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THE POLITICAL-PHILOSOPHIC LETTERS OF RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA

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LEBANON: THE TEST NOT ONLY OF THE P.L.O. BUT THE WHOLE LEFT

"Cruelty, like every other thing, has its fashion, according to time and place. Caesar, the accomplished scholar, candidly narrated how he ordered many thousands of Gallic warriors to have their right hands cut off. Napoleon would have been ashamed to do this. He preferred dispatching his own French regiments, suspected of republicanism, to Santo Domingo there to die by the hands of blacks, and the plague. The infamous mutilations committed by the Sepoys* remind one of the practices of the Christian Byzantine Empire." --Karl Marx, Sept. 16, 1857

Dear Friends:

No act of barbarism seems to be beyond the degeneracy of our times that have disgorged World War II, The Holocaust, the U.S.'s dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and today we need add abysmal cynicism to the butchery and savagery of the Lebanese Christian Right. As if the murderous 52-week siege, climaxed also by the cut-off of water, of the Palestinian refugee camp, Tal Zaatar, were not enough, the unsavory son of the infamous fanatical neo-fascist Lebanese Interior Minister Camille Chamoun--Danny--continued to slaughter in cold blood, the Palestinians who were streaming out of the camp with white flags of surrender.

*It isn't that Marx excused the acts of torture committed by the Sepoys even though the 1857 India Mutiny was an anti-imperialist act against Britain. It is that Marx was stressing--and not only in that Sept. 16, 1857 report for The New York Daily Tribune--that appalling acts of cruelty come both from exploitative societies and holy religions: "With Hindus, whom their religion has made virtuous in the art of self-torturing, these tortures inflicted on the enemies of their race and creed appear quite natural." As against racism, straight or inverted, Marx was deepening his theory of proletarian revolution as the only road to freedom.

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Told that the son of the "moderate" Rightist head of the Phalange, Pierre Gemayel, had agreed to let the Red Cross arrange the evacuation, these were the words Danny Chamoun spewed out: "There might have been an agreement between Gemayel and the Palestinians, but how much of the front does the Phalange hold--85 yards?" (1)

It is hard to conceive of anyone to the Right of the Phalange, but in the Christian Right in Lebanon you have both the gunman president Franjei and his son who heads a private army, and Chamoun's "Tigers" who thereupon descended upon the Palestinians like wolves and looters and when the carnage was over, the bulldozers pushed the corpses into mass graves. Back in 1958 it was the wily father who trumped up the bogus ^{issue} of the imminence of the Palestinians "seizing power," whereupon Eisenhower was all too happy to rush in U.S. Marines. In 1975 the gunman son indulges in outright genocide. The grisly end to Palestinian Resistance at Tal Zatar will not bring to an end the civil war between rulers and ruled, Muslim, Christian and other.

It is true that the civil war that erupted 16 months back, on April 13, 1975, to be exact, was sparked by Palestinians against the Phalange massacre of a busload of Palestinians who were returning from a meeting of the "Rejection Front." (2) And it is true that Muslim reprisals to such massacres are not without their atrocities. It is not true that it is a religious war between Palestinian Muslims and Lebanese Christians. Rather it is a class war between Lebanese masses--Christian as well as Arab and those who profess no religion--and the exploitative, racist, sexist rulers who have been enriching themselves ever since the Egyptian revolution in 1952, climaxed in 1956, that expelled Western imperialism and Lebanon became the finance and mercantile center for Middle East Arab oligarchs as well as Western imperialists.

Not only is it a civil war between masses and rulers, both Lebanese, but the Palestinian Left who have helped have played a most ambivalent role both in a class struggle sense and in a global context. It therefore is necessary to probe the dialectic of develop-

ments these past 16 months from both the obvious phases--Arafat's waffling, Syria's complete turnabout and actual occupation (not unrelated to Israel's, Russia's and U.S.'s seeming bystander roles)--to the not so obvious shrouded acts of the whole Left--from the Nasserists and "Left" Ba'athists--to the Communists, Trotskyists and independents, all under the umbrella of Jublatt's socialism.

I. P.L.O.'s Crucible

The Lebanese masses were so definitely winning the battle with the rulers that the latter "accepted" truces as well as parliamentary compromises that would allegedly cede the people rights, both political and economic. Though none of the contending forces unfolded a banner for total emancipation, no one feared that Arafat would not allow a genuine revolutionary force to come to power. None seemed disturbed by his ambivalence and limiting the Palestinian fighting alongside the Left, depending on his ambitions to get to the Geneva Conference on Palestine as sole representative of the Palestinians fighting for a state of their own. Between the spring and fall, 1975, no one in Lebanon doubted that the issue was Lebanon, and that it would never again be the undisputed stronghold of the Christian Right rulers.

