

# GUPS Congress

The 9th National Congress of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) was held in Algiers, February 12-17th. Its convening was especially significant in that it is the first congress of a Palestinian mass organization to be held after the visit of Yasir Arafat to Cairo. Consequently, the focus of the deliberations was on political issues of utmost importance for the Palestinian cause. As GUPS is the most active mass organization of the Palestinian Revolution, the positions taken by its congress acquire substantial influence. The Palestinian resistance organizations have always attached great importance to the role of the GUPS. Thus, the positions it adopts provide a barometer of the opinion of broad sectors of Palestinian activists.

The Congress was composed of 167 delegates who had been elected by the respective branches of the GUPS over the past two years. An additional 45 delegates were nominated and approved by two-thirds majority at the congress, to represent branches in countries, such as Egypt, Turkey and Lebanon, where prevailing conditions had prohibited elections. Some delegates did not attend. They did not, however, make any statement as to political reasons for their absence. Their seats were left open. The congress was also attended by a large number of guest delegations from Arab student organizations and progressive student unions around the world.

## For unity and democracy

Since the vast majority of the elected delegates participated, the Congress more than fulfilled the required quorum. The delegates included members of Fatah, DFLP, PFLP, the Arab Liberation Front, the Palestinian Communist Party and the Palestinian Liberation Front. This indicates a high degree of interest in the Congress as a forum for political struggle to unite the masses of our people on a clear political line and within the legitimate bodies that have been built up in the course of Palestinian national struggle. In truth, the Congress afforded this opportunity, precisely because of the democratic spirit that prevailed. On the whole, the constitution and by-laws of the GUPS were abided by regarding election of delegates, the congressional proceedings themselves, the adoption of the final statement and the election of a new leadership. Despite the severe disagreements experienced in the Palestinian arena this past year, there was a majority will that all delegates and political tendencies should enjoy full participation and expression of their views. There was no pressure or discrimination against any delegate's entry to the congress or right to speak.



The GUPS has reason to be proud of having successfully practiced the democratic traditions developed in the Palestinian revolution and the PLO. Moreover, a great vote of thanks goes to our Algerian brothers, who facilitated the assembly and work of the Congress in every way possible. The Algerians demonstrated in practice their genuine respect for the independence of Palestinian decision-making and for democratic proceedings, free from interference, tutelage or pressure.

Our comrades' participation in the Congress was in accordance with the PFLP's approach to the current crisis in the Palestinian Revolution. This is based on belief that the only way to preserve the achievements of the PLO, while simultaneously rectifying its line and practice, is by persistent political struggle to rally our people around reform in the legitimate frameworks. Moreover, in relation to the GUPS Congress in specific, we find it important to distinguish between our own political platform and the correct way to work within a mass organization. As an example, the PFLP's political representatives to the Congress did not attend the opening session, where Arafat addressed the GUPS, because of our principled position that he has disqualified himself to lead our people. On the other hand, our members who were elected GUPS delegates, participated actively in all sessions of the Congress, because their prime duty is to contribute to unity, constructive work and correct political stands on the part of the Union as a whole.

In line with this, our comrades together with those of DFLP, the Palestinian Communist Party and the Palestinian Liberation Front, presented a memorandum expressing a joint viewpoint on major political issues and matters of special importance for the GUPS work. This was positively received by the great majority of delegates. The four organizations also presented a joint paper advocating the principle of proportional representation, motivated by desire to develop the democratic structure of the Union.

## Political debate and final statement

The initial discussion at the Congress revolved around the Political Report presented by the Executive Committee of the GUPS. This paper presented a political line which was not acceptable to the majority of the Congress; it furthermore placed the GUPS in a position of addressing issues which are beyond the capacity of a student organization. Thus, the report was not adopted by the Congress, but referred to the Political Commission, whose 100 or so members, after thorough discussion, resolved to put it aside.

Consequently, the decisive political debate focused on drawing up the final statement. The principle stands befitting a mass organization of the Palestinian revolution were readily agreed upon: affirmation that the PLO is the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people based on adherence to the Palestinian National Charter and the resolutions of the PNC, and to the Palestinian people's right to return, self-determination and the establishment of an independent national state; adherence to the strategy of protracted people's war; escalating the armed struggle in the occupied territories in order to achieve the full inalienable rights of our people and abort all the imperialist and Zionist projects; preserving the inde-