Issues in the Middle East

The anti-feudal and anti-colonial revolutions of Egypt and Syria of the early 1950's which came in the wake of the defeat of the feudal Arab armies, were the starting point of the still developing socio-political revolution in the Arab world. Today this revolution has reached in some Arab countries the stage of expropriation of big landlords and nationalization of foreign and big Arab-owned enterprises. The changes of the progressive Arab states, notwithstanding their weaknesses and harmful crosscurrents, are an important factor in the developing countries' struggle for liberation and in mankind's struggle against neo-capitalism. The Western powers, to safeguard their huge oil profits, strove to strangle the Arab revolution by the use of coups, direct military intervention and military actions by the Middle East pro-Western countries. These policies have time and time again failed because of the opposition of the Arab, neutral and socialist countries, and the Soviet assistance to the progressive Arab states.

It is a well known fact that, prior to the Balfour declaration of 1917, the Jews lived for centuries peacefully alongside the Arabs in Palestine. The Zionists' endeavour to create a state in Palestine and the British use of Zionism for their own purposes ended these amicable Arab-Jewish relations. Zionism was born in the last quarter of 19th century. It remained a minority tendency in Jewish communities until the second world war. This reactionary bourgeois movement claimed that the only solution for anti-Semitism was to create a Jewish state and for the Jews to emigrate to this state. This Zionist proposition was in contradiction to the attitude of the progressive Jews who were advocating, as an answer to anti-Semitism, a close cooperation of Jews with the working class and the progressive elements of each country in their common struggle against discrimination against Jews and other national minorities.

At the inception of the Zionist movement its top leaders were seeking the support of the Turkish sultan and the European monarchs.
for Zionism, and promising them in return a support for their colonial policies in the Middle East. After 1920 the Zionists supported the British in their denial of independence to the Palestinian Arabs. After the 1948/49 war the Israeli Zionist leadership denied the Palestinian Arabs their right to return to their homes, although the Palestinian Arabs “kept in 1948 in their overwhelming majority aloof from the struggle” (Ben Gurion’s statement in 1948). Since 1950 the Israeli Zionist leadership has tied itself to the West, and in UNO has supported the Western Powers against the aspirations of the developing countries. This was accompanied by the statements of the top Israeli leaders, that “Israel is part of the West”, and that “a neutral policy is not for Israel”. In 1956 Israel, France and England invaded Egypt. And in 1967 Israel occupied large tracts of Arab lands, which she has held for over three years, without declaring her willingness to return them as the price of a genuine peace.

It can be seen from the above that the basic Zionist conception of an ingathering to Palestine and Israel of Jews living all over the world was the force which was driving the Israeli leaders to expansion and cooperation with the Western powers, and this brought the Jews of Palestine and Israel, time and time again, into collision with the Arabs. This state of affairs suited the Western Powers, who endeavoured to exploit it by encouraging Israel to take actions which would lead to overthrowing the progressive Arab governments. This doesn’t mean that the Arabs behaved correctly all the time in the past. Thus for instance since 1956 up to 1967 the Palestinian Arab leaders and almost all Arab states propagated the idea of the liquidation of the state of Israel and the deportation of all Jews who came to the country after 1917 as claimed by some, or after 1948 as claimed by others. This Arab attitude caused much harm. It strengthened the support of the Israelis for their reactionary Zionist leadership, and this strangled the socio-political development of Israel itself.

It would also be wrong to claim that all Israelis are Zionists, There are communists, anti-Zionist students and people like Uri Avenery, the non-socialist, who sees the root of the trouble in the domination of Israel by Zionism. There are also Israeli masses who have shown on many occasions their support for progressive causes and ideas and their longing for peace. Neither is it true that all Zionists are of the same mould. Thus today in Israel Mr. Riftin, the leader of the left wing in Mapam, many Zionist professors, students and intellectuals and even some leading Zionist personalities are criticizing the chauvinist policies of the Israeli government. In general it can be said that so far as the Zionists are upholding the Zionist conceptions, to this extent they are chauvinist and reactionary, and so far as they are under the pressure of the class struggle or
the reality and are acting against these conceptions, they may behave in a progressive way.

