

Interview with Dr. Uri Davis

Dear Uri,

Congratulations on your election to the Revolutionary Council of FATH which will no doubt afford you considerable influence within this powerful Palestinian organization.

Since we value your opinion as an analyst of politics in Palestine, we would be glad if you could find time to give us a short, written interview about your political aims within FATH and the perspectives you see for this organization after the congress in Bethlehem. To this end, here are some questions.

1. In the 80s you joined FATH. Would you explain us your motivation? We should also like to know why you choose this organization within the Palestine Liberation Movement and not an antizionist organization working within the state of Israel.

If by anti-Zionist organization working within the state of Israel you mean anti-Zionist secular internationalist political parties within the state of Israel – then the two options available to me at the time were either the Israeli Communist Party or the Israeli Socialist Organization – MATZPEN, both committed to Marxist philosophy.

I was born in Jerusalem in 1943. My late father, Joseph Stanley Davis was a liberal British Jew who arrived in Jerusalem in the mid 1930 to join his family (one of his cousins, Winifred, married Professor Leon Haim Yehudah Roth, first Ahad ha-Am Professor of Philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem). My mother – a Czechoslovak Jew who arrived in Jerusalem at about the same time to join her brother Shelomo Sandor Kacer). They married in 1939.

My father's reference group in Jerusalem was the group of intellectuals known as Berit Shalom (Covenant of Peace)/Ihud (Unity) group, whose members included Hebrew University Professors Leon Yehudah Magnes (first Chancellor of the Hebrew University), Ernst Akiva Simon, Marin Buber, and his relative Leon Roth.

Berit Shalom (Covenant of Peace)/Ihud (Unity) drew upon the tradition of Spiritual Zionism, the Zionist school founded by Asher Ginsberg (known by his pen-name Ahad ha-Am) – a school vehemently opposed to the dominant Zionist school of Political Zionism founded by Theodor Herzl.

The Spiritual Zionist school of Zionism regarded the aim of establishing a “Jewish state” in the country of Palestine in the Political Zionist sense of the term to be a disaster. Rather spiritual Zionists advocated the establishment of a spiritual center for world Jewry in Jerusalem, and, indeed, the students of the Spiritual Zionist school lead the establishment of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Members of Berit/Shalom/Ihud circle were also keenly interested in the writings of Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy of non-violence (Satyagraha) and as a young man I was exposed to Gandhian ideas at home. My father, a quintessential liberal English Jew, was opposed to para-military education at Israeli Hebrew secondary schools (GADNA') and I was the only student at my school (Municipal School A in Tel Aviv) who was exempt from GADNA' armed exercises at school.

I was fourteen years old when my father passed away in 1957, and when, at the age of seventeen I was called-up for compulsory military service in the Israeli army – I refused armed service on grounds on conscientious objection (today I would have

refused service in the Israeli army on political grounds – not pacifist grounds).

As of this point of departure in my moral, intellectual and political journey upon the surface of Planet Earth I recognize that the strategic choices I made throughout my life were determined primarily by the voice of my conscience – not my material interests. It is this recognition that made it not possible for me to join a Marxist political party. I joined the Israeli League for Human and Civil Rights, which following the 1967 war elected the late Professor Israel Shahak as Chairman and myself as Vice-Chairman.

2. Before the conference, the Palestinian analyst Bilal Al Hasan wrote that FATH would change from a liberation organization to a governmental party. Do you share this opinion?

That is not exactly what Bilal an-Hasan has written.

For instance, Bilal al-Hasan suggested that there was a split between President Abu Mazin and Head of FATH Membership Department and Preparatory Committee for the Sixth FATH Conference Abu Mahir (a split perpetrated by “a coup in every sense of the term” engineered by Abu Mazin against Abu Mahir). The proceedings of Sixth FATH Congress and the outcome of the said Congress suggest that there were most probably serious differences between them – but not such as would lead to a split. In fact Abu Mahir is now positioned by the Congress to succeed Abu Mazin.

Bilal al-Hasan suggested that “everyone was aware that what took place in Ramallah was an actual beginning to the splitting of FATH” – whereas the proceedings of the Sixth FATH Congress and the outcome of the said Congress suggest that FATH is not likely to split in the foreseeable future..

Bilal al-Hasan suggests that “it is thus possible to say that the splits inside FATH are no longer a question of analysis or conclusion [made from the outside], but have become a reality—with one wing led by a big FATH leader in Ramallah [Abu Mazen] and the second led by a FATH heavyweight in Amman and Tunis [the cities Qaddoumi has largely resided in since the Oslo Accords of 1993] – whereas the proceedings of the Sixth FATH Congress and the outcome of the said Congress suggest the end of Qaddumi’s leadership in FATH and the consolidation of Abbas’ leadership.

