

## Editorial

**Yasser Arafat – A Great Personality of the Twentieth Century**

Yasser Arafat, who died on November 11, 2004 at the age of 75, was one of the great personalities of the latter half of the twentieth century. In many ways he personified and embodied the struggle of the Palestinian people for national liberation against U.S.-Israeli colonial occupation. Like the Palestinian struggle, his life was a combination of heroic achievements and tragic failures.

On the occasion of his death, the U.S. and Israeli media, as well as various media outlets in Canada and other countries, have unleashed a barrage of slander against Arafat, accusing him of being the father of modern terrorism and a corrupt dictator. There is a bitter irony to these accusations considering that the U.S. and Israel have committed more acts of terrorism, political assassinations and murder of innocent civilians than any other nations or terrorist organizations in the latter half of the twentieth century.

## Commentary

**Iraqi Resistance to U.S. Occupation Deepens and Broadens**

As the U.S. continues its brutal assault on the people of Fallujah, it is beginning to appear that instead of trapping the Iraqi resistance fighters within that city it is the U.S. forces that have fallen into a trap. As soon as the Americans committed their troops to the battle for Fallujah, the resistance launched offensives against them in Mosul, Samarra and other Iraqi cities. There are also reports of numerous attacks on the rear areas of the American forces in Fallujah and the U.S. claim that it has totally “liberated” Fallujah is being disputed in many quarters. However, many of the reports coming out of Fallujah indicate that large parts of the ancient city

have been reduced to rubble and thousands of injured civilians are being left to suffer and die with no medical assistance. The hospitals in the city were among the first institutions to be “liberated” by the American forces and they have been declared off limits to Iraqi civilians.

The level of coordination and planning involved in the defence of Fallujah and the simultaneous escalation of attacks throughout the rest of the country proves that the Iraqi resistance is not a spontaneous and disorganized struggle, but a well-organized military operation. The fighting in Samarra, As during his life, in his death Arafat is being accused of being responsible for the “failure” of the Palestinian cause. This, despite the betrayal of that cause by every Arab government in the Middle East, by the former Soviet Union and various other countries of the socialist bloc, and despite the fact that the small Palestinian nation faces the armed might of the Israeli Zionist state, financed and armed to the teeth by U.S. imperialism. Facing such odds, it is difficult to conceive of how the Palestinian people can possibly win victory in the absence of a general anti-imperialist revolution throughout the Middle East.

*See page 4: Yasser Arafat*

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*See page 4: Fallujah*

## The Political Contribution of Yasser Arafat

Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), who died last week, was one of the major revolutionary figures of the past century. Since the late 1950s, he played a leading role in the struggle of the Palestinian people for national self-determination.

Much has been written about Arafat since his death. There are those who have used the occasion to try once again, unsuccessfully, to discredit Arafat in the eyes of the Palestinian people. Still others are trying to reduce him to a symbol, diminishing the role Arafat played as a revolutionary leader of his people. From his university days, Arafat dedicated himself to the struggle for Palestinian independence and nationhood.

Born in Cairo to Palestinian parents hailing from Gaza and Jerusalem, Arafat began university in Egypt right around the time of the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. The *Naqba*, (“disaster”) as Palestinians refer to it, had a profound impact on the young man, who witnessed the humiliation of the Palestinian nation and the propagation of the Zionist mythology of the day which claimed that the Palestinian people did not even exist. Arafat became active in the student movement and in Palestinian politics, becoming head of the Union of Palestinian Students at Fu’ad I University.

In 1957, living in Kuwait, Arafat founded al-Fatah, an organization dedicated to winning back Palestinian lands through armed struggle. In the 1960s, Fatah joined the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO); by the end of the decade it was the dominant group in the PLO. Barred from entering Palestine, Arafat began organizing for Fatah and the PLO within the Palestinian refugee population. He moved to Jordan, where tens of thousands of Palestinians refugees had been forced to move in 1948. An influx of thousands more arrived after Israel illegally occupied the West Bank, Sinai and Gaza Strip in 1967. Arafat organized resistance fighters from within the refugee camps, but was expelled from Jordan in 1971, after the Jordanian army failed to crush PLO organizing within Jordan.

Arafat then moved to Lebanon, where once again he organized for revolutionary struggle within the Palestinian refugee camps. His influence within the PLO grew rapidly as he pursued an anti-terrorist policy, while engaging and defeating the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in numerous battles.

