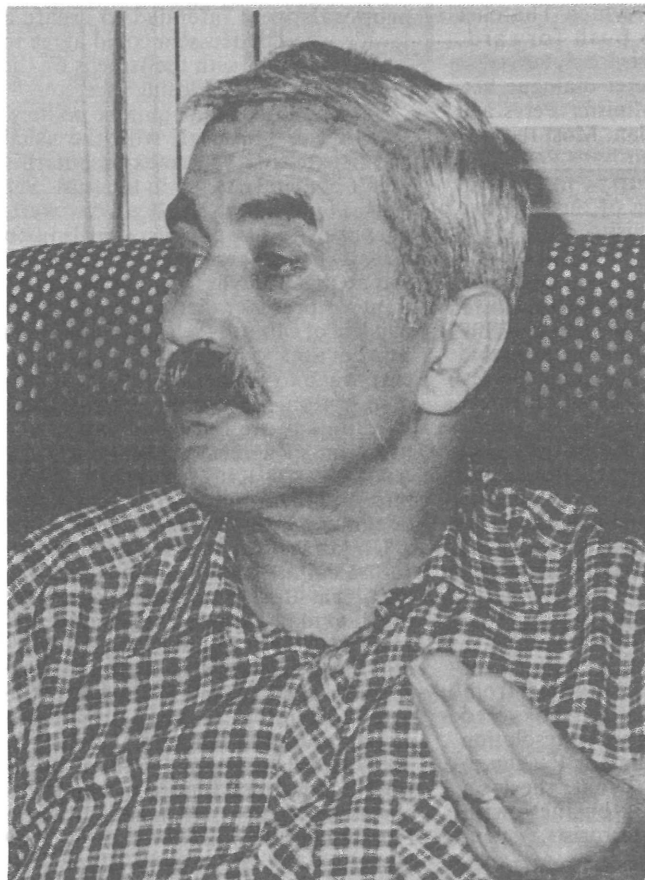


Interview with Comrade Habash

Palestine: 1948 Disaster and Today's Struggle

The following is excerpts from an interview conducted by the British journalist David Smith with Dr. George Habash, General Secretary of the PFLP:



Could you tell us first of all about your own experience of the West Bank in the period after the '48 war? What was the plight of the people, refugees living there then? What sort of identity did their situation on the West Bank create?

I still remember that period very well and in details that cannot be erased from the mind. The experience of the usurpation of part of the Palestinian land in 1948, was very bitter. I still remember how we were kicked out of our homes, villages, farms and shops, leaving all our belongings behind. I still remember how the Hagana gangs rounded the men up in the mosque of Lydda, where I was born, and forced them to leave the town on foot, without any of their personal belongings. It is still imprinted on my mind how the Zionists prevented me and others from treating the civilians who had been injured by the bullets of the Hagana gangs. Can I forget how my eldest sister was dying before my eyes without our even being able to move her to a place to be treated?

I leave it to the imagination of any person to picture the situation of a people suddenly forced to leave their land and wander in search of shelter. I leave it to the imagination of any person to picture the horrifying circumstances that would cause a mother to flee, forgetting her child asleep in bed. I leave it to the imagination of any person to picture the tragedy that will burden the

conscience of a human being forced to leave his mother, sister or one of his children to die on the road without even being able to bury them, for fear of the Zionist terror gangs pursuing him.

There is much more involved in the agony which resulted from the 1948 occupation. Its consequences have accumulated and continue to do so up to today. A large portion of our people were transformed into refugees living in camps. Many infectious diseases spread among them as a result of the conditions they suffered, living in crowded tents, malnutrition, etc. This was accompanied by severe suffering, psychologically and socially. The banishment of this large number of the Palestinian people, who became refugees, brought with it the problem of unemployment which reached 60% among able-bodied men.

Of course, all of this also affected those Palestinians whose land did not come under Zionist occupation in 1948. All Palestinians at that time - refugees or not - experienced a deep, horrible shock, and a sense of injury and anger. All wondered: How could this have happened? By what law can a people be uprooted from their land? How can any human being commit massacres such as those committed by the invading Zionist forces? How can any state representing «civilization» - the US for example - support this massive crime committed against our people? We were wondering: What about international law? What about the principles of the United Nations?

The shock that hit the Palestinian people expanded, involving the people of the seven Arab countries of that time. They wondered: How can it be that our countries were defeated by the Hagana gangs and the state of 'Israel' which they declared? With such questions began the formulation of an answer as to how to regain our rights, and what methods of struggle will achieve what we are convinced is right and just.

In addition to the conditions of the Palestinians, as a result of their banishment, there were our people's feelings of vengeance towards the Jordanian regime in particular and towards all the Arab rulers of the time. Instinctively and consciously, our people could see the special role of the Arab regimes, the Jordanian regime in particular, in what had happened. Our people knew that the Arab governments had intended to negate the role of the Palestinian masses in the struggle to defend themselves and their rights. Instead, the regimes replaced the masses' role with that of the official Arab armies, some of which were led by British colonialists such as Glub Pasha.

After our people were banished in 1948, feelings of resentment grew towards the Palestinian leadership who had trusted the Arab governments. Our people accused the leadership of failures and shortcomings, but did not denounce them for treason.

In view of these factors, our people began thinking of how to respond. Young men began penetrating the Zionist lines, singly and in groups, to carry out military operations against the Israeli forces. They began clashing with the Jordanian army. The struggle of our people was two-pronged: It was directed against 'Israel' and its occupation army, and against the Jordanian regime and its policy of dissolving the Palestinian identity through absorbing our people and land. Palestinian struggle grew after 1948, due to the victory of Nasser's revolution in Egypt and the Algerian revolution. These two revolutions became symbols and moral examples for the Palestinian struggle. The armed struggle continued. This assumed a Palestinian national dimension before 1967, and grew to become a great revolution after 1967.