

backing down from their position concerning the right to return to clear the way for proposed US-sponsored «peace talks» with Israel. Although promoted as «realistic,» this position is anything but that, ignoring as it does the plight of exiles and refugees who have played a crucial role in the Palestinian revolution.

Moving to the issue of Palestinians inside the green line, he emphasized that all Palestinians - refugees, exiles, residents of the 1967 occupied territories - «belong to one nation and one homeland», and have a linked political destiny. In turn, their destiny is linked with that of Jews in Israel. It is on this basis that Abna Al Balad calls for the building of a democratic secular state in all of Palestine for both Arabs and Jews.

Although prevented from attending the conference by the occupation authorities, Maha Nassar's speech was read by Les Levidow, a member of the Return group. Ms. Nassar's speech put forth the right to return as a consensus in the Palestinian community, and emphasized the unity of Palestinians inside and outside their homeland through the intifada. One of the goals of the intifada is the right to return, the acute necessity of which is experienced particularly by the refugees, who bear the brunt of Israeli repression.

Ms. Nassar criticized the Israeli democratic forces whose position on the Palestinian state and the right to return is unclear. She outlined Palestinian rights as the right to return, self-determination and the establishment of an independent state. These rights necessitate increased international pressure on Israel to achieve them.

As two of the scheduled speakers were not in attendance, a few members of the audience were asked to make short presentations. The first of these was Prof. Norton Mozvinsky of North Connecticut University. Prof. Mozvinsky addressed the issue of religious fanaticism and the need to criticize ultraorthodox racism. He pointed out that recent comments by various religious authorities in Israel that the lives of non-Jews are less valuable than Jewish lives should be viewed as a clear political position. These statements underlie others issued by

ultraorthodox leaders that Israel should return part of the 1967 occupied territories. Although cheered by some for their seemingly liberal bent, these statements are based on the view that the failure of the Israeli army to crush the intifada endangers Jewish lives, and it is only because of this that Israel should withdraw. Clearly racist in nature, these statements should be recognized and condemned as such.

Mohammad Hawari of Matzpen took the floor next, his words focusing on the process of political change now going on in Palestine. He reiterated the point made by others that an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would not meet the aspirations of the refugees, nor would it accommodate them physically. In connection with this, he said that the question of return is alive in the hearts and minds of Palestinians inside the green line too. And although they reject the idea, even Jewish Israelis know the importance of return to Palestinians. Given this, he outlined the need to present Israelis with an alternative political framework so they can accept the idea of return. This would entail raising the consciousness of more Israelis, especially young ones, about the contradiction between the idea of a Jewish state and a democratic one. Mr. Hawari emphasized the need to bring the abstract concept of return into specific reality in political praxis. To do this he proposed activists taking up the cases of specific villages whose indigenous inhabitants were driven out, and discussing how they can practically return to or be compensated for their land.

The last of these speakers was Udi Adiv, a former Israeli political prisoner. Mr. Adiv also drew a fundamental link between the Palestinian right to return and solving the conflict. He criticized the Israeli left for failing to deal with this issue, and asserted the need for what he termed «Palestinian democracy,» free of the constraints of both Jewish and Arab nationalism. In his view, nationalism of these sorts work in opposition to democracy, and relinquishing them would trigger a metamorphosis leading to a democratic state in Palestine.

Concluding remarks were made by Mohammad Al Khalil speaking on behalf of Abu Ali Mustafa, member of the PLO Executive Committee and head of the Department for the Affairs of the Returnees. In his remarks, Mr. Al Khalil reviewed the historical experience of Palestinians under Zionism, emphasizing its racist, settler colonialist nature. Citing the failed history of settler colonialism in this century, he noted that this does not bode well for the two remaining bastions of this phenomenon: Israel and South Africa.

Touching on the historical falsity perpetrated by Zionists that they purchased 78% of the land gained in Palestine, in actuality the purchase figure was only 6%, with the rest being gained through aggression. Racist isolation, expulsion and massacres were employed against the indigenous inhabitants to remove them to accommodate Jewish immigrants. A corollary to this tactic was aggression of various sorts against Jews in other countries to «encourage» them to immigrate to Israel.

The present day reality descended from this history is one defined by seemingly endless concessions extracted from Palestinians, including the demand that the oppressed recognize their oppressors. But the question put on a strategic level cedes the conclusion that the present situation is untenable, and the only kind of independent state feasible is a secular, democratic one for both Jews and Arabs.

Obviously, the PLO has a central role to play in achieving this goal. One of the aims of this national liberation movement is to secure the right to return, for without this no comprehensive peace can be attained. This not only entails securing this right for Palestinians, but taking steps to curtail the threat Soviet Jewish immigration poses to the goal of peace and security. For it is clear that one group cannot enjoy human rights at the expense of another.

In defining the second PLO aim of self-determination, Mr. Al Khalil pointed out that many accept this notion on a theoretical level, but in practice they reject it. What this means