When Syria first marched in to aid the Left, it was under the guise of its own Palestinian Army, Saiga, which, moreover, was supposedly under the control of the PLO. That was not only the view of Arafat, but his erstwhile opponent from the Left, Niyet Hawatmeh, head of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (FDLP) who so assured the Le Monde in a special interview: "I want to make it clear that the PLA is under control of the PLO, and there were no regular army troops under Syrian command, as claimed." (3)

So confident was Arafat both of gaining a whole country as base against Israel, and for a seat at a new Geneva Conference for a Palestinian State, in the winter, 1975, that he was following the events at the UN more than the actual developments in Lebanon. Above the

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machine gun fire in Lebanon where the fratricidal war was continuing, he was ordering the PLO representative at the UN regarding the Arab-sponsored Resolution on "Zionism Is Racism" to "analyze" the Lebanese war itself as but a "conspiracy," a war initiated by "international Zionism." (4) Having thus burdened the UN Declaration of a "Decade for the Elimination of Racism" that was to have been fought against South Africa and Rhodesia, with the "Amendment" that "Zionism Is Racism," he had to face the startling reality that not only was Syria out to cut PLO to size, but evidently Syria was aided by some Arab kingdoms, Saudi Arabia especially, and actually collaborating with Christian Right rulers.

Above all, what was gnawing at all the people was: would Syria have made so total a U-turn without at least tacit agreement with the U.S.A.? To call Assad a "traitor" at this late stage will hardly change the course of the war under Arafat's leadership. The point is: where to now that the victories of 1975 are worse than Pyrrhic? now that the counter-revolution has been extended into 1976, and there is no end in sight?

The last tragic denouement was, after all, preceded by sharp alternatives if one were not blinded totally by the narrow single-issue goal of extinction of Israel which is, when all is said and done, the only unifying force of all Arabs. There was still time in the Spring of 1976 to choose between Assad (who had by now openly sent in the regular Syrian Army "to stop the bloodshed," and Kamal Jumblatt, who had resisted Assad's "compromises" as the actual shoring up of Christian Right rulers and thus saving them from the wrath of the masses. In an interview with Eric Rouleau (5) Jumblatt still viewed the future optimistically:

"Lebanon will become a lay state, our Christians will end up by abandoning the Maronite caliphate, the Arab world must be Westernized and rid of an antiquated clericalism which is keeping it chained down." He then spoke of the future as a "Socialist Republic," adding: "Civil wars seem stupid today, but one day people will recognize that it opened the way to the Lebanese people's, even the whole of the Arab world's spiritual renaissance."

We will return to Jumblatt as the socialist umbrella of some ten Left organizations. Here what is crucial is that Arafat then chose, not Jumblatt, but Assad, after which he waffled long enough to have Assad refuse him entrance to Syria. Arafat did manage to convene an emergency meeting of the Arab League where, for once, he didn't mince words: (6)

"You, the 20 members of the League, are sitting here either in silence, or paying lip-service to the Palestinians' cause while the Palestinians are being slaughtered. Palestinian blood is cheap to you. . . There are 3,850,000 Palestinians living in your countries. You cannot destroy us. I warn you that if you try you will not get away with it."

If the implication was supposed to be that a genuine social revolution would sweep over the feudal kingdoms, Arafat is more obtuse than he has any right to be to think that that wasn't precisely the fear that swept over the rulers, and hence their affinity, not with the Arab masses, but with Christian Right oppressors. The Arab-Israeli confrontation is the 'distorting lens' (7) with which to view what is happening in Lebanon, and has rendered meaningless the designations of "Left" and "Right" in all Arab countries. It is time to turn away from all these narrow nationalisms, and see what it is that does recognize, in theory, what are class divisions, and ask that Left why it has done nothing but tailend the PLO?

II. The Strange Antecedents and Very Narrow Nationalism of the New Left

The very narrow nationalism of the New Left cannot be understood, much less fought, outside revolutionary international context, and the totally contradictory types of nationalism that emerged out of World War I and World War II. This is due not alone to different historic periods, but totally different philosophies of revolution. No academic nonsense motivated Lenin's return to Hegelian dialectics at the outbreak of World War II. Rather it was the dialectics of liberation at a time when the betrayal of the Second International urged workers patriotically to slaughter each other across national boundaries. That Lenin called "the bacillus" for proletarian revolution came, instead, from the Irish Easter Rebellion, 1916.

