

# Book Review

## *American Jewish Organizations and Israel*

munity to recognize the independent Palestinian state as declared at the PNC in Algeria in 1988.

(6) to form a committee of international lawyers' unions and to coordinate with the organizers of this conference to visit the occupied territories and Israeli prisons, especially Ansar III, and to give a report on the conditions.

(7) to proclaim an international day of solidarity with the intifada on which all the world's lawyers stop working for a certain period of time to support the intifada and to protest Israeli violations against the Palestinian people.

The second day's program, dealing with women and children in the intifada, was opened by Roula Kaklamanakis, a PASOK member of parliament and a writer. Rounds of speeches and discussions emerged with tens of suggestions made by Palestinian, Arab and European women. Among them were ideas of concerts, art exhibitions and literature with all proceeds going to the intifada. They also suggested women's delegations, medical treatment grants and tangible political support. March 8th, International Women's Day, was suggested as a day of international solidarity with Palestinian women and June 1st, International Children's Day, was suggested as an international day of solidarity with Palestinian children. Later in the day, a reception was held in honor of Um Jihad, sponsored by the Athens PLO office.

The conference was an overall success, producing three resolutions, tens of suggestions of tangible support for the intifada and an accusation against the Israeli occupation forces. The resolutions were all addressed to UN Secretary General Xavier Perez De Cuellar and dealt with (1) expulsions of Palestinians, (2) the protection of the Palestinian population, and (3) recognition of the independent Palestinian state. The accusation was (1) that the Israeli occupation forces are in South Lebanon in violation of international conventions, and protesting their expulsion of 31 Lebanese from South Lebanon, and (2) protesting the arrest, detention and torture of Suha Beshara and calling for UN intervention. ●

Lee O'Brien's book, *American Jewish Organizations and Israel*, published in 1986 by the Institute for Palestine Studies, is important for three main reasons:

Firstly, to our knowledge, it is the first really inclusive, objective and documented book on this subject, covering not only the Zionist lobby, but the full range of major pro-Israel political, community, fundraising and special focus organizations. (This is not to discount the pioneering works of anti-Zionist American Jews, like Elmer Berger and Alfred M. Lilienthal, who addressed the subject in terms of the major political and moral questions involved, with less emphasis on the institutional aspect of the pro-Israel network.)

Secondly, Lee O'Brien's book dispels some commonplace myths. Though not heavily analytical, it rests on a clear understanding of class questions and imperialist policy. Thus, the influence of the pro-Israel lobby is ascribed first and foremost to the prevailing convergence of interests between Israel and US policy: «The main source of the Israel lobby's strength lies in the fact that support for Israel is an inherent component of U.S. strategy... such policies face no significant challenge from forces within the U.S. political mainstream at this time» (page 154). This dispels simplistic ideas such as that Jews control US policy by virtue of their numbers or wealth - ideas which not only border on anti-Semitism, but also serve to whitewash US imperialist policy.

Thirdly, the book has political relevance for pro-Palestinian and peace activists. Knowing where the pro-Israel lobby's strength lies is a prerequisite for serious anti-Zionist work that goes beyond slogans, and for efforts to attain a just peace in the Middle East. Moreover, evaluating the chances for breaks in the pro-Israel consensus, whether in the Jewish community or the American public at large, presupposes such knowledge. This is highly relevant in the context of the ongoing Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories, which has opened new perspectives for making such inroads.

The book, in fact, covers historical and current differences within the American Jewish community, but the author finds no evidence of these leading, at that time, to more just consideration of the Palestinian question. O'Brien notes that despite conflicts between the traditionally liberal/Democratic American Jewish establishment and the rise of the extreme right in Israel itself, virtually all mainstream organizations have given at least tacit support to Israeli policies like increasing settlements, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, arms sales to dictatorships, etc. (It is to be noted that the author does not in this book deal with anti-Zionist groups or those which have expressed radical criticism of Israeli policy, such as the New Jewish Agenda. Her analysis applies to the mainstream organizations alone.)

### «ISRAELIZATION»

Over 30 major pro-Israel organizations are examined in detail in terms of their stated positions; their structures and activities for organizing the Jewish community, garnering support for Israel, and influencing the US government and public opinion; and their origins and changes over the years. From this emerges the following basic picture of the relationship between the American Jewish organizations and Israel:

While American Jews have never been a monolithic community in social, political or religious terms, they have united to an unprecedented degree in support of Israel. There are over 200 national Jewish organizations, making Jews the most institutionally organized minority group in the US. Originally, almost all Jewish community organizations were non-Zionist; the Zionist parties, while active, enjoyed little mass support. Yet virtually all supported the Israeli state after it was created, beginning the process of «Israelization» whereby any real distinction between the positions of the avowedly Zionist and nominally non-Zionist organizations has disappeared over time. Today, the most important organizations in Israel support work