

Revolution and Workers

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On the first night of May 1970, more than three thousand citizens gathered to celebrate International Workers' Day in a large ceremony organised by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in the Awdat camp in Jabal al-Hussein. In this ceremony, comrade doctor George Habash addressed the crowd of workers and citizens.

The central information department of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine presents the full text of this speech to the citizens.

Central Information Department

May 10, 1970

Worker comrades, fellow citizens,

We hold this ceremony to celebrate May Day. Some may, and indeed do, ask us questions such as “what do you have to do with workers? What does guerilla work have to do with workers? What does the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine have to do with workers?”. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine celebrates this holiday, the holiday of labour, in accordance with the political line and vision for the liberation fight. We celebrate the holiday of labour because we believe that the working class is the vanguard of the revolution of liberation. And only can its theory, stance and ideas seal off the victory and liberation. That is why

celebrate May Day.

Fellow citizens! Are the words we uttered, wrote and said that, first of all, the working class is the subject of revolution, and second, that one cannot obtain liberation without basing itself on workers' theory, stance and ideas, are these abstract thoughts for us? Are these abstract words? Are they mere extracts from books that we exploit either for self-indulgence or for lulling the masses into false hopes?

I here declare on behalf of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and of its fighters, political organization and central committee that those are not rhetorical expressions, but scientific and revolutionary facts that we utterly believe in. They have manifested themselves firstly in the grand world revolutions, secondly, in our experience in Palestine, and thirdly, in the contemporary situation.

Why is the working class the subject of revolution?

Why is it the vanguard of revolution?

Why do we assert that only its theory can lead us to the victory of revolution?

What is revolution?

Revolution may have hundreds of definitions, but its essence is immutable: the exploited versus the exploiter; the oppressed versus the oppressor; the poor and miserable versus those who cause them to suffer. Any historical revolution has witnessed these inevitable conflicts.

All historical revolutions have taken place against national or class-based oppression. If a revolution is of those characteristics, then how should we approach the Palestinian revolution? Who rises up against whom? Who are the exploited and exploiters? The scenery before us, brothers and sisters, leaves no doubt: The Jewish capitalists, who have been emboldened by the late 19th century global capitalist expansion and have formed alliances within world capitalism, conceived a project aimed at enhancing their capital accumulation and retaining their grip over the people and poor classes, leveraging the anti-Semitic mass persecution. Thus, it planned to establish a Zionist Jewish state in Palestine and continued its activities until 1948, when it established the state of Israel, our enemy, in our homeland, relying on the power of imperialism.

There is a class in our society that just metes out the leftovers to our people in order that they cannot break their chains and revolt against exploitation and oppression, and that the interests and political influence of Israel, Zionism and imperialism remain intact. That is the reactionary capitalist class, which is responsible for our people and movement having their hands tied.

In the war for the liberation of Palestine, the picture is clear: Israel, Zionism, imperialism and Arab reaction, that Israeli, Zionist, imperialist, reactionary, quadruple alliance that exploits our people and the sons of our people.

Fellow brothers and sisters:

Who stands against that exploitative alliance?

Those are the Palestinian masses expelled and exiled from their homeland, alongside Arabs who may face the same threat, and the working class as the most exploited segment of the society. The former is the reason why that class is the fire and torch of the revolution.

That is why we say that the working class is the subject of revolution. Why the working class? As I just mentioned, the working class is the most exploited segment of society. It is an entirely unpropertied class that owns neither capital and means of production nor land and machines. What they just have are their arms, bodies and sweat. Selling their labour power at a derisory rate is the only way to survive under the brutal working conditions. That class experiencing exploitation and oppression every day is the subject and fire of the revolution, and the only one that can lead it.

The subject and vanguard of revolution

The Palestinians who account for 85% of the café and hotel workers and shoeshiners in Tel Aviv and who are called almost every time by the racist epithet “Arabim hemur” (Arab donkey) are undoubtedly the subject and vanguard of revolution.

Our daughters and sons in Gaza, who are deprived of land and capital, deprived of anything but their arms and who desperately seek an opportunity to sell their labor power to gain their daily bread, are also the subject and vanguard of revolution.

Our stateless sons and daughters living and toiling in the East Bank¹ [...] and camps, who have no income, capital and means of production, are the subject and vanguard of revolution.

