

Third World peoples. In the meantime, various Arab governments, in an effort to co-opt the Palestine cause, encouraged an "independent" Palestinian voice and helped in the formation of political organizations to give outer shape to the Palestinian people's aspirations or discontent. The creation of these entities, however, always remained an instrument to further the policy of the sponsoring government in the inter-Arab feuding that characterized the Arab cold war of the late Fifties and early Sixties. The Palestinians remained, in effect, unrepresented.

Concurrent with this, young Palestinian nationalists, ideologues and activists in Gaza, in Lebanon, in Kuwait and at universities round the Arab capitals, were becoming increasingly convinced that their problem was not on the verge of being solved, that they alone could hasten or bring about a solution by regaining custody of their cause from the Arab governments, the UN and the big powers.

#### Algerian model

The Algerian struggle, which they had viewed as a model, had culminated in triumph for the Algerian nationalist movement, and innumerable Palestinians were able to go to Algeria for training and support. By the late Sixties, El Fatah had already become a fact and members of its underground cells were already mounting commando attacks against Israel.

Following the defeat of the Arab armies in the June war of 1967, a vacuum occurred in the Arab world that the Palestinian movement, now emboldened above ground, came to fill. El Fatah, virtually the only viable politico-military organization at the time, was the first to do so. This was followed by other groups such as the PFLP and the PDFLP, whose political influence on radically-oriented Palestinians derived from their sophisticated ideology rather than their military or numerical significance. Marxism and Maoist tactics, hitherto alien or taboo in a generally conservative Arab world, were openly mounted by the leadership of the Popular Front for the Democratic Fronts.

Integrated under the umbrella of the PLO, with its 12-member Executive Committee, the moderate faction, as exemplified by El Fatah, remained fearful of alienating the conservative elements in Palestinian society with radical views, while the left wing proclaimed a rigorously and consistently Marxist platform dedicated to socialist revolution in the Arab world along with the struggle against Zionism in Palestine.

Since the Fifties, a debate had gone on among many of these Palestinian leaders over a common vision that would appeal to a consensus of Palestinians and yet depart from folk rhetoric, i.e. return to the cloudless summers of Palestine as it had existed before 1948 and as it had become petrified in the consciousness of the Palestinian masses. By 1968, this was articulated in the Palestine Covenant, which was passed by the Palestine National Council. It proposed, briefly, that Palestine be reunified, along with its two peoples, into a secular democratic state; that the existence of Israel as an entity carved out of Palestine exclusively for the Jews at the cost of the Palestinian Arabs was "null and void"; that the institutions, laws and ideology of Israel constituted a negation of the human and national rights of the Palestinian people. Zionist *apartheid*, the Covenant argued, must be dismantled before peace could be achieved in Palestine and the Middle East as a whole. This political platform (often criticized by some Palestinians themselves as hardly defining the movement or authoritatively formulating a set of principles to guide it once its goal was achieved) nevertheless has been undergoing a great deal of evolutionary change. Not fully discarded or officially dropped from PLO literature, the idea of a secular, democratic state in the whole of Palestine is regarded rather as "a dream" (in Yasser Arafat's speech at the UN) or a philosophical vision. The accent now in the PLO is on what is called the "national authority," a euphemism for the separate state on the West Bank and Gaza. This, Palestinian leaders feel, would be followed inevitably by political, socio-economic and ideological competition with Israel, as opposed to a purely military confrontation. Convinced that time is on their side, they contend that Israel, a type of garrison state allied to the West and existing in the heart of the Arab world, cannot endure or sustain the stress and strain of isolation from the mainstream of events around it. Sooner or later, the Israelis, the argument goes, will realize their place in the geopolitics of the region. The realization of "the secular, democratic state" will be the result of a peaceful and predictable progression of events.

#### Three phases

The evolutionary continuum in the PLO's aims and methods has seen three distinct phases. Following the guerilla movement's appearance in 1967-1968, the Palestinians seemed to concentrate on military operations across the border and resistance

*Secular  
democratic state  
proposed  
in Covenant*

*Palestinians  
contend  
Israel  
cannot endure*