The leadership of all Israeli Zionist organizations and all Ministers of the Israeli government however, are taking a strong chauvinist line. Thus some of them, as the right wing Heirut, are advocating the incorporation of all occupied in 1967 lands into Israel, while others, including the Labor Alignment, are claiming that for security reasons a major portion of the occupied territories should not be returned. In conjunction with this I would like to quote the former Israeli Defence Minister Mr. Pinchas Lavon, who says: “The question of topography, which in conditions of modern warfare is of relative value, is not the fundamental question” (Information Bulletin of the Communist Party of Israel 3/4/69). What Israel should claim is not the occupied lands, inhabited by Arabs hostile to Israel, but a permanent and a genuine peace, which is the main pre-requisite for the security and socio-economic development of Israel. What Israel is entitled to claim in exchange for the recognition of Arabs’ legitimate rights, is the Arab recognition of Israel, its borders of May 1967 and of her navigation rights, also the incorporation of these rights into peace agreements. However, Israel’s demands go much further than these legitimate rights.

The refusal by Israel to state its willingness to return the territories occupied in 1967 and settle the refugee question as the price of a genuine peace was causing an increasing opposition of the population of the occupied Arab lands and the condemnation of Israel by world public opinion. In these circumstances many justly regarded the struggle of the Arabs to regain their lands as justified, although they were critical of the Arab guerrilla groups which were committing acts of terror against the civilian population. On the other hand, not only in the reactionary Arab states and circles but also among the progressive Arabs, policies are advocated which are harmful for the solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Thus not only Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, but also Syria, Iraq, Algeria and some other Arab states are demanding the liquidation of the state of Israel. The various Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine take a similar stand. Some of them are calling for the establishment in the place of Israel of “a democratic Arab Palestinian state, in which all citizens, Moslems, Jews and Christians will enjoy the same rights and duties” (platform of Al Fateh), while the others advocate a Palestinian state “on the basis of the coexistence of two peoples, the Arab and the Jewish” (platform of the Democratic Front, from Al Hurriyeh of Sept. 1, 1969).

The propositions of these Arab groups are unreal and harmful. Whatever were the wrongs in the past, Israel and the two and a half million Jews who live in this state have become irreversible historical facts. These Jews became an Israeli nation with a common language,
culture, economy and territory. The differences which still exist among the Jews, who came to Israel from many countries, are fast disappearing, especially among the second generation Jews. As a nation the Israelis are thus entitled to a state of their own. Moreover, they will never give up their national state. One should also recall Lenin's remark that the national peculiarity and the striving of a nation for a state of their own, either as a separate, independent entity, or as a member of a federation, will continue to exist for a long time. This doesn't exclude the existence of a substantial Arab minority, living alongside the Jews in Israel.

What about the Palestinian Arabs? To avoid many decades of armed clashes in the Middle East, one should solve the conflict by taking into account the irreversible facts. Return of a proportion of the Palestinian refugees to Israel, compensation for the others who prefer to stay in Arab lands, and the recognition by Israel of the right of the Palestinian Arabs to form a state of their own, consisting of the Gaza strip and the West bank, and which possibly would include the Transjordan where the Palestinian Arabs form a substantial section of the population, will solve the tragic situation of the refugees and preserve the identity of the Palestinian Arabs. This seems to be the only realistic solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict in the present historical conditions.

Sections of the communists and left socialists give all-out support to the Arabs who preach the liquidation of the state of Israel. They claim that Israel is a settlers' state, that its elimination is needed to restore Arabs rights and to prevent the imperialist intervention in the region. The liberation of Palestine — they say — would stimulate the masses and assist the development of the Arab revolution.

The Communist Party of China pursues a similar policy. It calls for the application of Vietnam's and Algeria's solution to the situation in the Middle East, notwithstanding the vastly different conditions. Its attitude to the Middle East is also prompted by its general criticism of Soviet foreign policy and the desire to gain influence among the Arabs. Basically, the CPC's policy is the result of its undialectical method of advocating the same solution to problems occurring at different places and times, and in conditions which greatly differ.

But Israel is not a typical settlers' state. The Jewish people of Israel became a nation. They are not directly attached to any metropolitan country. Unlike other settlers they are engaged in all fields of country's life and rely exclusively on their own military forces, although they get most of their finance and military equipment from abroad. The Israelis, if faced with the prospect of liquidation of their state, would fight to the last man, which would mean the extermination of the Israeli nation, while the Western Powers are
certain to assist pro-Western Israel with finance and military equipment, if Israel is faced with such a disaster.

