

# Thoughts of a Palestinian Exile



*"I was a Palestinian and the name had a cadence to it. I was not the bewildered, wretched native of the land: I was the native son." Fawaz Turki was born on June 10, 1940, when the war came and the years of exile began. Writing as one who has lived the tragedy of Palestine and spent a lifetime coming to terms with its intractable contradictions, he proposes here a way to break the deadly stalemate of national aspirations that holds his homeland in its grip. Turki approaches the Middle East neither as*

*a detached commentator nor as a spokesman for any organized group; he brings to bear the acute sense of history and the intense national identity that the life of an exile can produce, a background of personal experience vividly evoked in his own words.*

*"If I was not a Palestinian when I left Haifa as a child, I am one now. Living in Beirut as a stateless person for most of my growing-up years, many of them in a refugee camp, I did not feel I was living among my 'Arab brothers.' I did not feel I was an Arab, a Lebanese, or, as some wretchedly pious writers claimed, a 'southern Syrian.' I was a Palestinian. And that meant I was an outsider, an alien, a refugee and a burden. To be that, for us, for my generation of Palestinians, meant to look inward, to draw closer, to be part of a minority that had its own way of doing and seeing and feeling and reacting. To be that, for us, meant the addition of a subtler nuance to the cultural makeup of our Palestinianness.*

*"When I was a child, a few weeks after we left Palestine in 1948, I used to sit with a crowd of people at the camp, mothers and fathers and aunts and grandparents and young wives and children, to listen to the radio at precisely three o'clock every day. The voice from Radio Israel used to come on to announce The Messages. Silence would fill the space around us. Tension would grip even the children. 'From Abu Sharef, and Jameela, Samir and Kamal in Haifa,' the words would come across the air. 'To our Leila and her husband Fouad. Are you in Lebanon? We are all well.' A few moments pause, then: 'From Abu and Um Shihadi, and Sofia and Osama to Abu Adiv and his family. Is Anton with you? We are worried.' The dispassionate voice continues: 'From Ibrahim Shawki to his wife Zamzam. I have moved to Jaffa. Your father is safe with us.'*

*"One whole hour of this. During it an outburst of tears at the knowledge that loved ones are well. Despair that a relative is not yet located. Hope that in tomorrow's broadcast a good word may be heard. Then a trip on the bus to the Beirut station to queue up at the message office to send your own twenty-six words across the ether to the other side. Because you could not go over there yourself to say them. Because an armistice line was drawn as a consequence of a war you did not understand, did not want, did not initiate.*

*"Why this problem was allowed to come about in the first place is the business of the historian. He has a habit of tracing the development of every conflict, pinpointing where its seeds were planted, and endowing every subsequent event with immanent logic. He should be wished luck. But when and how this problem will be solved is our business. We have picked up our own habits, in this world, in this age of ours."*

THE TRAGEDY OF THE ARABS AND THE Israelis in the Middle East has been that they suffered the consequences of not limiting or identifying their objectives. The Arabs, whose objective should have been the containment of Israel rather than its confrontation, adopted policies that were sure to activate a groundswell for war, war from which only the Israelis could emerge as victors. For twenty years the field of expression of the will of the Arab people was left in the

by Fawaz Turki

hands of demagogues and fanatics, and their energies were channeled into challenging the physical existence of the state of Israel and the Jews living in it.

At a time when the memory of the gas chambers was still imprinted on the minds of the peoples of the world, and in particular the Western world, this policy helped, obversely, the Israeli cause rather than that of the Arabs. No better example could serve to illustrate this than those weeks that preceded the Six Day War, when blood-curdling threats could be heard all around the Arab world threatening Israel with destruction and its people with a sea of blood. While the Arabs were making their irresponsible statements and appearing as aggressors in world public opinion, the Israelis were preparing for war and expansion and seen as the victims.

