

within the PLO institutions. From the strategic, ideological angle, the two fronts had advocated the importance of the democratic forces' unity at their respective, foregoing congresses. Though the discussions on the unity process began in 1981, the situation after the 1982 war, and especially the emergence of the crisis in Fatah, served to catalyze the formation of the Joint Leadership in June 1983. The fact that it was formed, despite the lack of total agreement on all issues, attests to the importance which both organizations attached to this experiment at the time.

The original political platform for the Joint Leadership was the Program for Unity and Democratic Reform in the PLO, issued in October 1983. In this program, national unity is dialectically connected to the question of reform in the framework of the PLO. The program attests to the radical nature of the reform which the Joint Leadership was striving to attain. This was the main juncture in the experience of the Joint Leadership and later the Democratic Alliance, comprising the PFLP, DFLP, Palestinian Communist Party (PCP) and Palestine Liberation Front (PLF).

After the adoption of this program, the Joint Leadership underwent several political fluctuations. However, the differences that arose did not negate the common ground which existed between the two organizations. There were difficulties in the wake of the inter-Palestinian fighting in Tripoli as a result of the PFLP's and DFLP's differing assessments of how the problem should be solved. Yet a joint stand was taken, condemning inter-Palestinian fighting, as the result of an internal agreement. The two fronts agreed that democratic dialogue should be adopted as the basis for resolving internal Palestinian conflicts. The Joint Leadership also proposed that the Program for Unity and Democratic Reform should constitute the basis for solving such conflicts.

Upon Arafat's visit to Cairo in December 1983, contradictions grew in the Joint Leadership. This visit was seen by the PFLP as a qualitative development in the line taken by the Palestinian right. We therefore considered that the Program for Unity and Democratic Reform had become insufficient for continuing the struggle to unify the PLO. Moreover, the PFLP considered that Arafat's visit disqualifies him from serving as the common denominator for Palestinian unity. The DFLP, however, did not consider that Arafat's visit constituted a qualitative development of the rightist trend and policy. The DFLP maintained its view of the Program for Unity and Democratic Reform. Concurrently, there were differences with respect to how to deal with Fatah's Central Committee. The PFLP stressed not meeting with them until they adopted a stand on Arafat's visit. The DFLP considered it necessary to continue such meetings despite their not adopting a stand.

Thus, the experiment of the Joint Leadership underwent a difficult situation in the first four months of 1984. The differences centered on the extent of the danger implied by Arafat's visit; the view with respect to Fatah's Central Committee, i.e., to what extent it was in harmony with Arafat; and the ways of confronting the deviationist trend in the Palestinian arena. Despite these difficulties, the PFLP continued to exert efforts to preserve the Joint Leadership. We considered our step of establishing the Joint Leadership as one imposed by the current situation, but in essence a strategical aspiration as part of the effort to unify the left as a whole. In contrast, the DFLP viewed the Joint Leadership from a purely tactical angle.

Then on March 26, 1984, the Democratic Alliance met in Aden, with three Arab communist parties: The Syrian and Lebanese Communist Parties, and the Yemeni Socialist Party.

The discussion of the developments in the Palestinian arena resulted in the Aden agreement which emphasized the necessity of exerting all efforts to preserve Palestinian national unity, and gathering all forces to face the deviationist trend. One clause in the document specified the conditions for meeting with Fatah's Central Committee. Another specified the fundamentals of mutual understanding with the other Palestinian organizations, i.e., the National Alliance (the Fatah opposition, Saiqa, PFLP-General Command, Popular Struggle Front), in order to gather all forces to confront the deviationist trend, and work for unifying the Palestinian revolution on a national, anti-imperialist platform.

This document then constituted the political platform for the Joint Leadership and the Democratic Alliance, governing any situation where differences occurred. After the Aden agreement, the Democratic Alliance was supposed to begin a dialogue with Fatah's Central Committee to confirm the political basis for restoring the PLO's nationalist policy. At the same time, meetings were to begin with the National Alliance, on confronting the deviationist trend, in order to restore Palestinian national unity. The Democratic Alliance began dialogue with Fatah's Central Committee and with the National Alliance. However, the problem arose that all efforts were concentrated on dialogue with the former, while the dialogue with the latter was not followed up.

Why were we unsuccessful in implementing the Aden agreement? Why did our attempt to preserve the Democratic Alliance fail?

The main clauses of the Aden agreement were clear-cut. However, in the ensuing practice of the Democratic Alliance, there was too much stress on the general idea, while insufficient attention was devoted to the specific points outlined in the clauses, especially regarding the dialogue with Fatah's Central Committee. The dialogue with the Central Committee resulted in the Aden-Algiers agreement which was below the level of the Aden document of the Democratic Alliance. It did not specify anything about the consequences of Arafat's visit to Cairo; the point that Arafat was no longer a common denominator was omitted. Its specifications regarding relations with Jordan and Egypt were vague.

The Aden-Algiers agreement stressed Palestinian national dialogue, including the Central Committee, the Democratic Alliance and National Alliance, to arrive at comprehensive national unity in order to be able to convene the PNC. Under much pressure, a date was set for the PNC: September 15th, 1984. It was also agreed that uniting the Palestinian arena was a precondition for holding the PNC on that date. The date itself was tentative. The problem was not that of setting a date. The document touched on all political and organizational matters related to unity of the Palestinian arena. The date, September 15th, was simply to be the inevitable result of the dialogue efforts.

Three months passed without any development leading to unity between the three partners to the dialogue. As September 15th approached, the Joint Leadership faced a crisis. The DFLP understood the date set as a fixed one, despite the fact that no headway had been made towards comprehensive national unity. They made the date itself a primary point, although the clauses pertaining to the Palestinian revolution's relations with Jordan and Egypt, and a number of political and organizational matters, had not been put into practice. On the contrary, there were repeated breaches of the terms of the ►