

Comment

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Anyone who has written an article as rich in information and insight as Fawwaz Trabulsi earns the reader's gratitude. The only reason for the following critical comments is that the goal the author set himself, that of providing a 'Marxist-Leninist framework' for understanding the Palestine liberation struggle, is a most ambitious one. If one studies the classic examples of Marxist-Leninist analysis (Lenin's *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, Mao's *Report of an Investigation of the Hunan Peasant Movement*) one can note a number of common features. Firstly they are produced at a turning point in the development of the revolutionary movement and provide the theoretical foundation for a wholly new political line, leading to a wholly new strategy and form of revolutionary organization (Bolshevik Party, People's Liberation Army). Usually such a Marxist-Leninist analysis is the distillation of both original research into the objective co-ordinates of the class struggle and direct participation in that struggle. The purpose of this brief evocation is merely to remind us that re-describing social reality with the appropriate terminology ("contradiction", "class struggle" etc) is not what is meant by Marxist-Leninist analysis. It is surely not asking too much of comrades engaged in theoretical work if we insist on the need for new research into class relationships where existing bourgeois scholarship is inadequate (which is bound often to be the case). Such research must be guided by rigorous attention to the fundamental principles of scientific socialism and enriched by the lessons of struggle.

Fawwaz Trabulsi certainly succeeds in establishing that a Marxist-Leninist analysis of the Palestinian struggle would now be most timely. He provides a devastating explanation of the failure of the Arab leaderships in the past, especially in his discussion of the weaknesses of the petit-bourgeois nationalist régimes. The triumph of the Palestinian revolution will come only with the emergence of a wholly new analysis and strategy. Trabulsi postulates, I think correctly, that the Palestinian struggle must now be based on 'self-reliance' and 'protracted peoples' war': indeed the Palestinian Liberation movement itself provides us with these lessons. If this is the case, then what is now needed is a really specific analysis of Israel and the Palestinian nation informed by Marxist and Leninist principle. As Lenin was fond of saying, the living soul of Marxism is the concrete analysis of a concrete situation. Because he refuses to make a scientific analysis of the class structure of the Jewish and Palestinian peoples Trabulsi unwittingly becomes the

victim of the ideological delusions which both Zionism and Arab nationalism foster about themselves. For example he writes as if he accepts the myth that Israel has somehow magically escaped the class contradictions which remain at the root of all capitalist societies, even when they do not express themselves in social conflicts for long periods. This is especially surprising in view of the fact that Trabulsi clearly distinguishes Zionist colonization from the more familiar variant elsewhere (e.g. South Africa): the Jewish population of Israel constitutes a whole social structure and Israeli capitalism depends more on the exploitation of Jewish workers than it does on the super-exploitation of the Palestinian minority. Up till now everything has conspired to maintain the homogeneity of the Jewish community in Israel: the circumstances of the founding of the state of Israel, the double function of the Histadruth (employer and trade-union at the same time) and the propaganda of Arab chauvinists. However the June war and its aftermath have clearly exposed the aggressive nature of Zionism for the Israeli masses and increased the burden on the Jewish proletariat. (The strike of the Ashdod dockers has been a sign of this on the economic level, and the new anti-Zionist currents which are tentatively emerging within the student and intellectual milieu are potentially valuable developments on the political level.) Of course it remains true that the Israeli Jews are intensively mobilized behind Zionism at the present time: indeed they may well be more thoroughly mobilized than any Arab movements. But it cannot conceivably be in the interests of the liberation movements simply to accept this state of affairs as Trabulsi appears to do. What, for example, is one to make of the following statement in the section entitled 'Class Alliances Impossible'; which seems to be all that Trabulsi has to say about the political forces within Israel: 'The whole history of the CP of Palestine can be seen as the record of the impossibility of breaking through, the national barrier induced by Zionist colonization to the establishment of a lasting Arab-Jewish class alliance. In all the decisive phases of the development of the Palestine problem, the Party either split or was purged because of the differences in determining the main enemy or in interpreting a major political event.'

Only a completely philistine view of revolutionary politics imagines that splits and purges can be avoided on major issues. The precise political orientation of the RAKAH no doubt leaves much to be desired from a revolutionary perspective: as the same could be said for many other Communist Parties we need not attribute this solely to the Israeli context. The expulsion of the chauvinist Mikunis faction, and the subsequent political defeat which the RAKAH inflicted on it, is a cause for congratulation rather than implied censure. Obviously a full scale 'class alliance' is, in present circumstances, very difficult to envisage—but this fact should not be used to discredit any attempt to win sections of the Jewish masses away from Zionism. Waging a protracted people's war means striving by every means possible to weaken the morale of the enemy and to win over the populations he controls. This means paying close attention to social antagonisms within the enemy camp and encouraging the emergence of political forces with whom some understanding can be achieved. Such an approach would be quite incompatible with simply writing off RAKAH

which remains a significant anti-Zionist force within Israel. It would also entail encouraging the development of groups like MATZPEN which have supported the liberation struggle from inside Israel. To neglect these quite elementary principles is to continue to pursue in practice a strategy which has already three times demonstrated its utter bankruptcy.

