

Two Years of the Intifada

Heading for the 1990's

«The independent State of Palestine is being built on the national soil through the achievement of mass empowerment and unity of action in struggle, as a solid base for the Palestinian national movement in steadfastness and confrontation» - the PLO/United National Leadership (UNL) in the occupied State of Palestine, Call no. 36, March 15, 1989.

What was distinctive about the second year of the Palestinian uprising? Certainly, there were more marches and stones, more heroism and unity, more popular committees, self-sufficiency and civil disobedience from the Palestinian side of the trenches - and more killing and atrocities from the Israeli side. But 1989 was much more than a rerun of the first year of the intifada. While a major achievement of 1988 was comprehensive unity, mobilization and empowerment, the key to the intifada's momentum in 1989 was combining the ongoing militancy with conscious organizing work to regulate the socioeconomic framework of the new way of life that Palestinians under occupation embarked on with the outbreak of the intifada in December 1987. This was a logical development of the thrust of the first year, and required to continue and escalate the uprising in the face of intensified Zionist repression and divide-and-rule tactics.

Above all, the self-regulation was not an inward-looking dynamic, but part of the process of forging the State of Palestine in the furnace of direct confrontation with its opposite - the occupation. In the course of 1989, a well organized, sustained popular revolt was turned into an alternative system. Popular authority proved itself not only in directly challenging the occupation, but also in building a new political and social order. Two main battles typified this momentum - Beit Sahour's victorious struggle against

taxation without representation and the protracted workers' strike against the imposition of computerized identity cards in the Gaza Strip.

Profiling the State of Palestine

The emphasis on internal regulation did not render 1989 short of dramatic displays of mass militancy. In February, the defiance of the masses closed down the police stations in the Gaza Strip, while East Jerusalem residents enacted a successful boycott of the Israeli municipal elections, despite concerted Zionist efforts to attract select Palestinian candidates and voters.

The Israeli press reflected the widespread Zionist fear that the intifada was radicalizing. In the March 23rd edition of *Haaretz*, Ori Nir wrote that direct attacks, in which Palestinian youth confront Israeli soldiers face-to-face, were becoming more widespread, citing a number of attacks with knives and hatchets. He also noted an incident in Gaza where Palestinians seized firearms from Israeli soldiers, concluding «there is an increasing danger that attacks with live ammunition will become more frequent (as the intifada) comes to resemble the Algerian model». He also noted that «events in the territories over the past week or two are reminiscent in many ways of the first months of the intifada» in terms of mass demonstrations, burning tyres, stonethrowing and Palestinian-manned barricades, admitting that «Full physical control of the Gaza Strip

is only possible when curfews are imposed on all the population centres...and even then there is no lack of disturbance resulting from curfew-breaking.»

Through biweekly calls, the UNL charted a plan for keeping up the momentum at a level which the masses could realistically maintain. While the number of strike days increased in the fall to fight the battle of the imposed IDs, in general they did not rise dramatically as compared with 1988. In fact, the emphasis was on direct confrontation, with the UNL calling for the fall of a martyr to be the signal for more attacks on the occupation forces, rather than a general strike, except in the martyr's home district where due respect should be accorded the family in mourning. The UNL also urged those wanted by the occupation authorities to opt for the status of fugitive rather than succumb to arrest. The underground grew: a new category of highly respected citizens of the occupied State of Palestine, living in the islands of semiliberation among the masses of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In June, the Israeli press wrote that for one afternoon East Jerusalem looked like «the capital of Palestine» after 10,000 marched in the funeral of Omar Qassem, Palestine's Mandela, the longest serving political prisoner in Israeli jails, who died due to the Israelis' denial of medical treatment. This was the biggest demonstration in Jerusalem since the 1967 occupation.

A more joyful occasion occurred in Beit Sahour on November 5th; 3,000 Palestinians, residents and guest delegations, marched to celebrate the village's victory in the war of the taxes. The residents of Beit Sahour withstood a six-week military siege, maintaining their refusal to pay taxes to the occupation, despite harassment, beatings, ►