

# Palestinian Statehood Addressed at the Democratic National Convention

History was made in Atlanta, Georgia, on July 18-21 at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) by Arab-Americans who, for the first time, initiated a debate on Palestinian rights on the convention floor of a major political party. Over 50 Arab-American delegates (for Jackson, Dukakis, Gore), standing committee members, campaign and party staff lobbied in support of perhaps the most controversial proposed minority plank ever to be brought to a major political party convention. The plank read as follows: «That the United States help to end the impasse in the Middle East by adopting a policy which supports the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and independent statehood and which supports Israel's existence and security within internationally recognized borders.»

This resolution was also supported by over 100 Arab-American and Jewish-American delegates, alternates and standing committee members who joined to form Democrats for Middle East Peace. The resolution received over 1,500 endorsements in only two days. Chairing Democrats for Middle East Peace are Lois Levine Barrett, Missouri; Sami Odeh, California; Liz Blum, Vermont; and Jim Zogby, Washington D.C.

Prior to the convention, the Jackson and Dukakis campaigns had disagreed on 13 issues on the party platform. Later, 10 were resolved and three remained: fair taxes; no first use (of nuclear weapons); and self-determination for Palestinians. Unable to resolve these issues, the Jackson campaign decided to «stick to the principles» and called for an open debate on the convention floor with four speakers.

Arab-Americans and progressives were able to place the Palestinian question on the convention agenda due to the convergence of two factors: (1) the impact of the Palestinian uprising on public opinion; and (2) the rise of the Reverend Jesse Jackson's Rainbow

Coalition as a significant movement on the US political scene. As a broad coalition of oppressed minorities, workers and other progressive strata, the Rainbow Coalition provided the vehicle for raising the Palestinian issue in the context of an overall progressive agenda, breaking the black-out imposed by the pro-Israeli lobby.

The Palestinian issue was debated Tuesday night, the second day of the DNC by Dr. James Zogby (a Lebanese-American) and Rep. Mervyn Dymally (California) in support of the plank and Sen. Daniel Inouye (Hawaii) and Rep. Charles Schumer (New York), opposed. After impassioned speeches from both sides, the last speaker on the issue, Rep. Dymally, explained that for the sake of unity and peace within the Democratic Party and to avoid a split, he was calling for a «no-vote» on the Middle East plank. He specifically addressed Congressman Schumer, an avowed Zionist, in his speech.

## GAINS

Nonetheless, serious gains were made by the various forces working on the issue of Palestinian statehood, spearheaded by the Arab American Institute (AAI) and its executive director, Dr. James Zogby. They are as follows:

- In ten states, Democratic Conventions voted to support a new Middle East policy: Washington, Texas, Minnesota, Iowa, Maine, Oregon, Vermont, California, Illinois and New Mexico all supported self-determination and Palestinian statehood. This is 20% of

the states in the US.

- The debate at the Democratic National Convention had national exposure in print and film and before over 4,000 delegates. There was coverage in the *New York Times* (July 20th), *Los Angeles Times* (July 20th) and the *Washington Jewish Weekly* (July 21st) to name a few.

- In 1984, at the Democratic Convention in San Francisco, there were only four Arab-American delegates. In 1988, there were 46.

- The Arab-American delegates were successful in introducing and establishing the inclusion of three planks in the final text of the Democratic Party platform: (a) a plank on immigrants' political rights; (b) a strong stand against hate violence and negative stereotyping; and (c) a plank in support of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, and calling for a negotiated settlement to the Iraq-Iran war.

- Anti-Arab and other inflammatory language was prevented from being included in the party platform.

- For the first time, an Arab-American held a position on the prestigious Democratic National Committee.

As if to verify these gains and the threat they pose to the pro-Israeli lobby, a memorandum was sent by the President of the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Edward C. Levy, Jr. on August 3rd, to the AIPAC leadership. This memorandum was leaked; it stated in part: «Despite the fact that this battle was won, we cannot ignore the warning signs it presents for us. We are being directly challenged. For the first time anti-Israeli forces have organized grassroots support... We have our work cut out for us!» This memorandum signals the closeness with which the pro-Israeli lobby is following the movement of the Arab-American community and its entrance into the world of electoral politics.

Arab-Americans have definitely embarked on the road to involvement in electoral politics in order to express their legitimate concern about racism, discrimination and immigrant harassment, as well as to express their concern for peace in the Middle East, a concern shared by all progressive forces. ●

