

Mass Work

Shadia Abu Ghasala Nursery

In «Democratic Palestine» no.8 we wrote an article about the Shadia Abu Ghasala Nursery. Since the distribution of this issue was partially blocked and most of you did not receive it, we reprint this article.

In January 1984, the PFLP Womens Bureau opened a nursery in Yarmouk camp, Damascus. It is named Shadia Abu Ghasala Nursery in honor of the first woman martyr in the PFLP, who was killed in 1969, in Nablus, while preparing for struggle against the Zionist occupation.

There was a dual motivation for establishing the nursery: On the one hand was the conviction that it is more progressive for children to grow up in a group; that child development, both socially and intellectually, is enhanced in a collective environment; and that children should be raised with an understanding of their national cause and revolution. In the long-range view, raising the new generation to be strong, healthy and mentally alert is part of the ongoing struggle to liberate Palestine and establish a democratic state.

On the other hand, the Womens Bureau sought to support working mothers and give more women a chance to work outside the context of home and family, as a component of women's liberation which is also of utmost importance in advancing the revolution.

Traditionally in the Arab society, few women work outside the context of home and family. However, in this generation more and more wish to do so due to political involvement, economic necessity and the desire for a richer and more independent life. In Yarmouk camp there is actually a relatively high percentage of working women. Yet this



can be at the expense of the children; in the absence of sufficient childcare facilities younger children are left in the charge of older ones; many girls of ten years and up are responsible for households in the daytime. While there are a fair number of kindergartens in and around Yarmouk camp, there is very little childcare for the youngest. It was this fact that the Womens Bureau took into consideration when deciding to open a nursery rather than a kindergarten. In addition, there was the fact of close cooperation with the DFLP which was opening a kindergarten where children from Shadia Abu Ghasala nursery can continue when they reach three years of age. On the other hand, the DFLP kindergarten had some very young children who were referred to the PFLP nursery.

The great need for a nursery was proven by its immediate full enrollment. This occurred simply by passing the news of its opening by word of mouth

among comrades, friends and neighbors. Since that time, there has been a long waiting list. The Womens Bureau would like to meet this need by expanding the nursery, but is currently prevented by lack of funds. Early childcare is especially crucial as most Palestinian women have at least three children. This means that without childcare she would wait about ten years before finding a job, and it can often be difficult to start at that point.

Aims and program

The nursery opens at 7 a.m. and a bus makes rounds in the camp to pick up the children. The nursery aims to develop the children according to what is possible at their age level. Obviously, for the smallest this comes through contact with the staff members who take time to speak and sing to the children while meeting their physical needs. When the child is one year and a half, toilet training begins in coordination with the family's wishes.

For the older children there are more structured activities to develop language and motor skills. In a conversation with us, the nursery's director stressed that the optimal time is the morning when the children are most alert. Therefore, activities are set early with emphasis on teaching songs, dancing, rhythmic movement and circle games. Also there is story-telling and simple puppet theatre. Songs and stories provide an avenue to teach about Palestine ►