Israeli failure to acknowledge the implications of their presence in the midst of the Arab world, and the geopolitical demands that that presence made, resulted in continued frustration of their efforts to be recognized and accepted. For they wanted to create a "Jewish State"—oriented to European culture and allied to the West—in that part of the Third World that is fiercely suspicious of the Occident and its imperialistic machinations and hostile to the memory of its inglorious past. Instead of adopting the objective of becoming an integral part of the Middle East, they persisted in clinging to the concept of a "European rampart."

The Arabs of the Levant, not comprehending the designs of a state "as Jewish as England is English," viewed the Israelis as the Algerians had viewed the *piets noirs*. The *colons* had taken their French culture to the Maghreb and continued to identify themselves as Frenchmen; in like manner the Jewish immigrants in Palestine, and later in the rigidly sectarian state of Israel, were seen as encapsulating themselves within a European culture alien to the Middle East. Although the parallel was inconsistent, that at least was how the arrogant and militarily superior Israelis were seen by the Arabs in whose midst they lived. Thus the Israelis also created for themselves a vacuum into which they fell, their hopes as irreconcilable as those of their Arab counterparts, their reality and their dialectics precluding an effective achievement of Zionist aims.

The uniqueness of the conflict in the Middle East, as three wars have shown, makes the myth and euphoria of Israeli military triumphs appear for what they are: mythical and euphoric. For these will not hide the fact that in twenty-three years of military confrontations between Arabs and Israelis there really has been neither victor nor vanquished, that the failure of one has been the failure of both, and that if one paid a price for defeat the other paid a price for victory. Where the Arabs, in the aftermath of each war, were left more disunited, stunned, mortified, and closer to bankruptcy than before, reduced to agitating for a mere return to the status quo ante, their enemy neither destroyed nor closer to being driven into the sea, the Israelis were trading one insecure border for another, allocating larger amounts of their budget for armaments, enlisting more men in their military forces who would otherwise have been of better use in the labor force, and continuing to live with more tension looming ahead, poised nervously for the next inevitable confrontation.



DEVELOPMENTS THAT FOLLOWED THE Six Day War, however, indicated that we were witnessing the first major effort in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict to establish conditions under which the people of the Middle East can live in tolerable stability. This effort also revealed a dramatic change in the thinking and policy planning of the Arabs, and particularly the Egyptians. The Arabs of the Levant came to recognize the durability of the Israeli presence and no longer sought its destruction, although no trend toward rapprochement with the Zionists has gained much strength. The Egyptians, on the other hand, appeared to be heading toward formal recognition of the Zionist state, an end of all hostilities, and the beginning of a peace treaty. In making the latter conditional on Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai—that is to say, occupied Egyptian territory rather than occupied Arab territory—they were opting for a separate settlement and leaving the Levantines to make their own deal.

The United Arab Republic was thus serving notice on the Arabs that it was suspending its leadership of their world and returning to the position that prevailed before the first war, when Egypt was essentially a North African



nation whose people identified themselves as Egyptians, with vague ties to the Levant based on language, religion, and culture. This policy was nothing less than a reversal of the grandiose schemes that the late President Nasser had devised to lead, mobilize, and unite the Arab world.

The Israelis, confronted by this phenomenon and suspicious of Egyptian intentions, have been slow in taking advantage of the initiative to secure that peace they have constantly proclaimed to be their only aim. Hence neither the government nor any politically influential group is working in favor of a genuine compromise. Even when negotiations through Gunnar Jarring, the United Nations representative, were going on, the Israelis were proceeding with building projects on seized Arab land in occupied Jerusalem, continuing to develop sizable communities in Sharm el-Sheikh and planning to annex, along with the Holy City, a broad strip of territory along the Jordan River ("for paramilitary settlements") and the Golan Heights.