The Sixth FATH Congress was underpinned by a prevailing sentiment of the urgent need for change. My reading of the proceedings of the Sixth FATH Congress and the outcome of the said Congress is that FATH emerged out of the Congress united rather than otherwise; that Congress consolidated Abu Mazin’s leadership; and that indeed the Congress was successful in effecting change. To my reading, it is too soon to speculate which direction the change takes. We shall all be the wiser in about a years’ time.

3. In your books you show the apartheid structure of the state of Israel. Nowadays many Palestinians believe that leading personalities within FATH, such as Mahmoud Abbas, serve this Apartheid state in their administrative positions within the Palestine Bantustans in the Westbank. Is this not a provocation for a FATH Member?

I have been critical of the Oslo Accords from the start. The Oslo accords represent a massive Palestinian set-back – not Palestinian victory. Journeys aiming at the liberation of peoples from settler-colonial apartheid are no picnics. Such journeys are punctuated with set-backs (e.g., the said Oslo Accords) alongside achievements (e.g.,

the admission of the PLO as Observer-Member with the UN General Assembly). My main grievance against my FATH and PLO leadership with reference to the Oslo Accords is that the leadership falsely projected the said Accords as a victorious achievement, thereby introducing moral, intellectual and political corruption into the PLO system leading, inevitably, to material corruption.

But that in itself does not justify classifying “leading personalities within FATH, such as Mahmoud Abbas, [as] serve this [Israeli] Apartheid state in their administrative positions within the Palestine Bantustans in the Westbank” – namely, classifying leading personalities within the FATH such as Mahmud Abbas as “collaborators” with Israeli apartheid.

As far as I am personally concerned, I intend to remain member of the FATH Movement and Observer-Member of the PLO so long as the mainstay of the respective political programmes of the said two bodies remains anchored in the commitment to a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the implementation of all UN resolutions relevant to the question of Palestine. To my reading the implementation of all UN resolutions relevant to the question of Palestine lead to a unitary federal state modeled, for instance, along the lines of the federal parliamentary democracy of Kingdom of Belgium, and if I had it my way to a federal socialist Republic of Palestine (consisting of two bi-national states, the “Arab state of Palestine” and the “Hebrew state of Palestine”) - a member state of the United Nations organization, subject to all UN resolution on the question of Palestine and in conformity to the Charter of the UN.

4. During the Bethlehem Conference one could see many signs of a lack of democracy and transparency within the FATH organization. For example, after so many years, a real statement of accounts was not given. How do you think the organization can move forward to become genuinely democratic in character?

My feeling is that, relatively speaking, there was no more lack of transparency in the proceedings of the Sixth FATH Congress as compared, for instance, to the proceedings of any large liberal-democratic political party in the West.

As to the absence of a Financial Report and a statement of accounts – in my opinion it would have been utter foolhardy to submit a transparent Financial Report and a statement of accounts to a circa 2,500 member Congress convened in the shadow of the post-1967 Israeli occupation and spied upon by the post-1967 Israeli occupation. These documents ought to be submitted and discussed in the designated Committees of the Revolutionary Council and in appropriate Sub-Committees of the Central Committee.

5. In the new FATH central committee some powerful persons such as Dahlan and Rajub were elected who will probably try to prevent a joint government with Hamas. Is this not a grave burden for the future of the Palestinians?

I am afraid I need to pass on this question. My knowledge of the contingencies of the FATH-HAMAS equations are well outside my expertise. My work as a disciplined FATH member was centered on work inside pre-1967 apartheid Israel and with Palestine solidarity in North-America and Europe.

6. How can FATH still contribute to the overcoming of the apartheid state of Israel and to bringing about a democratic Palestine?

The platform, dated 12.3.2009, on which I was elected to the 31st position in the Revolutionary Council in the roster of 81 positions subject to elections by members of the Congress reads as follows:

A Future Vision for the FATH Movement as Suggested by Dr Uri Davis,  
Member of FATH and Observer-Member of the Palestine National Council

It is not inconceivable that it is in the interest of the Government of the State of Israel to allow HAMAS gain control of the West Bank, similar to the current situation in Gaza Strip, an interest consistent with the fundamental Zionist strategy aiming at the wiping-out of the Palestinian national project. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is the partner to the Government of the State of Israel as determined by the terms of UN resolutions and the agreements signed between the two parties sponsored and supported by the international community. Marginalizing the PLO and replacing the PLO with HAMAS reinforces the Israeli false claim that Israel does not have a Palestinian partner to the peace process, and removes such legal and political limitations on the Zionist settler-colonial project as may still obtain.