By the mid-1970s, Arafat was recognized internationally as the leader of the Palestinian resistance movement. His speech to the United Nations General Assembly in 1974 marked a qualitative turning point, putting the cause of the Palestinians on the international agenda. He arrived at the UN holding a freedom

fighter’s gun in one hand and an olive branch in the other, and he boldly affirmed the right of the Palestinians to resist occupation and oppression, linking Palestinian nationhood with the other anti-colonial movements.

“Our world aspires to peace, justice, equality and freedom,” he told the UN. “It wishes that oppressed nations at present bent under the weight of imperialism might gain their freedom and their right to self determination. It hopes to place the relations between nations on a basis of equality, peaceful coexistence, mutual respect for each other’s internal affairs, secure national sovereignty, independence and territorial unity on the basis of justice and mutual benefit.”

“In addressing the General Assembly today our people proclaims its faith in the future, unencumbered either by past tragedies or present limitations. If, as we discuss the present, we enlist the past in our service, we do so only to light up our journey into the future alongside other movements of national liberation. If we return now to the historical roots of our cause we do so because present at this very moment in our midst are those, who, while they occupy our homes as their cattle graze in our pastures, and as their hands pluck the fruit of our trees, claim at the same time that we are disembodied spirits, fictions without presence, without traditions or future.”

Arafat, who had been vilified as an anti-Semite and racist, proclaimed to the UN that the Palestinian cause was neither. “Our revolution has not been motivated by racial or religious factors. Its target has never been the Jew, as a person, but racist Zionism and undisguised aggression. In this sense, ours is also a revolution for the Jew, as a human being, as well. We are struggling, so that Jews, Christians and Muslims may live in equality, enjoying the same rights and assuming the same duties, free from racial or religious discrimination. We do distinguish between Judaism and Zionism. While we maintain our opposition to the colonialist Zionist movement, we respect the Jewish faith.”

This speech echoed around the world, but still the Palestinians were unable to make any progress, trapped mainly by the stalemate imposed by the Cold War. Even Israel’s refusal to comply with any of the UN resolutions compelling it to withdraw from Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem did not result in any concrete action being taken, because the United States consistently used its veto in the UN Security Council to prevent Israel from being held accountable for its actions.

**See page 3: Arafat’s Contributions**

**November 15, 2004**

## Federation of Cuban Women Delegation in Winnipeg

Alicia González from the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) visited Winnipeg from November 10 – 13 as part of a six-city tour of Canada. Responsible for International Relations with Canada and the United States for the Federation, Alicia visited Canada in order to meet with women's organizations and solidarity groups, to acquaint them with the work of the Federation in building a new society in Cuba and to establish links with them.

The Federation of Cuban Women is the largest mass organization in Cuba, with 4 million members aged 14 and up, representing 86% of Cuban women. It is a non-governmental organization which serves as the liaison between Cuban women and the government; it is self-financed by membership dues. In existence since 1960, the FMC has played a significant role in increasing the participation of

women in all aspects of Cuban society and life, and in beginning to break down social attitudes which have held women in a inferior position. It operates an Orientation House for Women and Families in each of the 169 municipalities in Cuba and develops programs which meet the needs of women in each area. These include education, job training programs, counselling services, and health services among others.

During her stay in Winnipeg, Alicia met with several women's organizations, including those representing Aboriginal women, and spoke to university classes. She also gave a public talk on the topic, "The Role of Women in Cuban Society" which detailed the impressive advances made by Cuban women in the 44 years since the Cuban revolution.

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### ***Arafat's Contributions...from page 2***

In 1987, the first Palestinian *intifada* erupted on the streets of the Occupied Territories, with the encouragement of Arafat. The revolution of the stones, as it came to be known, was a major tactical victory for the Palestinians, as it exposed the lie of the benevolence of Israeli occupation and etched indelibly in the world's imagination the image of a stone-throwing Palestinian youth confronting an Israeli tank.

In 1988, Arafat again addressed the General Assembly, this time proclaiming Palestinian independence and offering the world a compromise – land for peace. He told the UN "We set out in the PLO to look for realistic and attainable formulas that would settle the issue on the basis of possible, rather than absolute, justice while securing the rights of our people to freedom, sovereignty, and independence; ensuring for everyone peace, security and stability and sparing Palestine and the Middle East the wars and battles that have been going on for 40 years." He spelled out a vision of a Palestinian state that would exist in the Occupied Territories, with Jerusalem as its capital. Israel's leaders ignored his overture.

