in several problems and concerns facing the Palestinian action abroad.

In occupied Palestine, there are about two million people living under the yoke of occupation and suffering of awful and unbearable conditions. Therefore, it is necessary to exercise all forms of struggle. Once again, the significance of the first base is demonstrated.

At present, we must first work to unite the instrument of the revolution inside Palestine, through the possible coordination terms. Therefore, we should speed up work to translate the resolutions of the unification session of the PNC held in Algiers last April. We express satisfaction over the results attained on this level and call for attaining more similar accomplishments.

It is time to give priority to stepping up our military activities inside occupied Palestine, to escalate all other forms of struggle and to take the months-long uprising as our example for future action.

It is time to accord more attention to the anti-Zionist democratic Israeli forces and to extend support for their struggle against the common enemy.

Struggle inside the occupied territories has more than one strategic and direct task. It should keep the Palestinian question aflame on both the Arab and the international levels, in order to enable friendly forces to step up their solidarity campaigns in support of our cause and intensify their pressure on the enemy to force it to recognize our legitimate national rights, foremost of which the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent state.

It should also push the Israelis to be convinced that there are a Palestinian people having just national rights. As «Israel» managed to introduce psychological changes in our ranks by persuading all that «Israel» is undefeatable, we should at least tell the enemy that the Palestinian people exist, and can not be ignored. Their rights have has to be recognized.

We must exert every possible effort to make the burdens of the occupation far heavier than its revenues. Then and only ►

then, we would be marching along to restore our just national rights.

This, of course, is not the task of the struggle inside the occupied territories only. This struggle can not introduce the needed change in the balance of forces, which would force the establishment of a Palestinian state despite the enemy's will, but rather it is the task of the entire Palestinian struggle, fully linked to its national and internationalist dimensions.

How did your viewpoint develop concerning the relationship between the Palestinian national factor and the Arab national factor?

This viewpoint developed during two stages, each divided into subdivisions. The first stage was my participation in the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM). This stage overlooked the Palestinian national factor and emphasized the pan-Arab factor. I would like to point out that the ANM viewed the liberation of Palestine as a process that preconditioned achieving comprehensive Arab unity. And the ANM's slogan «unity is the road to Palestine» summarizes the ANM's thinking. The ANM strongly believed in the pan-Arab dimension in the early fifties, when we attempted to wage military actions against the Zionist enemy, due to the continuous confrontations with the Jordanian army which we used to call in those days the «Guardians of Israel».

Several factors played a role in emphasizing the pan-Arab national factor first, the results of the 1948 war and the defeat of the Arab armies in Palestine led us to believe in the pan-Arab response against this enemy. Second, at that time the idea of pan-Arab was in its peak. Third, the atmosphere that the late comrade Wadi Haddad and I found ourselves in, in the American University of Beirut (AUB), where several Arab militants showed readiness to struggle for Palestine, this atmosphere overshadowed the Palestinian national factor. It is worth pointing out that pan-Arab was an ideology opposing imperialism, Zionism and Arab reaction. Added to that is the ANM's inability to contact the Palestinian masses living in the 1948 occupied territories and to organize them. The exception to this was the Gaza strip, where the Palestinian chapter of the ANM was a strong force.

The Nasserite era added to our belief that the pan-Arab idea was close to liberating Palestine. But the events that took place later shocked us and forced us gradually to question the old pan-Arab ideas. The first event was the Zionists' plan to transfer the Jordan rivers' water course and president Nasser's failure to respond. The second event was the dissolving of the unity between Egypt and Syria (1963). And the third event was the triumph of the Algerian revolution (1962). These events forced us to seriously reconsider the relationship between the Palestinian national factor and the Arab national factor.

Consequently a Palestinian branch of the ANM was formed, called «The Youth of Revenge». This branch was concerned with the Palestinian struggle. And it was considered a step on the correct path, despite the continued emphasis on the Arab national dimension.

The second stage is the PFLP's. And in my own view point, this stage materialized the correct and precise outlining of the relationship between the Palestinian national and the Arab national dimensions.

