

The Aftermath of the PNC

With the break of daylight on the 15th of November, Palestinians took to the streets in the occupied Palestinian West Bank, Gaza Strip and 1948 territories after the declaration of the independent Palestinian state, despite the curfews which had been enforced since November 12th (the opening day of the PNC), the clampdown on all communications to and from the occupied territories, the road blocks and the warnings by Shamir and Rabin against any form of celebration. Palestinians challenged the Israeli occupiers and filled the streets, carrying Palestinian flags and singing nationalist songs, defying the 5-year jail sentence and \$10,000 fine declared by the Israeli army just prior to the convening of the PNC against those carrying the Palestinian flag and singing nationalist songs.

Amidst the rejoicing and welcoming of the Declaration of Independence, many Palestinians, however, were not in favor of accepting UN resolutions 242 and 338, which was a major concession in return for no Israeli concessions. According to the London-based International Information Service's survey in the occupied Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, 98% of those polled supported the declaration of an independent state, while only 22% were in support if the declaration entailed recognition of 'Israel'; the survey was conducted in October 1988, and included 1,000 Palestinians of various age groups and strata, including students, workers, professionals, employees and farmers. Taking into account the margin of error of a few points more or less, the survey clearly indicates a majority of Palestinians against recognition of 'Israel' (at least at this time).

THE ARAB RESPONSE

On the Arab level, the reaction was positive. Algeria was the first Arab country to recognize the Palestinian state, in a statement which was read immediately after its declaration. Brother Bousayeh, Central Committee member of the National Liberation Front Party, congratulated the PNC and the Palestinian people «on the

historic occasion of declaring an independent Palestinian state.»

On the other hand, Egypt lauded the PLO for taking a «courageous step» by recognizing UN resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for a negotiated settlement. Egypt's recognition of the Palestinian state is very important however, because it negates the Palestinian section of the Camp David Accords, the so-called «autonomy» or «self-rule» although the Egyptian section of the agreement is still intact.

King Hussein's reaction, which reflects his overriding concern, was that he feels «clearly and honestly that President Arafat has fulfilled all US demands.» The excitement of the reactionary Arab regimes over the results of the PNC was not particularly due to the Declaration of Independence, but rather to accomodating US and Israeli demands - recognizing UN resolutions 242 and 338, in addition to renouncing terrorism. Furthermore, these regimes are fearful of a spill-over from the intifada into their own countries, and their support is hinged on reaching a political settlement (not necessarily a just one) as soon as possible, before their population is «contaminated» by the revolutionary fervor of the intifada. Concurrently, these regimes continue to pressure the PLO into trying to end the intifada, although Chairman Arafat himself said that he cannot stop it, even if he wanted.

INTERNATIONAL REPERCUSSIONS

Repercussions of the PNC were felt on a wide scale in the international arena, particularly after the denial of a visa by the US State Department to Arafat, to address the UN General Assembly in New York. Most European countries viewed with favor the results of the 19th PNC, which facilitated a conducive atmosphere for peaceful negotiations. European Community representative and Greek Foreign Minister Carlos Papoulius said, «The EEC wants an international peace conference which would result in a just, durable and global solution to the conflict.» France urged 'Israel' to reciprocate to the PLO initiative, and

Britain's Foreign Office Minister William Waldegrave declared, after meeting with a PLO official in early December, that he will go to Tunisia and hold discussions with PLO leaders. Waldegrave said that «progress is being made» and that «there had been nothing from Israel but a concerted blast of criticism.» He will go to 'Israel' in an effort to get the Israelis involved in the peace process. Italian Prime Minister De Mita said, «World public opinion demands from the Israeli government to avoid all actions which increase tension.» He added, «It's not possible for one to sit idle before the tragedy in the occupied territories.» The Spanish Foreign Minister has scheduled a Middle East tour during January in his capacity as an EEC representative; he will make contacts with the parties involved in the conflict in an effort to mediate and push for the convening of an international peace conference. Austria has elevated the PLO representation to the ambassadorial level.

This positive European response to the outcome of the PNC and the initiatives the various states have undertaken, was explained by the *Guardian*: «European patience with US tolerance of Israel's obstruction of a peace conference and the violent repression of Palestinians in the occupied territories has worn extremely thin (December 2, 1988).

The most positive reaction, however, came from the African and Asian countries and the socialist community which extended full recognition to the Palestinian state, and opened Palestinian embassies on their soil. Nicaragua and Cuba are the only Latin American states so far to have recognized the Palestinian state.

Both Labor and Likud reacted negatively to the PNC, describing it as a «publicity stunt,» while according to a survey taken after the PNC by a leading Israeli newspaper, *Yediot Ahronot*, 54% of Israelis favored direct negotiations with the PLO if it does not abandon the resolutions passed in the 19th PNC. This indicates that the Israeli leaders, regardless of their political affiliation, are out of step with their con-