Because Lenin's revolutionary concepts of internationalism and the philosophy of national self-determination, as inseparable, both preceded and followed the Russian Revolution, there never was a time when national liberation was ever reduced to nationalism, as it was with Stalin once power was won. On the contrary. Lenin's last struggle against Stalin was, precisely, against Great Russian chauvinism he displayed in his native Georgia. As the Georgian Communist, Tsertsvadze put it: "It is true that Marx wanted the union of the proletariat of the whole world, but he never claimed that all Russians ought to unite at Tiflis."

Because the ideology of Stalinism, i.e., national Communism went hand in hand with the first workers' state as it became transformed into its opposite--a state-capitalist society--the replacement of the class struggle by Cold War "anti-Westernism" came "naturally," and though sides had changed during the war, narrow nationalism had not. In any case, by the 1950's, Stalinism found in itself a new affinity with the Arab Middle East.

I do not mean to say that what we see in the Middle East owes its origins to Russia. No, it is indigenous enough. The encounter with Stalinism is no mere matter of "politics making strange bedfellows." It has had revolutionary elements not only in its anti-Westernism, but positively with the overthrow of Farouk by Nasser in 1952. But it also is a hybrid. The "end of ideology" that came with the defeat of Nazi Germany had a strange new birth. In 1953, in Syria, the Ba'ath (Arab Socialist Renaissance Party) resulted from a merger of two groups, one that so hungered to free itself from Western imperialism that it had participated in the pro-Axis Rashid Ali revolt in Baghdad in 1941, and the other was socialist. Indeed, the first Renaissance grouping was headed by Michel Aflaq, who was in the Syrian Communist Party. (8)

Finally, ⁱⁿ Lebanon, where even now there is a greater variety of political tendencies than anywhere else in Arab lands, the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon, headed by Khaled Baddash, antedated the time Lebanon gained its independence from France in 1943. From underground existence it made its appearance in the open and kept up

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its Moscow ties when Bakdash appeared at the 19th Russian Communist Party Congress, the last (1952) which Stalin attended. Khaled Bakdash, who is probably under house arrest in Syria, may not have had as much praise for the Syrian nationalists as he had for Stalin, but he made it quite clear that the Syrian Communist Party was not really Communist; he wanted the country to be nationalist, not a Communist Syria. And now when no doubt the Lebanese Communist Party is the largest in any Arab country, its General Secretary, Georges Haoui, stated this June 27: "We don't force our reforms on the country. We are ready to talk with all our opponents including the Phalangists, for patriotism is not a monopoly of the Left." (9)

And the New Left, born in the 1960s, so disdainful of theory, (which it forever thinks it can pick up "en route"), has a strange attitude toward imperialism. It is as if imperialism were not the natural outgrowth of monopoly capitalism, but was a "conspiracy, organized by a single imaginary center, rather as the Nazis used to refer to the Jew-Catholic-Masonic Alliance, or Communists under Stalin to the conspiracy of the Trotskyists and Rightists in league with the imperialist secret service."

It is such an attitude to imperialism, along with the theoretic void that has pervaded the Movement since the death of Lenin that has led revolutionaries to collude with narrow nationalism on the ground that it is "anti-imperialist" though purely nationalist. Evidently nationalism of the so-called Third World is of itself revolutionary even when it is under the banner of a king, a shah, or the emirates. Thereby they canonize nationalism though void of working class character, as national liberation.

It isn't that class is the sole characteristic of national liberation movements that revolutionaries can support. It is that the working class nature is its essence and it is that the revolutionary and international impact emerges from masses in motion. (10)

I have no time for the Old Left like present-day Trotskyism (11) that tailends all, including the Arab variety of Stalinism. What is

important to note is the most original derivative of national Communism--with the most "uninterrupted" r-r-r-revolutionary phrasemongering--Maotism. Yet, with its very first separate international development when the Sino-Soviet world was still in orbit rather than in conflict--the 1955 Bandung Conference, ⁽¹²⁾--its pure nationalism but with global reach, likewise plunged into the Arab League lands "sub-imperialist" enfoldment. ⁽¹³⁾

The point is that, in the present circumstances of purely nationalist anti-imperialism with a global reach (not to mention the two actual nuclear global contenders for single world domination--U.S. and Russia--) we cannot bury our heads in the sand. That not only blinds you, but also robs you of revolutionary reason. All it leaves you with is the narrowness of only one enemy--whether that be Israel--or Israel's oppressive nationalism which attempts denying the very existence of Palestinian national consciousness, not to mention the right to self-determination, or China's obsession with Russia as enemy No. 1. Our nuclear state-capitalist world is far more dangerous than the old imperialism of endless divisions and redivisions of the world by the Big Powers. Once it is nuclearly armed, the Damocles sword puts into question the very survival of civilization as we have known it.