The PFLP realized that the Palestinian national dimension in the struggle should be emphasized more than the pan-Arab dimension. The 2nd and 4th PFLP congresses' political reports

outlined precisely the dialectical relationship between the Palestinian national and the Arab national dimensions.

What is your response to the charge that the PFLP still emphasizes the pan-Arab dimension over the Palestinian dimension?

I can easily countercharge those people that they emphasize the narrow national dimension without taking any consideration to the nature of our enemy and the methods to confront it. But this essential issue should not be dealt with charges and countercharges. A correct definition of the relationship between these two dimensions should be outlined. Our success in confronting the imperialist-Zionist-Arab reactionary camp requires mobilizing the broadest alliances between the Palestinian revolution and the nationalist progressive Arab forces and regimes. Emphasizing a narrow Palestinian national dimension could only harm the struggle.

During the past 20 years what were the developments that took place in your viewpoint concerning the structure of the Zionist entity and the factors affecting it, its relations to the west, the confrontation with this entity on the Palestinian and Arab levels in the light of the world situation and the conflict between Socialism and Imperialism and the Israeli democratic forces?

The questions raised have great importance, particularly when understanding the nature of the Zionist entity constitutes an important fact in outlining the forms of struggle against it.

The essential issue that should be discussed in my opinion is the nature and the level of development that the Zionist state has witnessed and the effects of this development on us, rather than discussing the developments that took place in our viewpoint. The Zionist state has witnessed several big qualitative changes on all levels for the past 40 years.

On the economic level, industry is ranked first among the different production sectors, in terms of the industry's share of the GNP or the exports. In 1984, 90% of the Zionist state's exports, which reached 6.5 billion dollars, were manufactured goods. Industry in the Zionist state has become the dominant factor in economy. The major weight in the Israeli industry now is directed towards the «technotron» stage where electronics become the cornerstone of the industrial technology.

On the military level, Israel now produces the MIRKA tanks and the KFIR fighter plane and is developing the industry of missiles, including the Jericho-II missile which is capable of carrying nuclear warheads. And it is well-known that «Israel» exports arms to several African, Latin American countries and even to the US army. Although the production of the LAVI-fighter plane has been delayed, developing the plane is still continuing.

Despite these economic and military developments, the main issue of concern are the developments that took place, and could take place, in the organic relationship between the Zionist state and the Zionist movement, and on the relationship between the Zionist state and the Zionist movement on one hand and imperialism on the other hand. When «Israel» was established in 1948, some said that this state could live n

mally among the region's countries, and its connection to Zionism is not inevitable, neither the role it was supposed to play for imperialism. And consequently major forces in the Arab communist movement and progressive world public opinion outlined their stands concerning «Israel» on that basis.

In contrast to this viewpoint which prevailed after WW II and as a result of the holocaust, another viewpoint considered «Israel» a crystallization of the Zionist project and a materialization of the organic bonds and joint interests of imperialism and Zionism in this region. «Israel» has become an indivisible part of imperialism's world policies. In addition to its role in this region, «Israel» is playing an important role in supporting fascist and racist regimes in Latin America, Central America and Africa. And «Israel» today is a partner in the US' SDI program which is a threat to all humanity. In addition to its well-known participation in the anti-USSR campaign.

It becomes natural thus to conclude that after 40 years, the organic bond between «Israel» and world Zionism and between «Israel» and world imperialism on one hand and imperialism on the other hand is a reality. This bond aims at increasing the role of «Israel» as a partner in executing aggressive plans and profiting from these plans. This fact is materialized by the «Strategic Alliance» agreement between «Israel» and the US. This alliance only reconfirms the organic bond between «Israel», Zionism and world imperialism.

The logic which views the Arabs' stand in rejecting the existence of «Israel» has pushed matters that far, is totally incorrect. This could be seen in «Israel's» continuous aggression and expansion despite the fact that the Jordanian army was mainly concerned with protecting «Israel's» borders, the Jordanian regime's and other Arab regime's acceptance of the UN resolution 242, and the willingness of most Arab states to recognize «Israel» and to negotiate with it. This is the reality of «Israel» and the reality of Zionism. The PFLP deals with realities, and based on these realities takes its stands. The aggressive expansionist nature of the Zionist state and the role it plays in imperialism's world policies will undoubtedly help dig its own grave.