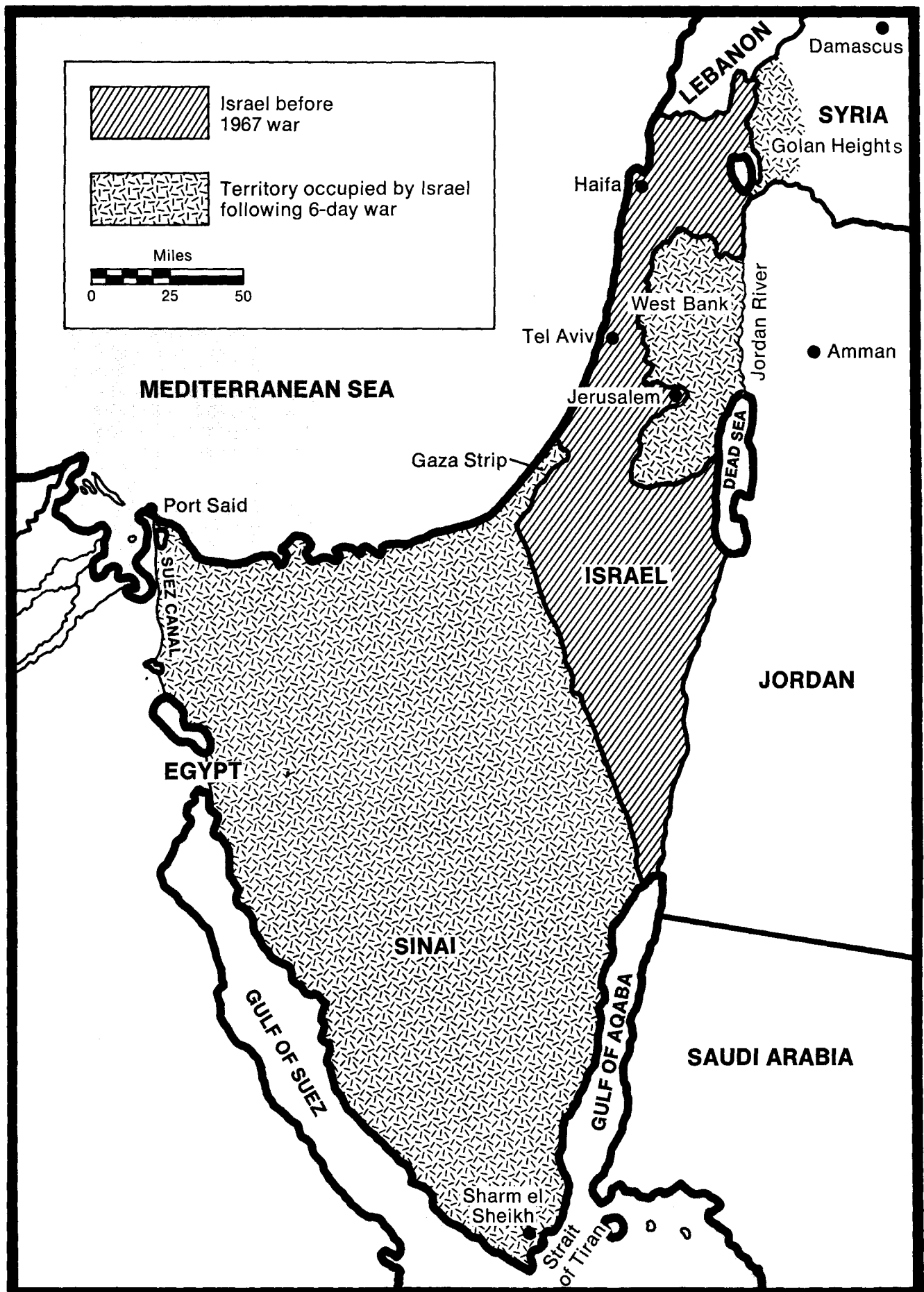
Although in the past the Israelis had contended that the only stumbling block to peace was the Arabs' refusal to recognize Israel as a sovereign state, in the face of Egyptian willingness to sign a treaty they held that peace was contin-



gent on Arab acceptance of "secure, agreed, and recognized borders," which meant major changes in the map in favor of an Israeli interpretation of "security." As negotiations gathered momentum, the Zionists consolidated their grip on the West Bank and accelerated their efforts to build 19,500 high-rise apartments in Jerusalem and intensive settlements in Hebron.

