

Viewpoint

For a Democratic Palestine

In May, a symposium was held in Nazareth, Palestine, entitled: «Is the State of Israel the State of All its Citizens and Absentees?» The symposium was organized jointly by the Galilee Center for Social Research and the Scholarship Fund for Publications on Israel. Below we print the discussion paper which was presented by Udi Adiv, a former political prisoner in Israel. It is entitled: «For Joint Israeli-Palestinian Action against the Occupation: Towards a Common Democratic Non-Sectarian State.»

The central question facing the Palestinian people and the democratic and progressive movements in Israel today is the question of the struggle against the occupation. The focus of this struggle is the intifada of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. The intifada is today the central factor for the Palestinian national movement under the leadership of the PLO and for the movements in Israel struggling against the occupation and in support of the national rights of the Palestinian people.

The purpose of this paper, however, is to draw an outline for discussion on the possibilities for establishing common Palestinian-Israeli frameworks both in order to act against the Israeli occupation and for a common future in a common state. Our view is based on the possible unity of the Palestinian people and those Israeli democratic and progressive individuals and movements who rebel against the Israeli occupation and the continued repression and exploitation of the Palestinian people. This unity is in our view the correct basis for the struggle against the Israeli occupation and for a common non-sectarian state.

Sections of the peace movement and the left in Israel assume and advocate an Israeli nationalism based on Jewish ethnicity, whose political expression is Israeli citizenship by force of the Law of Return. These sections support the Palestinian national struggle as a means to secure Palestinian recognition of their Zionist Israeli national identity. They wish to preserve their segregated existence - not to struggle for a common future. We submit that this assumption of a separate Zionist Israeli national identity is a barrier to a solution of the conflict and is a primary obstacle to a joint struggle against the occupation and for a common state based on equality and democracy.

We who initiate this paper know from the experience of our own life and our own struggle over many years that a joint struggle for a common goal on the basis of equality and unity of Palestinians and Israelis is the only possible alternative to continued Israeli occupation and repression.

The PLO was the first political organization to put forward the vision of a democratic state for all of its inhabitants: Muslims, Jews and Christians on the basis of separation of religion from the state. Yet, since its establishment in 1964 the PLO carried out its struggle as the organization of the Palestinian Arab people only and did not act consistently to create frameworks for common action with the democratic and progressive public in Israel.

In the past ten years, and in particular after the declaration of independence and the establishment of the state of Palestine, the PLO has recognized the state of Israel on a de facto basis. Following the Palestinian declaration of independence, various political perspectives developed. One important argument says that only the embracing of a political (not ethnic) Palestinian (not Palestinian Arab) perspective as the political foundation for a common democratic citizenship in a common state will make possible the integration of the Israeli democratic and progressive individuals and movements in the Palestinian national struggle. In addition, the argument says that the Palestinian national movement under the leadership of the PLO, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, must continue and promote its clear emphasis that its struggle against the Israeli occupation is fundamentally political: Palestinian against occupation regime, and not primarily ethnic (*qawmi*): Arab against Jew. On the basis of this continuing political democratic struggle, Palestinians and Israelis will be able to transcend their antagonistic ethnic-national identities and struggle together in a common organization for the same political goal of independence and liberation for all, based on cultural pluralism on the one hand and a democratic political national (*watani*) identity of common citizenship of a common state without distinction of language, culture, religion, ethnic nationality and gender on the other.

We make a sharp distinction between cultural identity and citizenship. In democratic states where there are more than one cultural identity, there obtains necessarily a clear separation between the distinct ethnic-national identities (cultures) and the common political-national identity (citizenship) uniting all the residents in the framework of the state as equal human beings under the law. It is only in the framework of such common democratic citizenship that the welcomed and enriching pluralism of cultural identities can flourish and blossom without collapsing into sectarian conflict and strife.

It is necessary therefore to distinguish clearly between Arab vs. Jewish ethnic nationalism (cultural identity) on the one hand, and political nationalism (citizenship) on the other. The expression of this latter political nationalism is ►