

Civil Disobedience

Civil disobedience is the key element in making the Palestinian uprising a permanent phenomenon which will undercut the basis of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The heroic uprising of the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip has achieved great victories on the Palestinian, Arab and international levels. Its continuation heralds the possibilities of more victories. The persistence of the uprising has challenged the Israeli occupiers as never before, and has opened a new chapter of the Palestinian struggle. The leadership of the uprising, with maturity and realism, has set forth a number of tactical slogans that lead to the main slogan of this stage, namely freedom and independence. One of the main issues at the present time is developing the uprising into a state of total civil disobedience. Thus, it is vital to understand this concept.

Civil disobedience is a form of popular struggle that can be enacted under certain objective and subjective conditions. Civil disobedience means popular rejection of the prevailing status quo, in this case, the Israeli occupation. Based on refusal to recognize the legality of the occupation, civil disobedience means refusal to deal with the occupation and its institutions. It means refusal to obey its orders. Total civil disobedience is thus equivalent to a total boycott of the occupation, as a step towards abolishing it.

Civil disobedience is, in essence, the backbone of the popular struggle to establish dual power. It is a struggle between the old authority that is unable to control the masses and maintain the status quo, and the newly emerging authority created by the masses in struggle, who are building new political, economic and social structures. Specifically, in the case of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, civil disobedience is a struggle between the authority of the occupation and the authority of the Palestinians led by the PLO and its political wing in the occupied territories, the United National Leadership of the Uprising. Call No. 9, issued on March 2nd, states this clearly:

«To the sons of the independent state,
The United Leadership, the Com-

mand of the PLO, as it greets your struggle, pledges to escalate the struggle with you until the occupation ends, and our state is established under the leadership of the PLO.»

CONDITIONS FOR CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Six months of continual uprising have clarified without a doubt that the uprising is based on comprehensive mass support and a strong organization. Actually, the current uprising is a qualitative leap achieved as a result of the accumulation of quantitative increments in the Palestinian struggle during the years of occupation. For the uprising to continue and achieve total civil disobedience, certain objective and subjective conditions must prevail. This does not mean that each and every of these conditions must be ripe from the first day; rather civil disobedience is a process. Some of the conditions must be ready from the start, while others will be built in the course of continuing daily struggle.

The foremost prerequisite for civil disobedience in the occupied territories exists: That is the people's total awareness of the oppression and subordination enforced on them by the racist Israeli occupation forces. In addition, the masses must be convinced that challenging and eventually expelling the occupiers is worth all the sacrifices this struggle requires. In reality, this consciousness has existed since the beginning of the 1967 occupation, but this alone is not enough to expell the occupiers. There must be a precise plan for the civil disobedience campaign and organizational structures to sustain it, in order that such a campaign can lead to achieving the masses' goals of expelling the occupiers and building an independent state led by the PLO. Accordingly, the United National Leadership of the Uprising has embarked on a step-by-step plan that will gradually raise the level of struggle to that of total civil disobedience.

Parallel to this, alternative structures

are being created, for this is another condition for civil disobedience. If the masses are to totally boycott the occupation, an alternative administrative apparatus must be built for organizing all aspects of life and leading the people in implementing the United National Leadership's directives. This is the reason for the popular committees and the related special task committees which have sprung up throughout the occupied territories, based on the leadership's directives and the masses' initiative in meeting the contingencies of the uprising and countering the occupation forces' repression. This popular apparatus constitutes the organ of civil disobedience and the means for leading the masses on a daily basis.

A third condition for practicing total civil disobedience is achieving a greater degree of self-sufficiency. Knowing the economic dependency of the West Bank and Gaza Strip on the Israeli economy, both for job opportunities and consumer products, the decision to boycott work in 'Israel' and Israeli goods means that the people must have alternative means of survival. From this stems the calls of the United National Leadership for developing self-sufficiency, refraining from buying unnecessary goods, increasing cultivation of the land, establishing more peasant cooperatives, and increasing local production.

A fourth condition for the success of civil disobedience is related to the position of the PLO. The masses under occupation have demonstrated their unity in struggle, as well as their undivided support to the PLO, and rejection of all attempts to abort or divert their uprising. This must be backed up by consolidation of the PLO's unity and clear rejection of the US and reactionary plans. Until now, the PLO has projected a united stand; although there were minor differences on the issue of a government-in-exile and initially on boycotting Schultz, these have been resolved. The PLO must now make concrete decisions for promoting civil disobedience, and draw up programs for supporting the masses' steadfastness in this situation.

A fifth condition which would enhance civil disobedience is a supportive Arab environment. Since the Zionist state threatens not only the Palestinians, but the entire Arab world, it is the duty of the Arab regimes and masses to support the uprising as the flashpoint of the anti-Zionist struggle in