Only following the uncertainties in the period immediately after the end of the Cold War did he make concessions, signing the 1993 Declaration of Principles that were to form the basis of the Oslo Accords. However, he also forced concessions from both Israel and the United States, who were forced, for the first time, to publicly commit to the right of the Palestinians to have their own state. Arafat also won

the right to lead his people from occupied Palestine; he received a hero's welcome when he returned to the West Bank in 1994, where tens of thousands lined the streets to greet him. For the next six years, Arafat fought to force the Israelis to live up to the commitments they had made during the Oslo process, but with no success.

Finally, in 2000, presented with a made-in-USA version of a Palestinian state parceled out in thin patches throughout Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Arafat said no. He walked away from the Camp David agreement and issued a searing indictment of Israel's policy of building settlements throughout the "peace" process, proclaiming that the Palestinian people would not settle for half a state.

Arafat was increasingly isolated by the Americans following his rejection of the Camp David accords. For the last three years of his life, Israel kept him a prisoner in the Palestinian Authority's compound in Ramallah, threatening numerous times to assassinate him and refusing to allow him to leave to seek medical treatment. Both Israel and the U.S. argued that Arafat no longer had any credibility with the Palestinians and was therefore not a viable partner for peace. Yet news of his death has revealed the truth behind this lie. As his body was flown back to Ramallah from the formal funeral in Cairo, thousands of Palestinians – men, women, children, youth - flooded into the compound in Ramallah to bid Arafat farewell. The chant of Palestinian mourners proves the struggle for nationhood lives on: "Arafat is the people and the people are not dead!"

### ***Fallujah...from page 1***

which the U.S. had earlier claimed to be “pacified”, also proves that U.S. “victories” are short-lived and transitory. The Iraqi resistance is using very effective guerilla tactics to pin down large numbers of American troops with relatively small numbers of Iraqi fighters. It is beginning to appear that the strategy and tactics being employed by the resistance were worked out long before the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and that the Iraqi military survived the invasion relatively intact and with large stockpiles of weapons hidden throughout the country. As in previous U.S. offensives, there are also reports that large numbers of Iraqi government soldiers and their commanders have gone over to the side of the resistance and have joined the fight against the Americans.

The developments of the past week since the U.S. began its offensive against Fallujah indicate that the U.S. position in Iraq is even more tenuous than previously suspected. The Americans have failed to deal a decisive blow to the resistance. Even if they eventually succeed in defeating the defenders of Fallujah, the Americans will not be able to occupy the city for very long, as they will require those troops to put down the fighting in Mosul, Samarra and a dozen other cities. As soon as they withdraw from Fallujah, the resistance fighters will return and retake control of the city.

Politically, the U.S. offensive in Fallujah has been a disaster for the Americans. It has not only generated enormous anger and hatred towards the U.S. throughout the Arab world, but it has also resulted in at least one “moderate” Sunni-based political party declaring that it will not participate in the elections scheduled for January 2005. This means that no Sunni-based political party will participate in the elections. In fact, it is looking very doubtful that those elections will even be held at the rate things are going; failure to hold the elections will further undermine the legitimacy of the Iraqi Interim Government and weaken the U.S. position in Iraq. In response, the U.S. will be forced to step up its offensive against the Iraqi people in a futile attempt to crush the insurgency.

The problems besetting the U.S. are not confined to Iraq. The election of a leftist government in Uruguay means that the control of Latin America by U.S. imperialism is also likely to face new challenges. Meanwhile, French President Chirac greeted the re-election of George W. Bush with a call for Europe to unite in opposition to the aggressive militarism of the

United States. With the U.S. military spread out across the globe, it is becoming increasingly likely that the Bush regime will have to reinstate the military draft in order maintain and increase its troop levels. As the Iraqi resistance continues to deepen and broaden and the U.S. sinks further into the quagmire it has created for itself, it is inevitable that the resistance to U.S. domination will escalate in the rest of the world, as well. Despite the bravado of the U.S. imperialists, these are not heady times for the American Empire.

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### ***Yasser Arafat...from page 1***

Whatever weaknesses Yasser Arafat may have had as a person or as a leader, he stood head and shoulders above any other leader in the Middle East. He consistently fought for the interests of his people and nation in the face of enormous pressure from both “friends” and foes alike that he should capitulate to imperialism. He also consistently opposed the use of terror tactics by the Palestinian movement on the basis that such tactics undermined the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause and weakened support for that cause in the rest of the world. The fact that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians openly wept at the news of Arafat’s death speaks more than words to the tremendous love and respect he earned from his people during the course of over 50 years of revolutionary struggle. Yasser Arafat will be sadly missed, not just by the Palestinian people but by all progressive people who yearn for a world free from imperialist tyranny and national oppression.

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