Trabulsi's vagueness about social and political forces within Israel is complemented by a similar lack of precision when discussing the Palestinian people. There is scarcely a line in the whole article about the class composition of the Palestinian nation nor any worthwhile discussion of the political currents within the liberation movement.¹ Instead we read such statements as these: 'Amid the crushing humiliation of the third military defeat of the Arab regular armies a people—hitherto dispersed, mystified and oppressed—is reborn.'

What is the meaning of 'hitherto' in this context? The Palestinians are certainly still 'oppressed' and it is unlikely that they have yet adequately overcome their dispersal and mystification. In the struggle against imperialism it is often correct for Marxist-Leninists to join broad national fronts: this is clearly the case in the Palestinian struggle. But at the same time it is their duty to have a clear idea of the class forces and political forces involved. Moreover where possible they should seek to achieve a certain relative autonomy within the struggle and prepare themselves for the possibility that the existing national leaderships may not prove to be sufficiently resolute, especially if the struggle in prospect is a long one. In the present instance there is certainly likely to be pressure coming from powerful sources to sell out the struggle if a deal can be worked out between, say, the great powers, Israel and Egypt. Lin Piao writes in 'Long Live the Victory of the People's War!' as follows: 'Past experience has taught us that . . . "Left" errors were liable to occur when we broke with the Kuomintang ruling clique, and Right errors were liable to occur when we united with it. After the overcoming of "Left" opportunism and the formation of the Anti-Japanese National United Front, the main danger in our Party was right opportunism or capitulationism.'²

It could very well be that, at the present time of (quite correct) anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist fronts in the Arab world, Right opportunism is also now the main danger. The response of the Chinese Communist Party in the early 1940's to the dangers inherent in the alliance with the Kuomintang was to launch a rectification campaign within the Party. Within an anti-imperialist front a revolutionary group will necessarily find itself allied with political forces dominated by an alien class outlook and all kinds of chauvinism, religious bigotry and other reactionary ideas. This makes it all the more necessary to ensure a correct political formation *within* the revolutionary ranks and to be most

¹ The 'Postscript' goes part of the way to rectify the omissions mentioned here.

² Lin Piao 'Long Live the Victory of the People's War' Peking, 1968, pp. 32–33. Note that the principle implied here for identifying the 'main danger' at any given moment is precisely the reverse of that used by most Left groups who when pursuing a Frontist tactic make 'ultra leftism' the main danger and vice versa. The dialectical superiority of Lin's formula is striking.

attentive to fundamental tenets of Marxism and Leninism (materialism in philosophy, class analysis in politics etc.). Trabulsi does not seem to be very sensitive to these questions. It is, for example, highly likely that the relative political passivity of the Arab masses at certain key points in the struggle is partly the consequence of their subordination to reactionary Islamic ideology. Instead of confronting this problem many revisionist 'Marxists' have sought to demonstrate that there is no incompatibility between the Koran and 'Capital'. They have also sought to dissolve the independent identity of the Parties to which they belong. In short precisely the opportunism and capitulationism which Lin warns us is the main danger in the multi-class alliance.

One fundamental tenet of Marxism-Leninism which Trabulsi himself seems to discuss in a rather confusing manner is that concerning the right of national self-determination. As the justice of the Palestinian people's struggle stems in large part from this principle it is surely as well to be absolutely clear about its application. The rather vague formula about the Jews, Kurds, and Southern Sudanese which promises them 'minority' rights in a future liberated Middle East seems to be denying these peoples the right of self-determination. The vital distinction on this question has been clearly made by A. Said and M. Machover: '. . . if one considers the situation which will exist after a victorious social revolution, after imperialism and Zionism are defeated, then there will not exist a separate Palestinian problem, but rather the problem of the various national groups living within the Arab world (Kurds, Israeli Jews, South-Sudanese). This problem can only be solved by granting these nationalities the right to national self-determination. Of course, recognition of the right to self-determination does not mean encouragement to separation; on the contrary it provides the correct basis for integration without compulsion or repression. Moreover self-determination in the Middle East is impossible so long as that region is under direct or indirect imperialist domination, but only after it is liberated . . . In particular this situation pre-supposes the overthrow of Zionism.'³

There is a pressing reason why these problems should be faced now although they will not admit of practical solution before the overthrow of Zionism—namely, that the defeat of Zionism will be greatly facilitated by a Leninist respect for the existence of a Jewish nation in the Middle East. (In the same manner Iraqi revolutionaries would be well advised to respect the right to self-determination of the Kurdish people.) Vagueness or prevarication on this issue can only play into the hands of Zionist propaganda and hamper the emergence of a powerful anti-Zionist force within the Jewish community.

³ 'The struggle in Palestine must lead to the Arab Revolution,' *Black Dwarf*, Vol. 14, No. 19, June 14th, 1969. These principles do not entail the view that the entire Middle East will be liberated at one stroke; on this point Debray's thesis on the Latin American revolution may apply: '. . . the existence of separate American nations, even mutually hostile ones, is an irreversible fact and revolutionary struggle today can only be a struggle for *national* liberation. To require of revolutionary processes in South America the previous condition of continental unity is to postpone them to the Greek calends. Régis Debray: 'Problems of Revolutionary Strategy in Latin America' *New Left Review* 45. Invocation of the Arab nation or Arab revolution should not be used similarly to postpone any particular liberation struggle.