

national condemnation, and further strengthened Christian-Muslim unity in the struggle against occupation.

Accomplishments on the ground

An important moral victory occurred on March 11th when five political prisoners from Gaza escaped from Ansar III detention center in the Negev. Two were caught and one turned himself in to UN observer forces in the Sinai, while two escaped into Egypt. Despite two of the prisoners being captured, the break-out alone represents a significant victory for the Palestinians on the psychological battlefield that is part of the

intifada. As one ex-detainee of Ansar III from Gaza noted after eight months in administrative detention, opening the camp at the beginning of the intifada was part of the authorities' attempt to reestablish the barrier of fear between them and the Palestinians which the uprising had torn down. The isolated setting, extraordinary brutality and notoriously harsh conditions were carefully designed not just to intimidate prisoners, but the entire Palestinian population. Certainly the Zionist authorities hoped that as the camp's infamous reputation grew, the threat of internment there would deter activism, thus crippling the intifada. What they obviously didn't foresee was

Ansar III becoming perhaps the quintessential symbol of Palestinian resistance and steadfastness. In this context, the escape from the prison camp dealt another blow to the authorities.

Unity among nationalist forces was strengthened on March 1st when the General Federation of Trade Unions in the West Bank announced that it was reunifying. A statement issued by the 16-member executive committee described reunification as necessary «in order to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of our workers and the people at large in view of the challenges posed at this critical stage...» (*Al Fajr*, March 5th). The executive also asserted the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state, and described the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

National unity on a broader scale was reaffirmed in a statement issued in March by 34 prominent Palestinians. They asserted the PLO's right to form and announce any Palestinian delegation to participate in a dialogue with Israel. The statement emphasized that no Palestinian from the occupied territories will participate in a delegation not announced by the PLO. Furthermore, any dialogue must have an open agenda and be conducted under international auspices as a step toward the convening of an international conference. Finally, they stressed the need for the intifada to continue. Although a Palestinian national consensus has yet to be reached on the benefits of a dialogue, such as the one proposed to take place in Cairo, and specifically under what conditions, the statement laid to rest rumors circulating in the Israeli press concerning the formation of a Palestinian delegation, making it clear that the PLO could not be bypassed in the peace process.

The Israeli media were busy in March churning out rumors obviously designed to undermine Palestinian national unity. The target of recent Israeli reports was the PFLP, which was allegedly on the verge of splitting from the UNL and, in an apparent reference to Hamas, preparing to work with other Palestinian organizations outside the framework of the PLO. Although field coordination does exist between the