If revolution is the one in which the oppressed and exploited topple the oppressor and exploiter, if the revolution will change the reality shaped by poverty and misery, then the working class is its subject because it is the most misery-stricken part of society. It is, however, not enough to reiterate that. The working class has already been the integral subject of revolution for fifty years in Arab Palestine. They are those who have been martyred in the revolution of 1936. They are those who have never shirked to shed their blood for the homeland. It is then not enough to say that it is the subject of revolution. We need to emphasize that it is also the vanguard.

Workers were the subject of the revolution of ‘36.³ But the leaders of the revolution were from capitalist and feudal families who were ready to collude with British imperialism at the first opportunity to sell out the revolution. All they were con-

1 Jordan (translator’s note)

2 Illegible text (translator’s note)

3 The uprising in Palestine under the British mandate between 1936 and 1939, which included a tax boycott and a general strike, gradually increased in that period and upset the social balance in Palestine, targeting Zionist immigration and the favouritism of Zionists by the British mandate, and was, in fact, the first intifada of Palestine (translator’s note).

cerned with was reserving a place for themselves in the puppet government. That is why the revolution failed.

The subject of the revolution was the working class, but the leadership was on the side of the reactionary class, the capitalist and feudal classes. We know the families that led the revolution, so the revolution ended in failure. The revolution failed once again after '36 when it was this time led by the national bourgeois and petty bourgeois, respectively. We therefore need to make the working class take the leadership. And we know that it cannot happen spontaneously.

Hence, to realize this goal, no matter how long it takes, we will persevere to organize and mobilize the masses, and sacrifice our sweat, blood and tears.

Unity of ranks and the value of leadership

Worker comrades:

You should know that the leadership has a deep value. Those aspiring to lead must be geared with the required skills. The working class is obviously the most prospective candidate to lead the revolution due to its poverty, misery and exploitation which already turns it into the main subject of the revolution. However, this will not turn into reality unless the following three conditions are met:

First, working class should be conscious of its own materiality and historical role. It needs to be aware of who it is and of what role it can play. The working class leaders should painstakingly work to improve the class consciousness until workers are fully ready to confront the tendencies that may divert them from the revolutionary path and that may disguise the exploitation. Organizing the workers should be built on that.

What can a worker alone do? Or ten workers? Or just one trade union? The working class organized and mobilized nationwide, in alliance with the Arab and international working class, however, it can obtain the ability to lead the revolution. There is no easy way to do that. The working class cannot undertake the leadership without paying a price and this price is the fatigue, mobilization, struggle and sacrifice.

Because it is weak owing to still being outnumbered in a backward country, the working class should acknowledge that the tortuous path to leadership cannot be traversed without shedding sweat and blood alongside expending huge efforts to develop class consciousness, get organized, and wage a true struggle.

It must be also stressed that it is impossible to win the victory if the revolution lacks the theory, mobilization methods, stance and ideas of the working class. Some may ask: Does the working class have its own theory? Does it have its own ideas? Does it have a cause? Answer: Yes. It is doubtless that the working class has a certain and specific perspective regarding the struggle and its methods which emerges out of its daily experience of oppression, poverty and misery. So is it when it comes to getting organized? It is impossible for the revolution to reach victory without relying on the working class' theory and militancy. The working class provides us with a cleaner and more scientific vision. Also does it a liberation strategy with a

higher mobilization capacity alongside a method of struggle, and a specific form of organization. These are the concepts of the working class. What do we mean by these? And what is the working class' theory for the struggle for liberation?

The working class is undoubtedly identifying who its enemies are here and saying that the struggle for liberation is at the same time a national struggle and a class struggle. We therefore cannot be content with saying that the only enemies we face in this struggle are Israel, or Israel and Zionism, or Israel and imperialism. [The working class] goes even further with clarity and scientificity and says that here, in our homeland, in addition to Israel, Zionism and imperialism, there are hostile forces linked to colonialism and Zionism, they are our enemies. We should be conscious of that reality. Our struggle otherwise has no chance to succeed. When the working class and the people learn this truth, then it will not be possible to stab the revolution in the back and stop it, as was done in '36 and '48.

