



Palestinian uprising: This time more than a burst of impotent protest

## Organising The Uprising

Palestinian protest against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip has smouldered constantly since 1967, occasionally flaring into violence. When the current uprising began, it was easy to dismiss it as just another burst of justified but impotent protest, of little more effect than a wave of emotion. Over two months and perhaps a hundred deaths later, it is clear that it is more.

This uprising is different from others in its scale and duration, and in the fact that it is mobilising previously quiet sectors of the population. Palestinians are proud

and excited to see shopkeepers and residents of prosperous suburbs taking part. It is also different, visibly, in the brutality of the Israeli army's response: brutality which so far has only increased the courage and determination of the Palestinians. A single death used to cause a wave of shock; now a hundred deaths are accepted as perhaps only the beginning of the price that must be paid for progress.

What makes this protest qualitatively different is the degree of organisation. On the local level, camp committees have sprung up to co-ordinate local solidarity and

relief, rivalries between various political groups for once submerged. Existing popular organisations such as the women's committees are mobilising in support. Medical relief committees are playing a vital role bringing medical care and first aid training to communities whose people are either trapped by curfews or reluctant to face the intimidation and harassment meted out by the military in hospitals.

To the embarrassment of the Israeli authorities, who claim with each new expulsion or wave of arrests to have rooted out local leaders, a 'United National Command' has also developed. After tentative beginnings the local Palestinian community accepted its legitimacy and it has been secretly

but effectively directing operations.

Essential to the uprising's strength is the political unity of the major PLO groups. Their common position is the demand for an international conference. They still differ in the confidence with which they regard this step, and in their hopes for the ultimate outcome; but for the moment they agree on the importance of making realisable demands and being seen to be committed to the peace process.

Israeli leaders worry about whether or not the disturbances are organised by the PLO. In reality the question is a red herring: rifts among Palestinians have never yet seriously threatened their common commitment to the PLO as their 'sole legitimate representative'. For Palestinians themselves, the question has practical importance, given the sometimes tense relationship between the occupied territories and the PLO outside. The uprising almost certainly began

spontaneously. But the PLO did, after a few weeks, respond to the situation so that now, whatever the exact chains of responsibility, a modus operandi has been established and commands near-total allegiance, linking ordinary people and their will to protest with the local leadership and the higher echelons outside.

Another new factor is the confusion and alarm of the Israeli people and politicians, confounded by the unexpected surfacing of an uncontrollable problem. The uprising is provoking radical questioning of the future of Israel. It is this that gives Palestinians grounds for hope: there seems a real possibility that this time they will force Israelis, their leaders and their friends internationally to face the reality of what they are doing, and accept the fact that the only way forward lies through recognition of the PLO and equal rights for the Palestinians.

*Kitty Warnock*