

Improvement at PSC, but Two-States Idea is Not Palestinian

By Blake Alcott

Fortunately the UK's large Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) seems to be expanding its range of interest. Formerly focusing its attention and actions disproportionately on the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, its most recent Annual General Meeting (AGM) in January 2017 devoted more space to the Palestinians in Israel and those in the diaspora.

Its plans for 2017, moreover, include alongside the usual focus on the naqba in May some activities surrounding the 100th birthday of the Balfour Declaration. Both themes cover all Palestinians and their entire history going back beyond 1967 to 1948 and to the British takeover.

Its invited speaker this January was Haneen Zoabi, one of the three Knesset members belonging to the National Democratic Assembly, known in Arabic as Tajamaa and in Hebrew and internationally by the acronym Balad. The party was formed in the mid-1990s in opposition to the Oslo agreements' abandonment of international and PLO concern for those Palestinians with Israeli passports.

Haneen and her party advocate the transformation of Israel from a Jewish state into democratic one, "a state of all its citizens". It furthermore pushes a revival of Palestinian national consciousness and culture, including hopes of closer ties to Palestinians outside the territories occupied in 1948.

She called for solidarity groups to right now focus their efforts on publicizing and resisting the [forced transfer](#) of non-Jewish Israeli citizens [from their homes](#) in the Negev

(Naqab) [to make way](#) for Jewish settlements. PSC is heeding this call.

The January AGM also unanimously, with the support of the PSC Executive Committee (EC), adopted a motion tasking the EC with organizing a whole-day conference on the Right of Return in 2018, the year marking the 70th anniversary of UN Resolution 194 which enshrined that right. Heretofore PSC has seldom shone its spotlight specifically on the refugees.

However

On the other hand, this year's Annual Plan focuses on the 'illegal settlements', by which it means those in the West Bank, as if Zionist settlements in the 1948 territories were legal, as if only the West Bank and Gaza were 'occupied', not all of Palestine.

Also unfortunately, the AGM defeated a motion urging the EC to adhere to PSC's unofficial policy of neutrality in the two-state vs one-democratic-state debate. The motion claimed that the EC should quit leaning toward the two-state solution, pointing out that the two-state solution "ignores the Palestinians in Israel and the Palestinians in exile outside of Palestine, thus violating PSC's aim of supporting the entire Palestinian people." The motion did not call on PSC to support One Democratic State (ODS).

Evidence that PSC is much closer to the two-state rather than the ODS position is admittedly circumstantial and indirect, as I [wrote](#) last year. However, the ideological and personal closeness of the PSC EC to the British Labor Party and British unions is not in dispute, and these organisations have openly espoused the two-state solution for years. Moreover a few years ago the EC's stated strategy was 'mainstreaming', the mainstream of course including all Labor, and LibDem and Tory MPs, united behind the partition of Palestine into two states.

PSC's past and lingering emphasis on West Bank and Gazan Palestinians also squares well with two-state advocacy: were these problems solved, and some near-sovereignty given to a small 'Palestine', presumably all would be well.

The relatively little attention given to date to the refugees also falls comfortably within two-state ideology: the longer one ponders Right of Return, after all, the clearer becomes the incompatibility of return – to Israel, as citizens – with any solution which cements the Jewish essence of the second state in the two-state solution, Israel.

There is however no paper trail showing 'PSC supports two states'. And perhaps many who voted against the motion at the AGM were merely rejecting the allegation that the PSC EC leans towards the two-state solution; that, since the EC has maintained neutrality, there is no need for such a motion.

An Issue Raised

But a Palestinian who spoke against the motion raised a crucial point. Never mind that he misconstrued it, reading it as a PSC stand against two states. His argument would have presumably applied also to a motion for two states.

His objection was rather that taking any stand at all would represent an attempt by those of us in solidarity to meddle something that is the Palestinians' alone to decide. Non-Palestinians have no right to support any solution.

This argument strikes a chord, but in my opinion does not hold water. Any human being broadly in favor of rectifying injustices to the Palestinians will have his or her own thoughts on what political outcome – what solution – is most consonant with all Palestinians' rights. The answer gives each of us a vision to hold onto and an answer to Westerners' questions about the goals of our solidarity activity.

And should we internationals really be neutral on the 'one' vs

'two' aspect? To me there is a difference between supporting one-state's reunification or de-partition of Palestine and supporting its partition, whatever the details of the land areas and populations of the two states. The Palestinian homeland's partition is a deep wound which, I think, it is incumbent on us to eschew until the day polls or referenda show majority support for partition.

Respect is due any Palestinian who feels that nothing more than a West-Bank state is possible and is willing to cut a deal to get it. He or she may have lost enough friends and relatives, been in jail long enough themselves, or be more than fed up with Zionist humiliation.

Walid Khalidi for instance in his 1992 book Palestine Reborn settles, however heart-brokenly, for the 20% of Palestine not taken in 1948. This position – which was gradually adopted by the PLO in the years 1974-1988 – logically entails the message for Palestinians in Israel and in exile: We support you, but fend for yourselves. No one can argue with a Palestinian who advocates two states after a noble past and for noble reasons.

