

# New Jewish Agenda Convention Urges Recognition of PLO

The New Jewish Agenda (NJA) this July, in its first national convention since its founding meeting in 1980, came out strongly for a policy of mutual Israeli/Palestinian recognition and for inclusion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in peace negotiations. The resolutions represent some of the work done by some local chapters since the 1980 founding convention. Chapters are not required to implement all the resolutions passed. Rather, they are encouraged to utilize those which best assist them in carrying out their ongoing work. The national Middle East Task Force will be offering assistance to local chapters in three areas of work: lobbying, work within the Jewish community, and dialogue with Arab groups. The present strategy for work within the Jewish community is to focus on Rabbi Meir Kahane, emphasizing how the impact of occupation has developed fertile ground for his growing acceptance within Israeli society.

NJA was founded to provide an organized progressive Jewish voice within Jewish communities on issues including the Middle East, Central America, disarmament, economic and social justice and feminism. This convention, held in Ann Arbor on July 18-21, 1985, brought together some 350 members from over 40 chapters across the country.

Among the workshops organized by the NJA Middle East Task Force was one on Israel's role in the Third World. It outlined the historical relations between Is-

rael and Central America and Africa, and focused on Israel's role today as a major arms supplier. Participants agreed that Israel's relationship to the United States was a key factor here, but differed over the extent to which Israel could be seen as simply a US "proxy" in these activities.

Another Middle East workshop examined NJA's potential as an alternative Jewish voice to the reigning pro-Israeli lobby. People here emphasized the need to target issues with potential support in the larger Jewish communities. These included pressure for the US to deal directly and openly with the PLO and to recognize the Palestinian right to self-determination. While the workshop urged a clear stand against Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, most felt that an NJA position favoring a reduction in US aid to Israel around this issue would damage NJA's position within most Jewish communities.

Other Middle East workshops included a session on the current state of the Israeli peace forces, and a panel of two Jews and two Arab-Americans on the question of Jewish-Palestinian dialogue. All agreed that dialogue, while desirable, was possible only within certain distinct boundaries. Abdeen Jabara, the Detroit-based attorney and activist, felt that cooperation around issues such as housing could only happen if the core issue of Palestinian rights was also dealt with. Ismael Ahmed, an organizer and Arab community leader in Detroit, pointed out the greater

reluctance of Arabs to engage in dialogue, since they see themselves as the victims in this relationship.

The convention agreed that the organization should not restrict its activities on Middle East issues to Jewish communities alone. The major Middle East resolution urged members to support those within and outside American Jewish communities favoring a settlement based on mutual recognition and self-determination, promoting Israeli peace forces in this country, and combatting racism, ultra-nationalism, rejectionism and terrorism on all sides. Other resolutions urged educational and joint political work with Palestinians and other Arabs supporting mutual recognition.

NJA members see their organization's role as influencing mainstream Jewish opinion on these questions, yet they recognize their vulnerability to pressures from this mainstream. They see NJA as an "alternative," but still very closely tied to the mainstream. The convention resolutions represent endorsements rather than mandates. It remains to be seen how far different chapters will be ready to go, given the operative rule of "don't alienate the Jewish community."

—Deborah Ehrlich