They preach to us that this is a national struggle, that we face Israel now, and that we are obliged to muster all forces under the same banner in the fight against Israel, so it is an obligation to keep the ranks united. We think these are well-said words. Well then, how can we be in the same ranks? The exploiter and exploited cannot stand in the same ranks? There cannot be any unity between our martyrs and the working class living in the occupied territories, and those who pay a hundred thousand dinars for a bridal dress.

How can the home front be strong as exploitation exists, as the exploiter and exploited still exist?

Claiming that there is no excruciating exploitation or a huge gap between classes in our country is non-scientific, deceptive and null. We witness tens of examples of severe exploitation every day that speak themselves to the impossibility of the aforementioned unity. A true unity of ranks thus entails the leadership of the working class, which had already abolished the class-based exploitation and calls for the unity of ranks against the national enemy.

When the workers took 12,000 dinars out of the 72,000 dinars, the world jumped up and down:

No exploitation. How can there be no exploitation? At the University of Jordan, a debate once took place in one of the board meetings. The first item on the agenda was the allocations of the board and its members in the form of *telhunt*⁴ and *tel*⁵, etc. While discussing these allocations of the board of directors, there was a simple official who had worked at the university for twenty years and was paid, I do not remember exactly, 12 or 14 dinars. He submitted a petition saying that he was looking after seven or eight children and that he wanted his salary to be raised to 18 dinars. They said that this was not possible, because if the aforementioned official's request was granted, all employees would submit the same request. They peddle the narrative of "no exploitation." I want to conclude this conversation with them

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right away. If there is no exploitation and class difference and if we all are “same”, let’s give them a chance to prove those arguments. What to do is so simple: They will move to the refugee camps and leave their palaces in Jabal al-Huseyn, Jabal al-Lweibdeh and Amman to the poor living in those camps. When the people of the camps go to the palaces, and the people of the palaces come to the camps, then we are ready to accept their unity in the ranks, but all this is empty talk. They all try to distort the truth. The facts tell us that exploitation exists, that the working class is the exploited class, and therefore its pure unity must also have a working class thought. The working class leads the unity of the ranks between all the classes in the revolution and if they are really concerned with establishing the unity of the ranks and everyone’s equality, let them donate their extra money to the guerilla forces. We already know how negligible the capitalist class’ pecuniary contribution to the cause is. We must be clear about it. Now let’s visit the guerilla bases and ask our fighters: you, comrade! Whose son or daughter are you? Who is your family? You will see that none of them come from the capitalist class, but from within workers and peasants. So they are entitled to say that:

The Palestinian liberation struggle is a national struggle, but it is also a class struggle. When we say this, we mean that there is a reactionary feudal capitalist class whose interests are linked to colonialism. This class cannot be one of the revolutionary forces, because, as you undoubtedly know, the revolution is against imperialism, against America. Then, if [a capitalist] has a branch of an American automobile company, an American insurance company, or an American bank, is it conceivable that after imperialism has been defeated, he will stand by the revolution? We want to define this clearly: There is a class, and this class constitutes a small part of society. This class has millions, not through sweat and toil, but because they are the brokers of American capitalism, because they own agents of foreign companies, because they are traitors and puppets. This class is counter-revolutionary. Ours is a national and, at the same time, a class struggle, against national oppression, Israel, Zionism and American imperialism, but also against the feudal capitalist big bourgeois class, whose interests are linked to colonialism and imperialism.

I would like to tell you that this reactionary capitalist class does not exceed 1 percent, and even if it is expanded, it does not exceed 10 percent. Then there remain 90 percent of our people whose interests are not bound up with colonialism and imperialism and who are, therefore, not enemies of the revolution but one of its forces. But if we say that the whole of our people are in favour of liberation (and this is true), then we must say that the mobilisation of this 90% must take place under the leadership of the working class. And every honourable man, every honourable intellectual, lawyer, doctor or engineer (here I mean the honourable national petty bourgeoisie) should be proud of the leadership of the working class. Here the national mobilisation is correct, here we have actually mobilised ninety percent of our masses, under the leadership of the working class, on the basis of working class theory and working class concepts, we have created the unity of the ranks in the face of national oppression.

This is one of the many examples we have to observe every day. All these examples point to the difference between the attitude of the working class and the national attitude which does not lead and does not put forward. The working class is radical in everything. Not only does it want to put forward the issues precisely and clearly, but it also wants the revolutionary mobilisation to be completed. In other words, there are always working class concepts and other concepts.