Many Palestinians, though, and some Jewish Israelis, openly work for re-unification, return and democracy and against Zionism – in other words for ODS – including the PFLP and large sections of Fatah and Hamas. We can only guess at the opinion of the majority of Palestinians, those who live in exile, although it is safe to assume they do not support the solution which officially relinquishes their right of return.

Some seek a vision that inspires, that wants full restorative justice, while others work for something that is perhaps more limited but also, perhaps, more realistic. Like all groups, Palestinians are divided, so non-Palestinian supporters must choose which positions, exactly, they are working for.

Because nobody polls all Palestinians it is of necessity sloppy to simply declare, as a member of PSC, for example,

solidarity with 'Palestinians': with which Palestinians? Who does an international 'listen to'?

[Regular polls](#) gather answers only from residents of the West Bank and Gaza. Sometimes the opinions of Palestinians in Israel are added in, although the questions are framed somewhat differently. Nobody ever puts the question to the Palestinians in the diaspora.

Of course a Palestinian constitution and the size and form of a Palestinian state are up to the Palestinians. But at this point there is not even a single database that can be used to ascertain reasonably accurately the mix of Palestinian opinion.

Residual Colonialism

I often hear or read the related objection that supporting a solution is 'telling the Palestinians what to do'. The idea is however absurd that the average member of the pro-Palestinian international community can tell anybody at all what to do. Nobody has to listen, for instance, to a single word I say. Our support for one or the other solution is done in discussion, in looking for goals that will move more people to join the struggle.

I can't resist noting that there are indeed many non-Palestinians who are really in a position to tell the lost and lowly Palestinians what to do, and their names are David Cameron, John Kerry, Jeremy Corbyn, Barack Obama, Tony Blair, Jonathan Freedland and Ari Shavit. When a newspaper like the Times of London, in an editorial on 6 February, sings the usual praise of 'the' obvious and internationally-agreed-upon two-state solution, people in power are listening.

But for me the answer to this objection is that those of us supporting ODS or two states are channeling their energies behind some Palestinians and not others. One cannot support every Palestinian position. In short, in supporting ODS I am

simply supporting those Palestinians and Jewish Israelis who support it.

Rights vs Solutions

Another argument against advocating solutions is that we should instead only support Palestinian rights. This 'rights-based' attitude is then played off against a 'solution-based' attitude. Presumably rights violations are in discrete areas that can be tackled on the basis of universal ethics while leaving the question of ultimate goals to the direct stakeholders.

We can fight for repeal of the eighty-some discriminatory laws within Israel, for instance, or for freedom of movement within, into and out of the West Bank, or the rights of return and restitution, without necessarily expending any thoughts on what happens next.

BDS and the Boycott National Committee indeed seem to urge limiting solidarity to issues of rights. It seems to me, however, that there is no logical separation between the fulfillment of rights and solutions. Support for a set of rights entails support for one solution or the other.

Take the three BDS demands: sovereignty for a Palestine outside the 'Green Line', equality within it, and return to one's home or land in Israel. When these are realized, the boycott ends. Now assume these have been achieved. The result would be two states. The one inside the 1948-occupied territories would be a human rights-based democracy, probably with a Palestinian majority. The nature of the West Bank/Gaza state is left open, but it seems the same reasons one supports human rights-based democracy in Israel would move one to support it in the small 'Palestine'.

The logical outcome of BDS success, then, appears to be Two Democratic States – both absolutely non-discriminatory on the basis of religion or ethnicity. But at that point what

conceivable reason could there be not to unify them, given that opposition to partition has been for a century the air that the Palestinian majority has breathed?

Rejection of the 1937 Peel proposals and the 1947 General Assembly decision was always emotional and virtually unanimous. PLO acceptance of it in the 1980s and 1990s was always extremely disputed. Two democratic states side by side could make sense only perhaps as a political compromise.

PSC Neutrality

The PSC EC might have some good reasons for wanting to stay in the mainstream. It evidently believes it can achieve more – for Palestinians, not for itself – from the inside of British politics than from a stance virtually nobody in British politics takes. Since the one-democratic-state position entails the replacement of the Jewish state by a democratic state is an unpopular prospect, at least among the elite, in the land of Balfour.

But members of PSC should not forget that since the two-state solution is a Zionist solution, and being neutral about the two-state solution means being open to it, its neutrality means openness to Zionism, openness, perhaps in this special case, to doing without democracy. While PSC never says it is anti-Zionist, it would be hard to claim solidarity with Palestinians and at the same time be pro-Zionist.

Perhaps next year's AGM will see a motion calling on PSC to endorse anti-Zionism. For the same reasons PSC EC in 2015 and 2016 opposed a motion to sanction Israel by expelling it from the UN, it would most likely oppose such a motion. But I hope the increasing attention PSC gives to the refugees and to the Palestinians in Israel will lead to the realization that the two-state idea is rather a thin branch upon which to hang all the rights of all Palestinians.

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