The Palestinian patriotic resistance as conceived by the FATH Movement is predicated (i) on commitment to humanitarian values (the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights); (ii) on all UN resolutions relevant to the question of Palestine; and (iii) on the totality of the resolutions of the Palestine National Council (PNC) culminating in the Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine.

Considering all above three elements as an integrated whole represents the best possible legal and political defence for the Palestinian fundamentals of (i) implementation of Palestinian right of return, (ii) Execution of the Palestinian right of self-determination and (iii) establishment of an Arab state next to a Jewish state according to the 1947 borders, simultaneous with the internationalization of the City of Jerusalem and economic union.

Given the above, there is no option other than review the current situation of the FATH Movement, a Movement that is now conflated into the Palestinian Authority (PA). The FATH Movement has been the backbone of the Palestinian resistance movement and the PLO, and the Movement ought not forget that the party that is signed on internationally ratified agreements in its capacity as the representative of the Palestinian people is the PLO and not the PA. The Palestinian Authority is an instrument of the PLO.

In this connection, it is imperative that the FATH Movement

\* highlight its independence of in relation to the Palestinian Authority and take part in leading the international campaign advocating economic, academic and cultural boycott of Israel, divestment in the Zionist entity, and the nullification of the erroneous registration of Zionist institutions as charitable, and hence,

tax-exempt, organization as well as imposition of international sanctions against the Israeli apartheid Government;  
\* Draw the best possible benefit from the Israeli recognition of the PLO and the Palestinian political organizations affiliated to the PLO as de facto legal bodies in consequent to the "Oslo Accords" - a recognition that enables the FATH Movement to avail itself of such assistance as may be made available from Palestinian institutions inside Israel, as well as draw the best possible benefit from the victory of the democratic resistance in South Africa led by the African National Congress (ANC) headed by Nelson Mandela, with renewed emphasis and stress on FATH and the PLO as the democratic alternative for all to Israeli apartheid, namely, a democratic alternative for the approximately 5 million 1948 Palestine refugees; some 6 million Arab and Hebrew residents of the 1967 Palestine occupied territories; and the currently 7 million odd Arab and Hebrew residents of 1948 Palestine, citizens of the apartheid State of Israel.

I aim to submit these propositions in detail to the Sixth FATH Congress in the event I am confirmed as a full member of the Congress.

Also, in my view, the restructuring of the FATH organization (tanzim) on a democratic basis in a manner that secures the rights of all members and all generations of FATH cadre is a matter of urgency. Such restructuring ought to allocate the younger generation appropriate representation in the Revolutionary Council and in the Central Committee as well as in all other leadership positions, notably in field positions. In order to revive the FATH organization, it may be appropriate to allocate a quota of one quarter of the leadership positions to the historical leadership of the Movement, one quarter to the middle generations and two quarters to the younger generations.

Long live Palestinian return!  
Long live the State of Palestine!

It is, inter alia, on the basis of this address that I was given the rather massive support at the ballot box, additional, needless to say, to the prevailing desire of the mainstream of the Congress (and the FATH Movement, for this matter) to demonstrate the humanitarian, non-confessional and international orientation of the Movement (and, perhaps, additional to my charm). There were serious attempts to abort my election, beginning with the removal of my name by fiat out of the roster of Congress membership (my perseverance in challenging the abuse led to the re-introduction of my name into the roster), through the breaking news broadcast on AL-JAZIRA news bulletin on the day of the election (one around noon-time and again in the evening) that my membership on the Revolutionary Council was secure by Presidential appointment inside the quota available to President Abu Mazin. Needless to say that had my appointment been secure inside Abu Mazin's quota, members of the Congress who intended voting for me would apply their vote in support of another worthy candidate. I had to mount a table and inform the Congress crowd awaiting their turn to enter the ballot hall that the information broadcasted by AL-JAZIRA was erroneous and that any one who had intended to vote for me should indeed do so.

7. How do you see the role of those grassroots organizations which act independently from FATH and Hamas nowadays?

In my opinion the three inter-related levels of Palestinian presence, namely, (i) the official level as represented by PLO/State of Palestine representatives; (ii) Palestinian party-political formations (fasil/fasail); and (iii) independent civil society organizations mobilizing for solidarity with the Palestinian people in defence of Palestinian rights ought to remain analytically distinct, joined together by a common commitment to the Palestinian national fundamentals of the implementation of the right of all 1948 Palestine refugees and their descendants to return and to the recovery of their property and inheritance rights inside pre- and post-1967 Israel; self determination and sovereignty.

8. Which other ways will you, in your position on the Revolutionary Council seek to overcome apartheid and to form a democratic Palestine?

See above 😊

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