

An interview with a supporter of the Stalinist Palestinian Peoples Party

4 July 2002

Abed, 37, is a supporter of the Palestinian Peoples Party (PPP), the Stalinist party, in the West Bank. He asked us not to expose his real name. He is an unemployed academic. We asked him his impression of the demonstration and his views on the situation facing the Palestinians. What stands out from his description of events is how the protest gave expression to the underlying class tensions within the Palestinian Authority, which have been suppressed by the insistence of the PPP and other ostensibly left formations that the class struggle must be subordinate to the national struggle and the leadership of the Palestinian bourgeoisie.

Abed insists throughout on political loyalty to Arafat and that the Palestinian working class must wait for the realisation of its own socialist goals until after the establishment of a bourgeois state. In this he is articulating the position historically advanced by the Stalinist parties worldwide, in opposition to the struggle for socialism and the political independence of the working class—of Popular Frontism and the so-called two-stage theory of revolution: First the struggle for national liberation, in alliance with and under the leadership of the bourgeoisie, and only then a struggle for socialism. In this way the PPP et al serve to stifle the independent political activity of the working class and hinder the development of an anti-imperialist and socialist movement, uniting the Arab working class throughout the region with their Jewish brothers and sisters.

Abed: First of all, I want to make clear that I'm speaking for myself and not on the behalf of my party. Second, I know that many people inside Israel want to think that we are against Arafat. I will say it clear: we are not against Arafat's leadership, but against the policy at the economic-social level. Criticising Arafat is very different to opposing his leadership.

From my point of view, the demonstration was a very successful mobilisation of the Palestinian working class. As a communist, I am in favour of social liberation of my

people, and it will be after we will get our national liberation. In the meantime, we are fighting for democracy and social justice. Our representative handed a letter with social demands to Tayeb Abed el-Rahim, who represents the president in Gaza. Another person met with officials from the Palestinian Labor Ministry and the Organization of Palestinian Workers' Unions (OPWP).

WSWS: What is the reason for Arafat's willingness to negotiate with the workers?

Abed: I believe that our leadership understands that it must be attentive to the people's needs and wants to prevent civil war among us. Arafat published the names of workers who will probably receive unemployment benefit. We are saying that our demands are not a threat but a call for a change.

WSWS: I have the feeling that the anger felt by workers towards Arafat runs deeper than you are prepared to acknowledge. People want to have a leadership for the working class and get rid of the old Palestinian bourgeois leadership.

Abed: By saying that you are eventually serving the Israeli-American task of overthrowing Arafat. At this stage, he is our leader.

WSWS: We are totally against Israel's plan, which is backed by US President George Bush, to replace Arafat with a pro-imperialist puppet leadership. But a genuine workers' leadership is a pre-condition for victory when struggles for social and national liberation are taking place.

Abed: You have to understand that we are in a very early stage; we need to have our national liberation. I believe in socialism but how can you discuss socialism when Israel has been committing war crimes and massacred tens of people in Jenin's refugee camp?

WSWS: *Haaretz* daily reported on June 2 that the workers consulted with human rights groups and non-governmental organizations, and that one NGO provided the funding for a smaller, experimental demonstration 12

days ago, and one paid for the banners used in yesterday's march. *Haaretz* insists, "Members of these organizations, however, were careful not to dictate or influence the content of the banners." There is an obvious danger that the present movement could be made to serve hostile interests. Were outside influences involved?

Abed: I don't want to confirm or to contradict it. This is not my duty; I'm not carrying any official role or leading position. Though, I must say that this is the first time in which a mass protest, a very organized movement, went to say that enough is enough. We say to our president: yes, we're with you, but you can't expect us to support you without making order in the Sulta [the Palestinian Authority in Arabic].

WSWS: But you know that any order created by Arafat will only serve the Palestinian bourgeoisie.

Abed: What bourgeoisie? We don't have the minimum capital to deal with questions of privatization or nationalization. Arafat represents the ruling elite but at the same time our historic leadership.

WSWS: What you're saying is that no matter how large the protest, it will remain subordinated to the national bourgeoisie.

Abed: I don't want to have a polemic about Trotsky or Trotskyism, but I urge you to think again about our reality. Don't you think that before speaking of revolution or shouting "socialism now!" we must demand "peace now" alongside with our determined demand to have our own Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital? And the right of return of the refugees? Afterwards, we will discuss socialism.

WSWS: Lets talk again about the movement. Your party plays a decisive role in the trade unions, alongside your participation in the Palestinian leadership. Today, I read in *Haaretz* daily that when teachers and doctors protested against their low pay, the PA ordered them to appeal to their so-called elected representatives in the trade unions. But the leaders of the trade unions are paid their salaries by the PA. Their basic loyalty is to the PA, not to the workers.

Abed: Corruption was spread among the trade unions and the entire Palestinian establishment. This is why we protest against this corruption. It is time to advance our social and political agenda that will strengthen us in our fight against American imperialism and the Israeli aggression.

This protest was historic; since 1993 there was not any kind of expression of an independent movement of workers. The fact is that it was not political protest, which

was organized by Arafat's opposition, like the Popular or the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine—even Hamas and Islamic Jihad weren't involved. I believe that our protest has delivered a clear message not only to Arafat but also to the other rulers in the region: the workers will stand up for their rights. If this protest were oppressed, the Palestinian people would have defended their brothers.

WSWS: Do you believe there is a revolutionary potential in this new development?

Abed: It is too early to say. If Israel thinks that this struggle will divide us, it is making an enormous mistake. It will only strengthen us in our struggle for liberation. Social reforms alongside a determined struggle for liberation will lead us towards democracy and independence. I believe that the current changes must be carried out under Arafat's leadership, and if Israel tries to remove him we will remove Israel.

WSWS: There are already efforts being made to buy off the leaders of the protest by offering them jobs.

Abed: So what? In every capitalist society it is almost the norm. Our leaders refused to accept these bribes.

WSWS: What of the future?

Abed: As you stressed before, there is a need for a workers' leadership. I believe that after we have our own state, it will be on the agenda. Our future is in a socialist society. I don't think that Arafat is a socialist, but in the struggle to defeat the Israeli occupation we are united: the resistance shall go on until we have our land, in 1967's borders.

WSWS: Do you have any perspective for the Israeli working class?

Abed: What do you mean when you say "Israeli"? Jews? Arabs? There are two nations in Israel. I believe that if the Israelis overthrow their bloody leadership, the two nations have a common future. My final solution is certainly one socialist state. But till then, I believe that the only realistic solution will be two states: bi-national Israel alongside Palestine.



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