Take, for example, the question of who the enemy is. With regard to this concept, the working class not only says that the enemy is Israel, Zionism and imperialism, but it also adds Arab reaction as part of the enemy. The working class is very clear about the method of struggle and does not trust in the method of political struggle, i.e. protests, enthusiasm, demonstrations and similar forms of political struggle and that through them it can achieve liberation. This class, which suffers oppression every day, cannot wait for the Arab armies to liberate Palestine. Why can't it? Because it lives with injustice every day and wants to get rid of this injustice once and for all. What does the working class say when it puts forward the method of people's liberation war? This class says, we are the oppressed, we want to take up arms, we want to fight, the enemy is stronger than us and nothing keeps us from sacrificing a year, two years, or even ten years. And I say, without any doubt, we are ready to fight for a thousand years until the working class achieves victory. We do not say this only because this class is the working class. It is not a question of words. The working class wants to put them forward because it is oppressed, it wants to get rid of this oppression. It has nothing to lose, so it is really ready to fight.

Workers and the question of organisation

The concepts put forward by the Popular Front are not sophisticated, abstract concepts hanging in the air: They are absolutely clear concepts of the radical working class, which wants to put the matter clearly, which wants to determine the nature of its line, its method of mobilisation and also of organisation. The working class also has concepts in its method of organisation. It is an exploited, enslaved, oppressed class. Therefore, it wants to oppose this exploitation in its organisation. That is why there are no high-level leaders or bureaucratic leaders in the workers' organisation. Workers rebel against oppression, cruelty and slavery. Therefore, their organisation is also iron, based on relations of democratic camaraderie.

The working class has its own concepts for everything: In contemplation, in the analysis of the struggle, in defining the enemy, in determining the method of mobilisation, in defining the slogan of the people's liberation war, in the nature of its organisation and in its political attitudes.

This became completely clear on 10 February 1970. What did the working class and all the poor masses say that day? How did they all feel? Not because they were more patriotic than others, but because they lived in exceptional circumstances.

On 10 February 1970, each of them must have said to himself or herself, “I was expelled from my country and lived for twenty years in camps, enduring conditions of poverty and disease, inadequate medical care and unemployment.” “I lost my first child because I could not find medicine, and for the first time I have something called guerrilla activity in front of me, and you want to kill this hope in me?” These poor masses, who have lived under persecution for decades, were stabbed in 1936, stabbed in 1948, and for twenty years lived a life of shame and poverty in camps. Seeing in guerrilla activity a glimmer of hope for liberation, these masses were determined on 10 February to fight to the death in every street of Amman to defend and preserve the revolution. This is the attitude of the working class.

We have not come here to applaud, but to understand and put forward our issues with complete clarity. I want to say that only the working class can lead us. That is why I want to say that the farmer, the student, the lawyer and the shopkeeper, whose interests are not aligned with colonialism but with the interests of their people, must support and stand with the leadership of the working class. This support is a consequence of the fact that the working class is the only class which, in its conditions and daily life, can achieve victory. We can see the attitude of the working class in the demonstrations against the visit of the US Deputy Secretary of State Joseph Sisco. The difference between the average nationalist attitude and the attitude of the working class, which had made the citizens point to it and recognise it as their leader, was clear. This attitude, which we aspire to, is the attitude of the working class and the theory of the working class. The workers, then, are the substance and leaders of the revolution. The attitude of the workers is the only theory on the basis of which the revolution can triumph.

I would like to emphasise one last point. The working class, even in its hardness, is scientific because of its position, because it is hungry for victory. This real desire for victory makes it necessary for it to see the struggle in a clear and scientific way. Therefore, the leadership of the working class of the Palestinian and Arab masses cannot be an adventurous and unscientific leadership. The working class fights for its own leadership in the war, and once it has taken the leadership position, it will be eager to mobilise all national classes for the liberation revolution. This leadership therefore becomes the leadership of the peasants, of the working class itself and of the national petty bourgeoisie. It is therefore really eager to achieve victory over its real enemy by fully mobilising all the forces of the revolution.

