

One Year of the Palestinian Uprising

The following article is an attempt to assess the first year of the Palestinian uprising as seen through the periscope of the calls issued by the United National Leadership.

Paper took on a new vitality in occupied Palestine. Leaflets and the Palestinian press have historically expressed popular opposition to the occupation, but in 1988, for the first time, the printed word became a daily struggle guide for all the people on a regular basis. Call no. 1 was issued on January 8, 1988, in the name of the Palestinian nationalist forces, one month after the outbreak of the uprising. It was quickly followed by call no. 2, issued by the United National Leadership (UNL) of the Uprising, signalling the stable functioning of a collective leadership representing the major Palestinian political trends. Since then, calls have been issued at weekly or biweekly intervals, eagerly awaited by the masses and painting an ongoing picture of the uprising's development. Through the calls one can trace how the uprising has built the political, economic, social and militant bases for its own continuation towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian state; one can also discern the democratic, popular outlines of the state that was recently declared by the PNC.

Comparing the calls with the actual unfolding events, one is immediately struck by the absurdity of the misconceptions that the uprising was either spontaneous in the sense of being without firm basis or reason, or alternately that it was «directed from outside.» What is most striking is the calls' close connection with mass action. The calls seldom dictate forms of resistance that have not already been initiated on the local level, i.e., tried in the battlefield in one or more places in Palestine.

It is most common that a new type of mass action or civil disobedience is first introduced generally, while the following call makes the directive more specific, and the next again prescribes organizational structures for making this act maximally effective. This shows the tangible daily give-and-take bet-

ween the UNL, the popular committees and the masses. One can infer that various forms of struggle are tried out to gain experience about their results, before being required of the people at large. The calls' main function then is not to «give orders» but to initiate, organize and coordinate action on a national basis, in this case, throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and on occasion reaching out to the Palestinians in the 1948 occupied land and the people of the Golan Heights.

Most calls begin with a brief assessment - in glowing terms - of the experience and achievements of the uprising in the foregoing period, while calling attention to upcoming political events - Shultz's shuttles, the Arab summit, the European Parliament meeting, a UN session, etc. This provides both an overall perspective and encouragement to the people of the uprising, while setting the stage for the concrete tasks of the week. Besides coordinating major demonstrations, strikes and boycotts, to make them more effective and force the occupation authorities to spread their troops on all fronts, the main function of the calls is organizing a new routine and quality of life, enabling the people to continue the uprising and advance towards total national civil disobedience.

THE SOURCE OF THE CALLS — A LEADERSHIP OF QUALITY

The fact that the UNL's only public appearance is through the calls is one indication of how it distinguishes itself not only from the traditional (usually reactionary and pro-Jordanian) notables, but also from the nationalist leadership that rose to prominence in the territories in the seventies. While the former carved out their place within the confines of occupation and functioned as agents for Arab reaction, the nationalist mayors and other public

figures represented the people's aspirations, but were soon attacked and deprived of all freedom of movement by the occupation authorities.

The UNL, having learned from the foregoing experience and based on the priorities of organizing an all-out popular revolt, is totally clandestine. Stemming chiefly from the Palestinian organizations that have resisted the occupation since 1967, the UNL is closely linked with the generation of militants who have served time in Israeli prisons, contributing a heavy dose of political and organizational training and perseverance. The UNL's composition is also linked to the proliferation of new mass organizations in the decade prior to the uprising, in which the Palestinian political organizations, and especially the left, took the initiative. These links are one explanation of the high degree to which the UNL's calls are implemented, as has been noted by a number of first-hand observers. For example, Joe Stork observed from his June 1988 visit to occupied Palestine: «The most organized villages seem to be those where at least two, and often all four, of the major organizations have a presence, in just about every case going back several years... the cadres of the major organizations are responsible for interpreting and implementing the *bayanat* (manifestos) of the Unified Leadership. The composition of this local leadership thus reflects the balance of political forces in the area» (*Middle East Report*-formerly *MERIP*, September-October 1988).

The UNL is the PLO in its dual sense of representing all the people, and representing the major Palestinian political and resistance organizations. It moreover functions in a way which provides a model for the PLO. Not depending on individuals or the dominance of any single group, its membership is rotating and in line with the various forces' actual activities. This insures not only secrecy but also internal democracy and unity. The consistency of the political line and program of action found in the consecutive calls shows that this is conducive to a realistic and correct political line that reflects the Palestinian na- ►