The liquidation of Israel is thus an unrealistic task which would involve many decades of bitter struggles and could lead to a military clash between the great Powers. If the course of liquidation of Israel is adopted by the Arab world, this would play into the hands of the imperialists. It would cause new wars, much destruction and suffering and the strengthening of militarism and bureaucratism in the progressive Arab states. It could cause new Arab defeats and serious setbacks for the Arab revolution.

Fortunately a substantial section of the Arab world is opposed to such a harmful and adventurous course. The assumption that a long lasting Israeli-Arab confrontation is needed to promote the Arab social revolution is false. The need for a socio-economic advancement, the realization that the imperialist interference bars the advancement and that the developing countries can achieve it only by the adoption of the non-capitalist road are sufficient for the development of the social revolution, as the events in other developing countries have shown. The progressive forces should be opposed both to the chauvinist attitudes of the Israeli government and to the wrong conceptions of the extreme section of the Arab world. This is the platform on which the progressive forces of both nations should unite, because this is the only basis for peace and a healthy socio-economic development for the Middle East.

On the other hand, one should welcome Egypt's and Jordan's acceptance since May 1968 of the Security Council's resolution of 22nd November 1967 "in full" and as a "package deal", and their willingness to discuss its provisions point by point, but in indirect negotiations (Jerusalem Post Weekly 4/6/68, New York Times Weekly 14/7/68). Nasser has subsequently specified in clearer terms that he will "accept the reality of Israel in recognised and secure borders", "make a declaration of non-belligerency", and "provide freedom of navigation through the Gulf of Akaba and the Suez Canal", in exchange for the "evacuation of all territories occupied by Israel in June 1967" and "a settlement of the Palestinian refugee problem" on the basis of "the right of return or compensation" (Newsweek 10/2/69, Time 16/5/69). And in May 1970 in his interview in Die Welt Nasser said that he supports a peace agreement with Israel in the spirit of the Security Council resolution of November 1967 (CPI's Bulletin, July 1970). In these circumstances the insistence of the Israeli governments on direct negotiations was justly regarded by world opinion as an excuse for the occupation of Arab lands. Israel was also considered to be largely responsible for the dragging out and failure of Dr. Jarring's mediation efforts.
The escalation since last December of the undeclared war activities in the Middle East and the extreme gravity of the present situation makes it imperative for both sides to seek a genuine settlement of the conflict, and to use any opportunity to achieve it. The only solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict is the acceptance of UNO's resolution on the Middle East by both sides. This means that Israel should return all territories occupied in June 1967, recognize the right of the Palestinian Arabs to form a state of their own, settle the question of the refugees on the basis of a generous compensation or right to return, and ensure a complete equality of rights, duties and languages for all their citizens, Jews and Arabs alike, and on the other hand the Arabs should recognize Israel, its borders of May 1967 and Israel's navigation rights.

The settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict on this basis represents the maximum length to which both sides will go in the present historical conditions, and therefore it is a realistic basis for peace. We should welcome the acceptance by Egypt, Jordan and Israel of the American plan for peace, as a basis for indirect negotiations under the auspices of Dr. Jarring.

We should however, warn against both an inadequate settlement, which would not fully recognize the legitimate rights of both nations, and an intentional prolongation of the negotiations for many months and even years caused by the desire to leave things, in the main, as they are at present.

The progressive forces should energetically work for the success of the negotiations, because there are great obstacles barring the road to a genuine peace. The Palestinian Fronts For Liberation and some of the Arab states are opposed to the very existence of the state of Israel and are still thinking in terms of conducting guerilla activities for the purpose of liberating the whole of Palestine. In their activities they can count on the support of the People's Republic of China. This support, however, would be only of a very limited character.

The Israeli government is still determined to keep some of the Arab lands occupied in 1967 for "security reasons", and it still rejects a solution of the refugee problem, based on compensation or return. And does the U.S.A. intend to implement fully the UNO resolution on the Middle East? In my opinion this is not the case. In his letter of June 19 to the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Mr. Rogers spoke about carrying out "the resolution in all parts" and the "Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967" (leaving open whether this means all territories). And by leaving many contentious issues including the refugee problem open, he tried to create an impression that he came "close to the legitimate aspirations of Arab countries".
And while Mr. Rogers was waiting for the reply, President Nixon on July 1st issued a statement which is described by *Newsweek* as “most pro-Israeli”. In his statement the president said that “the Middle East is now terribly dangerous”, that “once the balance of power shifts to where Israel is weaker than its neighbours, there will be a war,” and that “Israel must withdraw to borders that are defensible”. Simultaneously the US was pressing Israel to scale down her territorial claims. What was the purpose of all these manoeuvres? Mr. Nixon speaks with many tongues while pursuing, in the main, his imperialist line. Mr. Rogers’ peace proposals or 28/10/69 (in which he claims some spoils for Israel) and of 19/6/70, were made to strengthen the position of the pro-American Arab regimes and to raise faith in American intentions in quarters which were critical of US policies. Mr. Nixon’s speeches however aimed to impress upon the Soviet Union and the Arabs that there is a danger of “confrontation between the two super-Powers”, and that a compromise solution which would leave some spoils to Israel is a necessity.

