

A State is Born

The Palestine National Council held its 19th session (extraordinary), the Session of the Intifada, between November 12th and 15th. Palestinians from the four corners of the earth, with the exception of the Palestinian territories occupied by 'Israel', along with hundreds of media personnel, converged on the Algerian capital for this historic event. Two landmark decisions were made during this PNC session: first the declaration of an independent Palestinian state; and second, the acceptance of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, plus Palestinian self-determination, as a basis for a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

On the agenda were four major issues: the Declaration of Independence, the formation of a provisional government, the uprising and the political report.

The intifada was the catalyst not only for the Declaration of Independence, but for the convening of the PNC session as well. The decision to declare an independent Palestinian state was discussed by the PLO Central Council after King Hussein severed the administrative and legal ties with the West Bank on July 31st. Despite its motives, the king's move was a result of the continuation and escalation of the intifada, and the Palestinian people's rejection of the Jordanian option. Between the declaration and actual establishment of the state lies a long and treacherous road, which necessitates consistent struggle on all levels, persistence and above all national unity. Nonetheless, the declaration is a victory for the PLO. It puts to rest once and for all the Jordanian option and the idea of a confederation between the Palestinian West Bank and Jordan, before the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. King Hussein can no longer claim the Palestinian West Bank as part of his kingdom; nor can Peres continue to hope of negotiating its future with Hussein. The Palestinians now have a state. This also puts an end to Shamir's plan to enforce the Camp David «autonomy» plan on the Palestinians.

The declaration of an independent Palestinian state has given the intifada new momentum. The Palestinian people under occupation have come so far during the past year that it would be next to impossible to go back, after sacrificing hundreds of lives, the thousands of injured and imprisoned, the demolition of homes, expulsions, the closure of schools, desecration of Moslem and Christian holy places, etc.

As in the case of the Declaration of Independence, the formation of a provisional government was also discussed and agreed upon in principle at the Central Council and Executive Committee meetings prior to the PNC. Some of the specifics were hammered out during the PNC's discussion of the political report, while some issues were left to the Central Council to make final decisions on. Among the issues left open for the Central Council to decide are: the relationship between this government and the PLO - whether the government will be the political apparatus of the PLO, or take its place; how and when the government will be formed - now or at the doorsteps of an international peace conference? These are all critical questions whose answers will have a direct bearing on the future course of events and on the PLO.

Two committees were formed in the PNC, an intifada committee and a political committee. The intifada committee met and drew up draft resolutions which were unanimously

approved (see text in this issue). They stressed the need for national unity and escalating the uprising, as well as programs of action for supporting it from outside on the Palestinian, Arab and international levels. Besides material aid, there were specific proposals for placing the occupied territories under UN supervision and for the Arab countries to open their borders to the Palestinian resistance, as part of the support to the uprising.

The political committee was engaged in a heated discussion over the political report which was finally approved by a majority with some abstentions. The report calls for convening an effective international conference under UN auspices, with the participation of the five permanent members of the Security council, and all parties to the conflict, including the PLO on an equal footing, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, with the guarantee of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination; the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the areas occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem; a halt to all annexation and the removal of Israeli settlements built since 1967; resolving the question of Palestinian refugees in accordance with related UN resolutions; and guaranteeing freedom of worship in holy places for all religions. The political report also rejects all forms of terrorism, including state terrorism (see text in this issue).

The main point of contention was making specific reference to resolutions 242 and 338. These resolutions were adopted by the UN Security Council after the 1967 war and directed at 'Israel', Egypt, Syria and Jordan. They do not present a solution for the Palestinian question, whereas there are other UN resolutions which specifically deal with the Palestinian problem, for example resolution 194, which recognizes the Palestinians' right to repatriation, and 3236 which recognizes the Palestinians' right to self-determination.

Accepting 242 at this time is in essence answering to the US demands, and giving a gratuitous concession. Making such a concession, without any concession from 'Israel' in return, will put the PLO at a disadvantage at the negotiations table. It will also set a precedent for the US and 'Israel' to ask for more concessions, while they have yet to recognize the Palestinian people's right to self-determination or even to choose their own representatives.

Concessions, as an essential ingredient in making a settlement, must be reciprocal. The PLO's decision to accept 242 and 338 was met with demands from the US administration for yet more concessions, while Israeli leaders are now speaking of the mass expulsion of Palestinians. 'Israel' is not interested in making peace, but in more annexation. 'Israel' has to be forced to make peace, and this will only come about through continuing and escalating the intifada, at the same time increasing the growing isolation of 'Israel' on the international level.

All in all, the drawback of accepting 242 and 338 was balanced by the declaration of an independent state and the resolutions on the intifada. Despite the polarization over the political report, Chairman Yasir Arafat and Dr. George Habash both stressed the overriding issue of national unity; a split in the ranks of the PLO was ruled out by George Habash even before the PNC started.