

The Fatah Conference

The fifth conference of Fatah (Palestine National Liberation Movement) concluded on August 9th in Tunis. Due to Fatah's status as the largest component organization of the PLO, the conference was followed with great interest by Palestinian, Arab and international forces. In this article, we will deal with the major political issues which have significance for the Palestinian struggle as a whole, without covering all the details of the conference's work.

Two important documents were adopted at the conference. The first was the political program, on which we will concentrate our discussion, because it contains the basic principles of the Fatah movement and also addresses the current situation. The second document was the communique which reflected some of the important points contained in the program.

MIXING STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The political program includes a set of tactical, strategic and current tasks which should be compared with the original strategic and interim goals of the Palestinian revolution. We can begin to evaluate the political program by noting some points which might be useful for such a comparison:

First: The program lacks criticism of past experience despite the fact that this would strengthen the movement and help it overcome its shortcomings, assuming that critical review would be used to change positions and practices for the better.

Second: The program mixes between current and strategic tasks. Moreover, there is sometimes a tendency to play on words when assigning priority to the various tasks. This appears to be an attempt to escape responsibility for how these tasks should be implemented in practice, and which tasks are considered primary. Below we will provide some examples:

- The program omits all mention of the liberation of all of Palestine, despite the fact that it correctly posits the Palestinian people's historical right to Palestine. The program labels the partition of Palestine and the establishment of the Zionist entity in 1948, as a big crime. Nevertheless, the conference failed to define the strategic tasks needed for reversing this crime, although it did clearly define the interim tasks for ending the 1967 oc-



cupation of the rest of Palestine.

- In the process of discussing escalating the struggle, the program uses the term *armed action*, not armed struggle. This is not just a case of mistaken word usage, but means practicing violent actions in a tactical, intermittent way, rather than seriously considering armed struggle to be the basic, strategic form of struggle required for the liberation of Palestine. This is reminiscent of the way in which Yasir Arafat used the ambiguous word *caduc* (obsolete, or null and void), to describe the Palestinian National Charter, during his May visit to Paris. He used this word to meet the demands of the French government for a change in PLO policy, while avoiding the appearance of violating PNC decisions. Thus, changes in wording about the armed struggle make us wonder whether it is being seriously considered as the basic way of confronting the Zionist enemy. Moreover, *armed action* is not described in the program as being ongoing, whereas other forms of struggle are. Statements by Fatah officials after the conference have confirmed such doubts. Some defined

armed action as referring to the intifada which is at present predominantly mass rather than armed struggle. Abu Iyad of Fatah's Central Committee also said that the use of the term armed struggle in the conference's communique did not necessarily mean that it would be used today or tomorrow. Such statements make one think that emphasizing armed struggle in the communique was more of a rhetorical threat to the US in view of its failure to advance the dialogue with the PLO, rather than expressing serious intent to escalate the liberation struggle.

- The conference adopted the program of the 19th PNC session which stresses the Declaration of Independence and the establishment of the State of Palestine. However, the conference avoided assessing statements and moves by some PLO leaders since the PNC, that violate the PNC's decisions. In fact, we do not know the real decision of the conference concerning UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 serving as the basis for resolving the conflict in the Middle East. One could view it as positive that these resolutions were not mentioned if this means that they were not adopted as part of Fatah's program. On the other hand, it is inconsistent to adopt the PNC's program without mentioning them, for their acceptance at the PNC marked a break with previous PLO policy. Failing to mention them may be no more than an evasion of responsibility, keeping the door open for adopting whatever position serves tactical and pragmatic considerations in the future.

In the same way, the conference took no clear position on Israel's right to exist, or whether the Palestinian National Charter is considered *caduc*. Moreover, there is no mention in the program of the Camp David accords, despite the fact that the Zionist enemy continues to mold its plans on these accords. The