

The ironic thing is that if you ask almost anybody what he believes, he will essentially respond with our program. Maybe he's not a socialist, but he wants all Palestine, he wants the refugees to return and he won't say he's against the Jews. Research conducted by a professor at Haifa University concluded that between 30 and 40 percent of the Palestinians inside Israel support the program of *Abna Al Balad*. As well, more than 60 percent of the Arab population inside the green line is under 18 years old. This is reflected in *Abna Al Balad*, the majority of whose members are youths. The future is ours. There have been no immediate results from our program, but if you look to the future you have to be very optimistic. But in the meantime something has happened: the position of the PLO changed. In the past we have supported the PLO's position, but now we're facing political problems with the PLO also, not only with the authorities and other forces inside Israel.

What, then, is *Abna Al Balad*'s view of the last PNC, at which the PLO accepted UN resolutions 242 and 338 and recognized Israel's right to exist?

We are against these positions, but the masses began to ask us: Are you more patriotic than Arafat? Before we've represented the positions of the PLO; now we are against them so we have a problem with the masses. When the people see that we're militant - raising the Palestinian flag in every demonstration, etc. - and that the other forces aren't doing anything, they appreciate our sacrifices and continue to respect our position. But they're still afraid to join us because we're suffering attacks from the authorities, firstly, but also because the masses see Abu Ammar as a symbol. They've criticized this position of ours. When the splits occurred in Fatah and the PLO after 1982, and after we strongly criticized Arafat for the Amman agreement (with the Jordanian regime), we lost mass support because people saw us as being against Arafat. But now we're consolidating our mass support in a clear political program. We are not afraid of what is going to happen now. We look towards the future.

The «interim solution» holds nothing for us, nor do the slogans of the intifada - liberation and independence. They speak of liberation and independence for the Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and we're not an integral part of the intifada there. Not because they don't want us, but because objectively speaking we are not part of the intifada. So this kind of independence and liberation does not include us. Nevertheless, we are preparing ourselves for the future when the masses will discover that our position is the correct one. Anyway, a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza is now a dream after the formation in Israel of the right-wing government. Shamir and Sharon will agree to a Palestinian state? The whole situation now has changed and every organization must rethink its positions. Our program is the correct one until now, but that doesn't mean the people will join as members. We have organizational problems. Until now we've been able to organize all the people who agree with our program. We haven't cadres who can do this kind of organizing. As well, our financial situation is very bad.

What repressive measures have the authorities taken against you personally and *Abna Al Balad* in general?

I was under house arrest for a period amounting to four years during the years 1980 to 1987. I was put under administrative detention at the beginning of the intifada after the big «peace day» strike. Every year, after everything we did - demonstrations, raising flags, writing slogans on the walls - they would come to arrest me and some other comrades for some days. These short arrests - 15 days, 8 days, etc. - have become

part of our lives. Also, I lost my job as a teacher which I had held for 14 years. I was fired by military order while still in prison under administrative detention. It was a gift they presented to me on Land Day 1988.

Why haven't they just banned *Abna Al Balad*?

Branches of *Abna Al Balad* have been banned, like the one at Hebrew University. They took a decision in the Knesset to ban it and gave the defense minister the responsibility of carrying it out, but then the government collapsed and he couldn't. Now I guess they'll carry out the banning order. They threaten us all the time with this. I think they learned from the *Al Ard* experience that banning us will not help them. I told them in court that if you ban us, hundreds of youths from our organization will go underground with their activities, which will make them stronger. They don't want this. They want us to continue operating in the open so they can control us. Anyway, the objective situation is not ready for underground struggle. Until now, our only option is to remain legal. This is a balance that has been struck between us and them. Maybe eventually they will do it.

What are the achievements of *Abna Al Balad*?

Until now, our biggest achievement has probably been consolidating our program and fighting the authorities and paying the price to make *Abna Al Balad* legal. Don't think that it is an easy thing to say that we want a democratic secular state in Palestine. The authorities interpret this to mean that we want to destroy Israel. Our main achievement, I think, is represented by our statements and positions and the Palestinian flag we raise all the time in every strike and demonstration. We represent something different from all the other forces. We're swimming against the tide: we're against the majority inside the green line, the majority in the PLO, the authorities and Zionism. We're a small organization; don't think that we're thousands of comrades. But we're active like a big party, like the CP. Every place they're fighting we're fighting. We're represented in all the Arab committees inside the green line. We're an integral part of the leadership of the Arabs, and we're the opposition to all the forces there. We're continuing to struggle while waiting for better times. We have an interest in the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. We want to see if this state will help or be a big prison for all the Palestinian left.

So you do support the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

We think that this stage will then pass and other stages will begin. National and political achievements are connected to the refugees. What will happen with them? What will the leadership of the Palestinian people do with them? How will it solve their problem? If one million return to live inside the green line, imagine what will happen. We will immediately become two million inside Israel, and this will open other avenues of struggle. I believe in this; if I didn't, I wouldn't struggle. Why should I be pessimistic? But it is difficult. Nobody imagined this big Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union, not even the Israeli authorities. Everything has changed now.

In the last local council elections, Islamic forces were successful. How did this happen?

There are many reasons for it happening. First, there is an increase in the power of Islamic forces not only inside the green line, but also in the West Bank and Gaza. Sometimes Hamas has an equal balance of power with all the PLO factions in calling strikes. Also in Jordan, Egypt, Algeria and Iran they've gained strength. We're not alone, not exceptions in this; it's happened