Relations with Israeli democratic forces

It should be clear to all that any evaluation of the Israeli democratic forces should be connected directly and dialectically to the nature of the Israeli society and to the background of «Israel's» establishment from economic, political and historical perspectives. Added to that is these forces' viewpoint on how to solve the «Jewish problem», given the nature of the Zionist state, the scopes of its development and its internal contradictions.

First I would like to point out that the strategic slogan raised by the PFLP since its establishment was «establishing the people's democratic Palestinian state», where total equality prevails, notwithstanding sex, religion and race. It is natural thus, that the Palestinian and Arab struggle should interconnect with the struggle of the democratic and progressive forces in «Israel» which raise slogans that conform with the Palestinian revolution's slogans and have anti-Zionist stands ideologically and practically. And we have worked for a long period emphasizing this point in the PNC's resolutions,

particularly in the 13 th, 14 th, 15 th, 16 th sessions and was reconfirmed in last April's session of the PNC. We realize that there should be a distinction between the Israeli democratic and progressive forces and the Zionist forces. Neglecting these

differences only harms the Palestinian revolution. It confuses the Palestinian masses and provides a Palestinian cover for Arab—Zionist contacts, in addition to weakening the stands of the Palestinian revolution's Arab and international alliances and the role of the Israeli democratic and progressive forces themselves.

The PFLP does not underestimate the importance of taking advantage of the internal contradictions in the Zionist state, but we should not overestimate the weight and influence of these contradictions in the present period. Although some Zionist circles have begun calling for an Israeli withdrawal from parts of the occupied territories, as a result of the growing political, military and demographical role of the Palestinian factor and the fear for the security of the Zionist state, these circles are not influential in the decision-making and still adhere to the Zionist ideology which is based on expansionism and negating the existence of the Palestinian people.

Some people say that this period of the Palestinian struggle is dedicated to gaining the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people, and that all stands which serve reaching this goal should be taken advantage of. But this viewpoint overlooks what I have mentioned about the organic bonds between «Israel», Zionism and world imperialism, which necessitates a dialectical interconnection in waging the battle on all levels and fields. We are fighting against «Israel» and Zionism at the same time. Our fight to maintain the UN resolution 3379, which views Zionism as racism, is a tactical battle closely linked to accumulating victories to reach the strategic goal.

Based on this, the PFLP registered its reservation on the resolution adopted in the April unification session of the PNC, which called for establishing contacts with democratic Israeli forces without specifying an anti-Zionist nature and stands of these forces. The PFLP considers this resolution a gap from which some reactionary Palestinian forces could take advantage of to contact influential Zionist forces. And this was manifested clearly in the Amirav-Nusseibeh meeting (Amirav is a member of the Herut party and Nusseibeh is a Palestinian professor).

My aim from this review is to outline the dangers behind legitimizing and demanding contacts with Zionist forces, particularly in this period of declining official Arab policies, manifested clearly in the resolutions of the Amman Arab summit.

When dealing with this issue, two facts should be taken in mind. The first one is that the situation of the parties in «Israel» is vacillating and unstable and this situation is expressed in the splits and mergers that occurred and which plague the democratic forces as well. The second fact is the growth of the rightist and fascist trend in the Israeli society in contrast to the limited size and effects of the Israeli democratic forces. And this could be clearly seen in the results of the Knesset elections and polls. In the 11 th Knesset elections, the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality gained only 5,800 Jewish votes, whereas Kahana gained 20,000 Jewish votes, which clearly indicates the forementioned fact. Despite that, this doesn't mean that the Zionist state has no internal contradictions or that the laws of class struggle do not apply to it. But this requires the Palestinian revolution to outline at every stage, the methods of dealing with this issue and to take advantage of these contradictions in a way that serves the just Palestinian struggle to achieve the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state.