

Sari Nuseibeh

Successful Resistance Must Be Internalised



A call was recently made in the occupied territories for a gradual boycott of Israeli products. Spearheading the boycott is Hanna Siniora. On this subject, Al-Fajr's Maher Abukhater talked to Dr. Sari Nuseibeh, Professor of Philosophy at Bir Zeit University, on his impressions.

Q: Why do you feel this call for a boycott is being made now?

A: It is probably being made now because of the phase that the uprising has reached. At this juncture in the uprising, one might well witness a qualitative leap in the resistance, with this being partly manifested through a process of gradual "collective disengagement" from the Israeli system.

Q: This call has been made before, for example by the Palestinian Center for the Study of Non-violence and others before that, but did not receive the local and international attention it is receiving now. Why do you think it is popular now particularly with the media?

A: Once again, timing is an essential factor in evaluating almost anything. In particular, any one of different possible resistance strategies can only have the desired impact in a given context, or within a certain set of circumstances. At this particular point in time the

Palestinian masses are precisely at a level where such a call may spark positive reaction; therefore, the Israeli fear and the media interest.

Q: Some Palestinians known as nationalists, have reacted either cautiously or negatively to the call for a boycott. Although this call obviously falls within the national Palestinian guidelines and is something that these same people would do, why was there this reaction?

A: You must remember the security and legal restrictions surrounding the pronouncements and acts of Palestinians under occupation. To call for a campaign of civil disobedience is a punishable offense. In particular it makes no sense from the point of view of Palestinians involved for the punishment to be meted out before the offense. Therefore you find that many nationalist Palestinians reacted cautiously. Another point you have to take into account is groundwork and preparation. For a resistance strategy to be successful it must first be discussed and adopted by the various "power stations" in the diffuse network of the mass movement. You publicize it, or launch it publicly, after and not before the national movement has 'internalised' it. Otherwise, you simply get the publicity value without the content.

Q: Do you feel this criticism is going to hurt the boycott?

A: Much depends on the degree to which our local leadership can overcome the sensitivity involved and seize the opportunity being presented. This requires political maturity, and I am not sure that it is here in abundance. Also, speaking purely as an analyst rather than as an activist, it is possible to overcome the present hurdle by escalating the civil action being postulated, and suggesting something that has definite appeal among the masses, namely, a call to boycott the payment of taxes. A mass rally around this call can surely eliminate the basis for some of the caution and criticism expressed against Mr. Siniora.