

Resistance with responsibility

Mohammed Al Batal is a member of the foreign relations committee of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. He spoke to the Weekly Worker about Israeli expansionism, Sharon's murderous war aims and the prospect for a democratic settlement between the Palestinian and Israeli Jewish nations

Weekly Worker, No. 482, April 17, 2002

How do you interpret the current situation in Palestine?

What is happening now is in fact a result of the Oslo Accord, which was far from an implementation of UN resolutions and far from any international guarantee about securing an agreement between the two sides. The occupied territories are defined under Oslo as a 'disputed area', not as Palestinian territory. The questions of settlements, refugees and Jerusalem were not considered under Oslo.

The transition was outlined in strange terms. First there is 'area A' - about 18% of the disputed territory in terms of the 1967 borders - which was to be under total control of the Palestinian Authority. 'Area B' was 22% - a mixture of Palestinian administration and Israeli security and military control. 'Area C' - the remainder - is totally under Israeli control. The fact that the six West Bank cities are now under reoccupation once again shows the weakness of the accord.

Secondly, the five-year transitional period which began in 1993 has dragged on for eight years and we still haven't reached the negotiation stage for the main issues for Palestinians - the refugee question (65% of our population are refugees); Jerusalem; the border; and the settlements.

The Oslo agreement is full of negative elements and will not result in what we call a "balanced peace". That is why we criticised it from early on.

What do you think are Sharon's war aims?

His election programme made it clear that he was against the "deadly mistake" of the Oslo agreement. When he came to power, he promised the Israelis that he would guarantee each citizen individual security and 'peace'. That meant a new transitional agreement - delayed for 10 years - avoiding the four main questions I have mentioned. Only then could we enter into negotiations. At the same time, during these 10 years, there would be more and more settlements and afterwards there would be nothing to discuss.

The Palestinian leadership refused to come to an agreement on security which left all the political issues unresolved. Because of this, Sharon reoccupied all the Palestinian cities, getting the green light from the US administration.

Our people have no option but to continue with the intifada. This is the last stage of our struggle for a balanced peace - implementing the United Nations resolution through direct negotiations.

In terms of the struggle for a secular and independent Palestine, how can you explain the growth of Islamic Jihad and Hamas?

First of all let me tell you that the DFLP has had a clear line since the foundation of our party in 1969. We publicly declared then that we are against the killing of civilians on both sides. And we are against any

action inside Israel. We are for resistance in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 and only against the Israeli army and military forces where they are acting in contravention of international agreements and laws.

In June and December last year we issued general statements in common with all parties involved in the intifada – including Hamas and Islamic Jihad – to stop all actions inside Israel and all actions against Israeli civilians. But unfortunately this policy was broken because of Sharon's reoccupation of Palestinian territory. But we are trying to reinstate this pledge once again. For us it is a principle of struggle because we do not want the murder of civilians on either side – we do not want to give Sharon the opportunity to paint the Palestinian people as terrorists. In the present situation the Americans and Israelis are able to confuse the Palestinian struggle with terrorism.

There are many reasons for the increase in these attacks. First of all, they are due to Sharon's policy; secondly, this is unfortunately the method of struggle of Hamas and Islamic Jihad - the fundamentalist line; thirdly, because till now the peace process has not delivered. If we are able to reach a balanced peace, all these actions will disappear because the Palestinians would like to live peacefully with the Israelis.

The secular forces are not responsible for the line of the fundamentalists, who built their social and economic structure with huge financial support from the conservative islamic countries. They were a minority when the PLO united the democratic, nationalist and leftist elements.

Since the Oslo agreement, the PLO has been paralysed. With the national, democratic and progressive parties divided, the islamic parties increased their role. That is why we are calling for the reforging of Palestinian unity and the restoration of the PLO structure. We want to establish an emergency administration for the Palestinian Authority and effective leadership for the intifada and PLO. Such an emergency leadership could put the Palestinian struggle back on the correct line of resistance with responsibility. We are working towards this, but unfortunately we are facing difficulties from both the fundamentalists and the Palestinian Authority itself.

How should the Palestinian liberation movement relate to the Israeli working class and the Israeli people?

We were the first Palestinian or Arab party to call for a peace process in the region on the basis of United Nations resolutions 242, 338 and 194. Since our foundation we have had very good relations with the Israeli Communist Party and since 1969 we have called on the Palestinian struggle to open the door to the peace movement inside Israel. It was not until 1974 that the Palestinian National Council adopted our minimum programme, which later became the national programme of PLO, which clearly calls for two states and a settlement of the Palestinian refugee question.

We continue to have relations with our friends and comrades inside Israel. I mean here the Israeli Communist Party, the Arab parties and the left and moderate elements even among the Liberal Party. We are calling for coordination of the opposition to the Sharon government because in fact his policy is equally against the Israeli people and the Palestinians. We are still continuing with this policy and hope that the peace camp inside Israel will come to be as united as it was before.

Every week there are big demonstrations inside Israel in opposition to the Sharon government. We hope this will continue, because the only way to reach a balanced peace is through greater coordination between the Israeli moderates and the Palestinian movement.