In peace negotiations, the Israeli concern was to deal directly with Egypt and thereby isolate it from the eastern front states, rendering the Syrian, Lebanese, and Jordanian positions more helpless. Syria, a country that had had nine military coups and six different constitutions in twenty-three years, remained erratic in its stance and rejected outright both the November 1967 UN Resolution and any contact with Jarring. Lebanon, which had lost no territory to the enemy and had not been engaged in any serious fighting, was passive. Jordan continued to be reluctant about spelling out explicitly in public its definition of an acceptable settlement, although it was reported to have conducted secret face-to-face negotiations with the Zionists.

This left the Palestinians, the group in the region with the highest stake, in a dilemma at a time when they were expected to maintain their political dynamism. They had



just emerged from the Jordan civil war, which had left them weaker as a military entity, and were now contending with sustained pressure from King Hussein, the loss of Syrian support, and the defection of Egypt. There was talk of setting up a Palestinian state and bargaining over occupied territory which, except for Sinai and the Golan Heights, was Palestinian territory.

Faced with overwhelming obstacles, what were they to do to achieve their long standing aims of a democratic, unitary, and secular state in Palestine? Were they to proclaim continued and uncompromising attachment to total liberation of their homeland or acquiesce in a settlement that involved the establishment of a Palestinian state? Were the options open to them limited to these two alternatives?

**W**ILDLY SIMPLISTIC STATEMENTS ABOUT what to do with us continued to be made up until the time of the battle of Karameh, on March 21, 1968. Before that most proposals advanced by interested parties dealt flatly with "absorption of Arab refugees." As recently as 1967, when the June War gave rise to speculation on the fate of "Arab refugees," Mr. Walter Laqueur, a well-known expert on the Middle East and the director of the Institute of Contemporary History in London, voiced the sentiments of many of those who bothered to write or read about us when he said: "The refugee problem *could* be solved—an international loan of several billion dollars would make their absorption possible, some on the west bank, others in underpopulated regions of Iraq and Syria."\* One wonders what made this gentleman so confident that the Palestinians were ready to accept that when for over two decades they had adamantly refused monetary compensation, absorption, and "billion dollar loans"; and what was it about the underpopulated regions of Iraq and Syria that would have seemed so attractive to the Palestinians then that did not before.

With the emergence of the New Palestinians, debate over resettlement and large loans ceased. In other words, only when we took to armed violence did the world stop calling us "the Arab refugees" and start calling us Palestinians. Responsible statements were heard from world leaders suggesting that for the first time since their diaspora, the Palestinian people's position was now being understood. President Nixon, a man not noted for his consideration of the oppressed peoples of the world, said in his State of the World message in February 1971 that no Middle East peace was possible "without addressing the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people." This was significant only inasmuch as it indicated the great shift toward understanding the Palestinian cause occurring in American policy, and in that it was the first statement of its kind made by an American president.

The only sympathetic response to, or at least understanding of, the Palestinians from the Israeli side, came from the New Israelis. The Old Israelis remained adamant that either the Palestinians did not exist or that they would one

day conclude a separate peace with Hussein. They were the archetypical Zionists, aging Eastern Europeans who believed blindly in Zionist claims in Palestine and contemptuously dismissed competing ones. To them the Palestinians were the "natives" who, unbeknownst to the Zionists, had been illegally inhabiting the Jewish Promised Land. Driven out, the Palestinians would soon vanish into thin air. Their existence was not recognized in the same manner that Israel's existence was not recognized by the Arabs.

The New Israelis were the young men and women in Israel who did not feel the insecurity and frustration of older Zionists, who were prepared to acknowledge the validity of the Palestinian entity, and who were not blind to Palestinian national aspirations. Shlomo Avineri, a representative of this group and chairman of the Department of Political Science at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, declared bluntly that the Palestinians were the only people in the Middle East who could offer peace to Israel and with whom Israel should deal directly.

