

Plan for 'Improving the Quality of Life'

Aims and Dimensions

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THE START OF THE PLAN

In the second half of 1984, news leaked out about a group of American businessmen who had started activities concerning the 1967 occupied territories earlier in the year. The group appeared under a variety of flashy names, such as «The American Society for Peace in the Middle East» and «Businessmen's Association for Peace and Development.» Chaired by Steve Cohen, a Jewish professor at Queens City College in New York, this group includes a select number of Jewish and Arab American big businessmen.(1) It includes prominent Zionist figures such as Howard Squadron and Philip Klusnik, former chairman of the World Jewish Congress. The members of Arab origin include Najeeb Halaby, father-in-law of King Hussein of Jordan, and Khashoggi, the known Saudi businessman who has made secret visits to 'Israel'. The group also includes known US politicians like Cyrus Vance and Philip Habib.

This group is closely tied to Secretary of State George Schultz who has been speaking much about the subject of «improving the quality of life» of the citizens of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while completely ignoring the essence of the Palestinian people's cause. According to one report, the group's work is totally coordinated with Schultz's office, especially with his assistant William Kirby, architect of the plan for settling Palestinians in the USA and Canada.(2)

In 1985, there was no talk about the project. It seemed that the initiators preferred to wait and give the Hussein-Arafat agreement of February 11, 1985, a chance. Then talk about the project resumed after Hussein's speech freezing coordination with the official PLO leadership, and after the Israeli military coordinator of the West Bank, Moshe Goren, had toured Europe, carrying a secret list of projects to the tune of half a billion dollars. Then, Israeli Prime Minister Peres proposed a «Marshall plan» for the Middle East, also known as the Peres-Khalil plan (Mustafa Khalil is Egypt's prime minister). This is based on coupling international capital with Israeli technology in order to 'develop' the whole Middle East. This project appears to be the focus of several parties in the region, especially the ruling circles in Egypt and 'Israel'.

BACKGROUND FOR THE PLAN

To understand the background for the plan to «improve the quality of life» in the occupied territories, we have to go back to the conditions and changes that preceded its emergence:

1. The PLO's departure from Beirut, and the official leadership's deviation towards the Arab reactionary trend, which means dealing with the US settlement, cooperation with the Camp David regime in Egypt, and coordination with the Jordanian regime. This was coupled with many splits in the

Palestinian arena. This situation led to demoralization among the Palestinians. Chances were opened for the imperialists to eliminate the goals achieved by the Palestinian people through long, hard struggle and sacrifices.

2. During this period, two main factors caused the deterioration of the economic situation in the occupied territories. First was the recession in the Arab countries, especially the oil-producers, due to falling oil prices and the Gulf war. This reduced the remittances sent home by Palestinians working abroad, and the amount of aid given to the occupied territories. There are fewer job opportunities for Palestinians and less-markets for Palestinian farmers in the Arab countries. The second factor was the acute economic crisis in 'Israel', that negatively affected the economic situation in the 1967 occupied territories. Thousands of Palestinian laborers lost their jobs; West Bank products, especially construction materials, could not be sold on the Israeli market. Fears arose in US and Israeli circles that the bad economic situation would lead to an escalation of Palestinian national resistance to occupation. Some local 'moderates' thought that this would lead to 'extremism' and tried to use this talk to encourage a solution for the economic problems of the occupied territories.

3. The fall of the Likud government in 1984, and expectations that the Labor Party would succeed in the elections, was a very significant factor, because Labor's formula for a political settlement harmonizes with the Jordanian 'option'. Labor has a more flexible approach to the issue of political settlement and engages in tactics, more so than the Likud which is known for its blunt policies.

These three factors were the main variables that created the background for promoting the US businessmen's plan. These variables encouraged imperialism, Zionism and Arab reaction to intensify their attack which became especially prominent on the diplomatic front with the Reagan plan and the continuous visits of US envoys to the area. Yet, from the outset, these parties realized that the invasion of Lebanon, the PLO's departure from Beirut and the inter-Palestinian conflicts had not altered the basic political orientation in the occupied territories. The distinguishing tendency was still adherence to the PLO and the Palestinian national goals. Thus, the conspiring parties set out to exploit the economic deterioration in the occupied territories, in order to change this political tendency. In this light, we can view the American businessmen's project as a plan for achieving what the Israelis were not able to achieve by invading Lebanon. This was in fact precisely expressed by the initiators of the plan themselves.

GOALS OF THE PLAN

In an interview with the Israeli daily *Maariv*, Steve Cohen explained: «Israel's security is the common factor among the



Hussein accepts Bush's offer of US money for passifying the occupied territories.