This does not mean that we give up the struggle for self-determination, Palestinian especially. ⁽¹⁴⁾ It is that we do not narrow our vision of the revolutionary struggle for a totally different world, on truly new Humanist foundations, the first necessity of which is the unity of philosophy and revolution.

Otherwise, long before "the final day," we will not only be confronted with impotent hijacking, to which Dr. Habash's Committee is already reverting, but to such tragic wars as Lebanon, which is more agonizing than a repeat of that bloodbath in Jordan in 1970. It is much later in the day. It includes not only Palestinians, but Lebanese revolutionaries. And, in the civil war no less than ten Left groups are gathered under Jumblatt's banner.

When history and theory get into each other's way, and philosophy and revolution get separated, there is no exit from counter-revolutionary consequences.

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- (1) Newsweek, August 23, 1976.
- (2) In this instance the Rejection Front is not yet the one related to the Sinai Agreement, which was not to take place till September, but to negotiations with Israel, and any idea for a Palestinian State out of the West Bank and Sinai.
- (3) The interview, "At last a real cease-fire," by Frances Cornu was published in the Le Monde section (dated 1/25/76), of The Manchester Guardian, dated 2/1/76.
- (4) See Political-Philosophic Letter No. 1.
- (5) H. Rouleau also holds that "Assad's Calculated Risk"--the invasion of Lebanon,--would not have been undertaken without consultation with the U.S.A. Manchester Guardian, June 4-5/76 in Le Monde section.
- (6) The report of the closed session was evidently made to Henry Tanner by an Arab source, New York Times, 7/14/76.
- (7) "Lebanon: The Insane War," by James M. Markham, New York Times Magazine, August 15, 1976.
- (8) See both "The Arab Socialist Movement," by German Majdalany,--a leading theoretician of Ba'ath, and "Syria: Nationalism and Communism," by W. Z. Laqueur, as well as a Soviet View, "The Growth of National Consciousness Among Arab Peoples, 1945-1955," in The Middle East in Transition, by Walter A. Laqueur. Though the material is dated, 1958, it contains a substantial variety of views.
- (9) This quote is from a review of Fred Halliday's new work, Arabia without Sultans, in New Left Review, #95, 1-2/76, by Maxime Rodinson. Nearly any work by this great scholar will give the reader the most comprehensive view possible on the Middle East.
- (10) Frantz Fanon was profoundly conscious of the contradictory types of nationalism facing the African revolutions. See especially the chapter, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," in The Wretched of The Earth. Rosa Luxemburg, who hardly had any sympathy for the "National Question," being totally absorbed in internationalism, did, however, profoundly grasp imperialism's oppressive domination of non-

capitalist lands: "Though imperialism is the historic method of prolonging the career of capitalism, it is also a sure means of bringing it to a swift conclusion." (Accumulation of Capital.)

(11) That present-day Trotskyism flies in the face of the Trotsky legacy both historically and theoretically, I have shown in Political-Philosophic Letter No. 1. The latest developments on Lebanon and Israel further expand their opportunism. See especially the interview with a Lebanese Trotskyist in Paris, Intercontinental Press, 7/28/76, as well as the latest issue on Israel. (August , 1976)

(12) An interesting new view is in Israel, the Korean War and China, by Michael Brecher, Jerusalem Academic Press.

(13) The expression regarding Iran, is Fred Halliday's in Arabia without Sultans. See footnote 9.

(14) See Noam Chomsky, in New Politics, Winter, 1976. Also Israel and the Palestinians: A Different Israeli View, and the endless PLO statements. The Left's authentic representative, the head of the Lebanese-Arab army, Amren al-Khatib, who has always been Al Fatah, complained: "It is difficult to make a revolution in Lebanon; there is too much money around." The trouble is that oil money and not only from "left" Iraq and Libya but also from Saudi-Arabia bankrolls the PLO.