The growing awareness of Palestinian aspirations among perceptive Israelis did not extend to sympathy for the Al-Fatah concept of a secular Palestine and the return of the Palestinians to their homeland. But the departure from the hard Zionist line was in itself revealing. Avineri, in an article in *Commentary*,\* cites his objection to a binational state. "Over the last century the Jews and the Palestinian Arabs have merged into national movements, each craving a home, a place in the sun, a corner of the earth it can call its own. Throwing both of them into a state which would be neither Jewish nor Arab would make it impossible for either movement to overcome mutual tension and start cooperating with the other." But he adds: "On the other hand, those like Golda Meir who continue to ask 'Who are the Palestinians?' seem increasingly out of touch with reality; for it is Palestinian organizations that send their members to kill and maim Israelis, and it is against members of Palestinian organizations that Israeli patrols lie in nightly ambush in the Jordan Valley. Under such conditions anyone still questioning the existence of Arabs who call themselves Palestinian is talking ideology not facts."

**T**HE PALESTINIANS CURRENTLY FIND themselves confronted by the choice of taking either one of two roads. They can consider a solution now that departs, in one degree or another, from their set aims of a secular state in Palestine; or they can continue the struggle until the whole of their homeland is liberated. A settlement involving the former choice can take many forms. One of these is the creation of a separate Palestinian state in what became, in June 1967, occupied territory under Israeli military administration—namely, the West Bank and Gaza, the eastern and southern regions of Palestine that were respectively annexed by Jordan and occupied by the Egyptian military authorities in the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948.

If the Palestinians accept this solution, it is assumed that the Zionists will at last have to pay the compensation for seized Palestinian land and property in Israel that

\* "Is Peace in the Middle East Possible," in *The Israeli-Arab Reader, A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*, Walter Laqueur, ed. (New York: Citadel Press, 1969).

\* "The Palestinians and Israel," *Commentary* (June 1970), p. 41.

the refugees have hitherto rejected; and it is also assumed that a land corridor along the Beersheba, connecting the West Bank to the Gaza Strip for access to the Mediterranean, would be granted. This would guarantee the economic and geographical viability of the projected state. The establishment of an entity such as this would be predicated in practice on the knowledge that a Palestinian nation is to be reborn, rather than an artificial state to be created.

Present Israeli insensitivity to the existence of the Palestinians, and Hussein's mule-like stubbornness in trying to subdue them and their movement, are hampering the efforts of Palestinian leaders to study, if only quietly, the conditions under which the idea of a separate, independent, and dynamic Palestinian state could evolve in reality.\* It is quite obvious that a Palestinian state would give birth to the first truly popular government in the Arab world and be the first revolutionary regime in the area to represent the will of the people. For in contrast, the Iraqi, Egyptian and other takeover governments in the Middle East came to power as an expression of nationalist or bourgeois movements rather than as a spontaneous explosion of the masses. The new Palestinian nation will thus not be re-established for the benefit of rich landowners and businessmen, but for the working masses and the peasants.

As a Palestinian, the prospect of an end to my isolation from the mainstream of other men's ordered activities and purposes exercises an intensely strange fascination on my mind. I am lured by the agony of wanting, *now*, in my own lifetime, the chance to know what it feels like, how the experience would sense in my brain, to be, for the first time since I was a child, the citizen of a country, a native of a land that is my own, all my own, with hills and mountains, and children in brick houses, where I could sit with my people, no longer menaced, no longer destitute.

I will not get this chance if some Arab leaders consider me a danger to their feudal systems and want to crush me, if some Israelis consider me nonexistent when I petition for my rights, and if the world considers me a mere refugee waiting for a shipment of food. Without this chance, I have nothing to lose. Everything to destroy. All the time to give.

But what can we do now? What lies ahead for us in this crucial phase of our revolution? The Egyptians have defected from our cause, or at least have reconsidered their priorities and concerns. The Jordanians want to crush us if they can. The Syrians and other Levantines want to reduce us to mere puppets and place us, as they had done before, under their erratic and irresponsible leadership. The Israelis have yet to acknowledge that we exist. The Big Powers want to put an end to us in one way or another. And we merely want to return to our homeland, to Palestine, where we and those already there can live in peace.