And also the working class is as scientific as it is fierce in its revolutionary militancy, because it wants to end exploitation and achieve victory.

Three issues before the masses

Brothers and sisters, to the extent that the outlines of the liberation struggle must be clear, the issues of the revolution from time to time and the problems it faces in every period must also be clear in our minds. In this period, the working class and the masses of the people who want to achieve victory must understand three fundamental issues:

Firstly: the question of the continuation of the guerrilla war against reaction.

Secondly: The question of united command.

Third: Conflicts in the occupied territories and their intensification.

For the victory of the revolution, these three issues must be understood by the masses and monitored daily.

With regard to the first issue that the Popular Front wants to clarify, this ceasefire that took place after 10 February is a ceasefire mined by the reactionary leadership itself, which is in a state of silence, but is plotting to target and liquidate the revolution. We say that only through the masses and their consciousness of these conspiracies can we thwart them, and that since 10 February the leadership has formally withdrawn and has spoken softly, promoting unity between guerrilla activity and the army. But this is not the reality and they can no longer deceive us. We want to use our reason and judge concretely, as we see it: When we examine the facts, we see that since 10 February the leadership has been making dastardly plans for the guerrilla movement. The Popular Front and another guerrilla organisation saw this and exposed the plan prepared by the reactionary leadership for the Westerners to attack the guerrilla movement. There is no time to go into details here.

The [Jordanian] administration created a special apparatus outside the army, security forces, intelligence and military intelligence. It has allocated a very high special budget to it and has divided this apparatus into departments and branches. These are all plans that point to a real evil and hostility to guerrilla activity. We do not say these words to insult the leadership, on the contrary, we know who is in charge of this apparatus, to which order this apparatus is subordinated, its basic elements, each section, each unit, its work. The head of this apparatus is the chief Abdulkarim Omar, who is linked to Prince Ali bin Nayef, and I have in front of me a list with the names of his main assistants. These people were working on a big plan and some of them are now in the guerrilla branch, some in the media and political activities. In other words, they want to be revolutionaries working along populist lines(!) This branch specialises in this. Some of you have undoubtedly seen the leaflets signed in the name of the "Revolutionary Consciousness Committee." If you read these leaflets, you will see the poison that these people spread among the ranks of the people.

This branch constantly raised suspicions about guerrilla activity and incited hatred between Palestine and Jordan in order to increase the army's hatred of guerrilla action. There was another branch devoted to monitoring guerrilla bases, the number of guerrillas in each base and the weapons in them. In one unit, for example, there is a retired officer and twenty deputies whose task is to report any movement of guerrillas and to inspect all bases. There is another branch for assassinations and smuggling. This plan is based on recruiting people in the name of the guerrilla in order to attack people and harm guerrilla activity, and then they make a fuss about guerrilla activity and use this as a justification for attacking guerrilla activity. I would like to mention only the headings of their confessions; assassinations followed by arrests, spreading rumours and false news, striking fear into the hearts of the people, arresting people in the name of armed struggle, monitoring the army and tracking the movements and connections of guerrilla organisations and citizens,

monitoring the resistance movement and the location of organisations belonging to guerrilla movements, to know their bases and the number of their members, to distribute weapons to the supporters of the administration, to deepen the terror, to create conflicts between the inhabitants of the two sides, to write slogans on the walls, to issue bulletins in the name of the “Revolutionary Consciousness Committee”, to print and distribute posters, to report daily all the information obtained by the member or recruiter. These were the most important points that the reactionary leadership wanted to give to its men. I can assure you that this is a simple copy of the reaction and its father, the CIA. We know the role of institutions and companies in this country: For example, what is the commercial organisation above the Bank of England, what does it do? We know the building behind the Orthodox Club in Jabal Amman [neighbourhood] and what it does, and we know all the hideouts in Jabal Amman and in Amman and what they do.

Recently, the Popular Front arrested groups that were directly co-operating with Israel. The purpose of this co-operation was to smuggle people from Gaza and the West Bank to Jordan, because Israel’s goal is to get rid of the largest number of our citizens. There is a person who facilitates this task, he is one of the emirs and his name is Hussein bin Zaid or Zaid bin Hussein, and he receives 9 dinars for every citizen who escapes from the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, and about 80-100 citizens a week escape in this way.