The US tried in the past on several occasions to reverse the Arab revolution by giving aid to Egypt and by supporting her claims against Israel. Thus for instance the US supported Nasser and his claim to Negev in 1952-1955, and requested the withdrawal of the Israeli troops from Sinai and the Gaza strip at the end of 1956. These attempts repeatedly failed. Instead the Arab revolution spread to Sudan, Libya and the Yemens, and this already endangers the American oil profits. Today the Egyptian revolution has gone too far for the US to rely primarily on these tactics which proved to be of little value in the past. The US intends therefore to impose a settlement which would encroach on some of the legitimate Arab rights, and to use Israel in the future also as a cat’s paw. The purpose of this policy is to prevent further development of the Arab revolution in the Arab countries near Israel and their closer ties with the Soviet Union.

President Nasser, in line with his policy since 1968 of acceptance of the UN resolution in toto and his statement in *Die Welt* of support for a peace agreement with Israel, was the first to accept the American plan for peace, and by doing so he started the ball rolling. By this act Egypt aims to expose the true character of Israel’s intentions and create divisions in the Israeli government, force Washington to state clearly where it stands on the question of the Israeli-Arab conflict, and give a chance of reaching a peaceful settlement which would recognize the legitimate rights of the Arabs. By the acceptance of the US plan Nasser was running risks, because by doing so he antagonized many sections of the Arab world, while the chances of reaching a genuine settlement are as yet quite slim.
Nasser was prompted to the acceptance of the American plan by the Soviet Union which, supporting Israel's claims for sovereignty and territorial integrity, was requesting all the time and also lately, that "Israel should unequivocally recognize the need to withdraw its troops from all Arab areas it occupied in June 1967"); and that "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian Arabs" should be met. (New Times of 12/8/70 and 19/8/70). An Israeli-Arab peace agreement, meeting fully the just rights of the Palestinian Arabs, would soon deprive the Palestinian Liberation Fronts of their mass support. The question is, can the steadfastness of Egypt and other Arab states, with the help of the Soviet Union, cause the US to force upon Israel the recognition of full legitimate Arab rights? The chances are not too bright, because the US still intends to use Israel as a cat's paw.

Notwithstanding all this, there is still another possibility — namely that the Soviet Union, prompted by her desire to conclude with West "just agreements, relaxing tensions and promoting peaceful co-existence" in as many fields and areas as possible, and confronted with American blackmail, may come closer to the American compromise solution. Can Israel's neighbours be pressed into accepting a solution which would not settle adequately the refugee problem, and would leave some of the occupied territories with Israel? I doubt it. The Arab masses are likely to revolt, especially the Palestinian Arabs of Jordan, if the rulers dare to accept such solution.

But even if the Arab rulers should succumb to the pressures and manage to survive, the inadequate solution would still leave the Israeli-Arab conflict unresolved. Sabotage, guerrilla activities, reprisal acts, an Israeli policy acting from strength and tied to West, and a danger of new wars both hot and cold, would inevitably re-emerge in these circumstances.

Progressives should therefore insist that legitimate rights of both nations should be fully recognized and incorporated in the peace agreements. The failure of the negotiations to produce an adequate solution of the conflict could bring in time many calamities for the people of the region. In such a case the main hope for a genuine peace would be that the Israelis, under the impact of class contradictions, world public opinion and grim reality, will reject the reactionary Zionist leadership and accept the need for the recognition of legitimate rights of the Arabs and the integration of Israel in to the Arab Middle East. The process in this direction, involving intellectuals, students and some other sections of the Israeli community has already begun, but it is hindered in its development by the insistence of some Arab quarters on the liquidation of the state of Israel.