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*\* The Israeli government has officially expressed its hostility to the idea of an independent state for the Palestinian people. "We do not believe," Golda Meir said (Newsweek interview, March 8, 1971), "there is room for three states between the Mediterranean and the Iraqi border . . . a third state is not possible if there is to be peace in the area. . . ." In Amman the "parliament" condemned the notion of granting the Palestinians independence in any form (February 24, 1971).*

But those who now rule and live in our homeland have not shown themselves susceptible to this solution. In a land where a poll shows 54 percent of the population hostile to the notion of giving up even occupied territory, let alone welcoming us back into their midst, we will have to do a devil of a lot more convincing than we have hitherto done. Or we have to intensify our armed struggle and match our words with violence. And this will mean we are setting for ourselves a goal, the achievement of which will take not a year or two or three or a score, not a decade or two or three or a generation, not a lifetime or two or three, but it will take more. Maybe the shadow of infinity will loom ahead of us. Maybe we will perish on the road. Maybe, because we are human, we will make the same blunders we made before.

We know our rights in Palestine. There are many around the world who know our rights in Palestine. There are many more who one day will.

Can we wait?

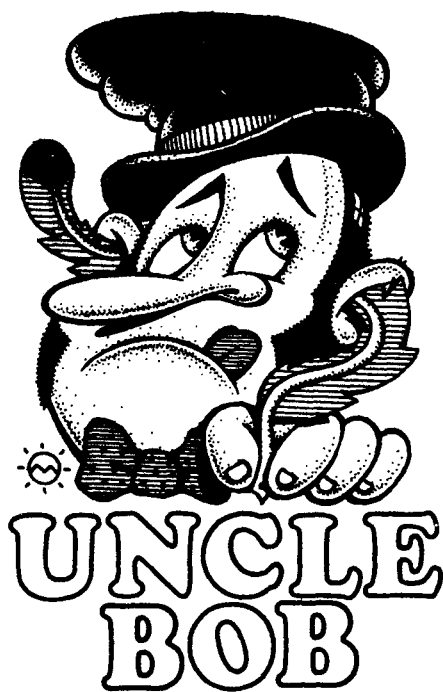
Those reading this essay and those fifty thousand Palestinians with their arms and the dignity of freedom as they wait on the hills, and those of our people galvanized by truth, will say the response to this test should be positive. It is the whole we want and not the part. It is Palestine we want where we have our roots. It is a New Nation we want where we do not have to plant them anew.

It was 1937. Then it was 1947. This is followed by 1971. We have paid a price. How much more can we pay?

If you live a comfortable existence where the problems of life are examined within the matrix of ideology and rationality, your world is a habitable one. If you give twenty years of your life in a refugee camp, you have paid a high price. If you are asked to sacrifice another twenty, the price becomes intolerable. If you are asked to make your yet unborn child take on your burden, you are committing an injustice. If you look around you and your existence is and has been a meaningless and tedious round of sparring with the vagaries of life for the most basic and the most simple needs of nature, when now you win, now you lose, ideology and rationality go out the mud-house window into the courtyard, near the waterpump, at the refugee camp. And because you are fatigued and dispossessed, you want to accept the part and not the whole. The Palestinian problem has never been to the Palestinian people a crisis, a crisis of political intent, but a tragedy they have lived every day of their lives.

We are offered part of our homeland back; we have been robbed of the rest. We can examine the offer. We can bargain tenaciously. We can talk and reason and listen. We can look at what we have. What we have not. What we will have. If we can build a New Palestine nation where life will be meaningful and where we can lay the foundations for yet another era in self-assertion and rebirth in the short history of our revolution, when our revolutionary awareness can be coupled with evolutionary development, then we ought to commence now. If the New Palestinian nation, before its inception, does not appear to truly represent our political aims, or will not truly be a projection of our dreams, then we reject it. Then we continue our struggle. Then we will have tried.

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## Tell us about small claims court . . .

IT'S STRANGE THAT you ask. Small claims courts never seemed to me very important or interesting, until I started thinking and reading about them. Lo and behold, I turned up enough for a column.