Fight against reaction

We return to our first topic. We, the masses and the working class, have a question of safety hanging over our necks. This issue is a reaction. Reaction is always on the move, we have to judge by deeds and not by words. We, as the Popular Front, believe in nothing but actions. In this sense, all the actions of the administration still point to an attack on guerrilla activity. Against this, we say that the masses must be vigilant based on their consciousness, surround the guerrilla movement, protect it at the risk of everything, and take to the streets at a sign, until the reaction is cornered and does not return to the idea of attacking the guerrilla movement. They say that now is not the time for internal conflicts, and we say, “Who started the war of 11 April? And the 10 February war in Jordan? Who started the war in Lebanon in April ‘69? What about the March war in Lebanon?” Undoubtedly it was the reaction. It is the reactionaries who take the position of attacking and planning the attack on guerrilla activity, and we, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, say that our main desire and endeavour should be concentrated on the attack and struggle in the occupied territories. But at the same time, we will respond violently to every attempt by the reactionaries to destroy guerrilla activity.

There is one more issue that must be brought before the masses in order to make them responsible. Because the masses are responsible for the revolution. Therefore, the masses must be told the truth so that they know their duty and role in protecting the revolution. This issue is the relations between the guerrilla organisations. It is a question of consolidated leadership and of maintaining this practice and encouraging it to grow continuously. Without the masses and their vigilance, their control,

their interaction, their pursuit of the news of this practice, we cannot guarantee that this practice will win. The only condition for guaranteeing its success is that all organisations and their leaders make it clear that the masses want, firstly, the practice of a united leadership, and secondly, that through it they want it to succeed and become more advanced than before. Thirdly, the Popular Front declares that all guerrilla organisations in the Palestinian arena are national organisations in our eyes. We differ from these organisations on issues such as who the enemy is. We offer a definition, and probably not every organisation offers it. There are also differences in the form of organisation and political positions, but in spite of all this, all these organisations are national organisations. Their fighters are mostly members of the working class, whose holiday we are celebrating today. That is why we, the Popular Front, say that we, Al-Fatah, As-Saiqa (Lightning Forces), DFLP, Al-Ansar Forces, the Struggle Front and all other organisations are on the same side. We will not allow colonialism, reaction and Israel to break these ranks. There are different perspectives in these ranks, there is constant dialogue and different projects. We in the Popular Front believe that a real national unity that serves the struggle must be based on solid foundations, and we want an effective, progressive and revolutionary national unity that, once these foundations are laid, will lead to a real escalation of the struggle and political action.

We therefore consider it necessary to have a progressive political programme which constantly clarifies the strategic political baselines of the struggle. It is also necessary that relations within the united leadership be open and equal between all the organisations in order to create a favourable climate for these organisations to contribute to the revolution.

It is the duty of the masses to defend it. Some may have understood the united leadership as an integral part of the PLO, which means that we have made no use of previous experience, and we know that the old form did not give the Palestinian movement the expansion it wanted. Therefore, the united leadership must create a new form that is more advanced than the old forms, based on a political programme and an internal order, a climate of inter-organisational cooperation and programmes representing different directions of activity. Therefore, the bases and the masses, including the bases of the Popular Front, must constantly press for the development of unified command work and the success of this practice.

To say that there must be, for example, a small national assembly, a central committee or a unified leadership, without any real change in organisational and political content, is a worthless statement.

We therefore recognise that this practice belongs to the masses and therefore they must be willing for it to succeed.

Before concluding my speech, let me assure you that our view of all organisations is that they are national organisations, sons and daughters of a single people with the same problem. Undoubtedly, the basic element of the base of all organisations is the members of the working class. We must constantly establish co-operative relations with all organisations. We do not want to be utopian or dreamy: In this co-operation there will always be different points of view and masses that will lead them to more revolutionary ideas, until all political and mass organisations and all

theoretical activities adopt them. Their aim must be to support the struggle.

Every kind of consciousness-raising and response to reaction and to the question of the means of revolution must be devoted to the service of the struggle. These three issues must be supported and embraced by the masses. Therefore, brothers and sisters, Labour Day is an opportunity for us to see our tasks more clearly and to review the strategic issues we face.

Long live the working class, the subject and leader of the revolution!

Long live the Palestinian revolution as part of the Arab revolution!