Most everyone gets angry enough at his landlord, his auto mechanic or a local merchant to want to sue-the-son-of-a-bitch. Usually it passes: we don't know how to sue, we imagine the complications, the time it takes, the legal fees; and it never seems worth it. Small claims courts do cut through most of these obstacles. It is possible to sue in pleasant surroundings, with dispatch, without lawyers, without pompous circumstance and huge costs. In Massachusetts it costs exactly \$1.78, according to *Consumer Reports*, which never lies. Here is how:

1. *Call up the clerk* of the small claims court in your town/county and ask the following questions. If the clerk won't answer you over the phone, tell him/her that you are bedridden and cannot get down to the office in person, and say something like "I thought the small claims court was for little people, people like me, etc." until guilt carries the day.

a. Are lawyers allowed to defendants? (I'm assuming you are the plaintiff.)

b. Describe your complaint and ask if the court has jurisdiction over this kind of case.

c. Tell the clerk where the defendant lives or works or does business and ask if the court has jurisdiction over the defendant.

d. Ask if your complaint must exactly locate the defendant's legal address. In some states it isn't good enough to use the address you find in the telephone book or even on a receipt you may have saved. If strict accuracy is required, ask the clerk how you can find out what is the proper address to use in your suit. Usually, you can write a note to the secretary of state at the state capital, and to the county clerk at the county seat in which you think the defendant lives/works/does business, and ask them to check their records for you.

e. Ask the court clerk to send you the filing forms and instructions. They are free.

2. *Fill out the forms* legibly, concisely stating your case without malice or venom. Remember that you are into a liberal reformist institution now, where right-thinking people are expected to be rational and calm. If you are a crazy, use a brick, not a Bic Banana, to get your justice.

3. *Prepare thyself.* Make sure that you have some receipt or cancelled check or something to prove that you actually bought the crummy merchandise or paid the rent deposit in the first place. Haul the merchandise into court if you like; show the judge it doesn't work. Rehearse your pitch, and get it down to a couple of minutes. If it's a complicated story, jot down some notes with the events in chronological order. Remember your day-in-court is about five minutes long.

4. *Think about witnesses.* If the receipts alone are not convincing, as in technical disputes over poor workmanship by auto mechanics and such, you might want to get a qualified mechanic to testify. Your best friend won't do—the witness needs to be an expert that the judge will believe. Witnesses do not get paid.

5. *Be on time.* If court convenes at 9 a.m., the bailiff may start calling the roll of cases sharply at nine and you better be there to get onto the docket. If you are unable to make the court

date once it has been set, be sure to call up the clerk and ask that a continuance be granted, otherwise you may not only have your case dismissed (preventing you from suing again), the judge may even grant an award to the defendant—ordering you to pay him some money.

6. *Control yourself in court.* Make your presentation without great passion or accusation. Do not try to convince the judge that the defendant is a thief. Let the facts speak for themselves.

AND NOW A LITTLE history. Way back in the '30s lots of states set up informal courts where poor souls could sue each other cheaply and fast. These lumpen tribunals were designed to simplify the settlement of minor disputes, to cut the prohibitive costs usually attendant on civil litigation, and in the words of the *Columbia Law School Journal*, the small claims courts were also to "avoid alienation of large segments of the population from the court systems." You remember hearing about the '30s, and all those troubles—some people thought there might even be a revolution if some reforms were not made. They were, and there wasn't.

Before the days of small claims courts, justices-of-the-peace handled little disputes between creditors and debtors. Attached to that arrangement was a capitalistic incentive system—the JP getting personally paid for his services as judge from fees which were paid by users. Since the users were mostly petty merchants and collection agencies, the JP soon descended from his lofty judicial perch and became a tool of merchantry. The quality of justice yielded, and justice-of-the-peace became justice-for-a-piece of the action. Now things are better: the judges are berobed, are all lawyers, and now the taxpayers get to pay the judge a salary. Sounds like a good deal, right? Those scurvy, avaricious businessmen who have been plundering and pillaging us all these years better watch their ass, 'cause we got our own People's Court. Right?

Dead wrong!

Small claims courts have been taken over by those same folks who owned the JPs. Recent studies show that over  
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by Bob Cratchit