

By Diana Johnstone

STRASBOURG, FRANCE

AS A GUEST OF THE SOCIALIST GROUP IN the European Parliament in Strasbourg in mid-September, Yassir Arafat spelled out the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) acceptance of a two-state solution to the conflict with Israel that would seem fair and desirable to most Europeans, if they paid attention or dared speak up. Arafat urged them to do their part in an international movement toward peaceful settlement of regional conflicts.

The Socialist Group, which has hosted Israeli Labor Party leader Shimon Peres several times at the European Parliament, decided to invite Arafat in an effort to promote Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. It was also a sign of impatience among European Socialists with their fellow Socialist Shimon Peres, Israel's foreign minister, for failing to take bold steps toward withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and negotiations with the PLO.

Replying to questions from his Socialist hosts (the largest group in the 12-nation Europarliament), as well as the Communist and Rainbow (Green) groups who also received him, Arafat made it clear that he seeks to negotiate a final peace settlement with Israel in the context of a United Nations-sponsored international conference, and would even agree to military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank by a United Nations peace-keeping force after a Palestinian state is established there, in order to ensure the region's security.

This made scant impression on the media herd in Strasbourg that was primed to see no "news" short of a unilateral declaration by Arafat recognizing the state of Israel. Since this could not and did not happen, there was "nothing new" for most of the media.

Starting with his official host, Europarliament Socialist Group chairman Rudi Arndt, a member of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), everyone kept asking Arafat to "recognize Israel." But by the time of the press conference, Arndt himself was tired of hearing the same thing. "I don't know what's the point of putting that question again and again," he snapped at a journalist. Arafat had said he'd extend his hand to any Israeli over a peace table, noted Arndt. "Anyone who can read understands what he means."

Arafat pointed out repeatedly that formal recognition is up to the Palestine National Council, the PLO parliament, which is scheduled to meet next month. The PNC must decide whether and how to proclaim an independent Palestinian state and provisional government. A Palestinian Declaration of Independence would solve the problem of the Palestinian Charter (which is interpreted by Israel's defenders as a dangerous threat) by superseding it.

Some things are stated, and some are not. The Israelis have a widely recognized state that is not only one of the world's foremost military powers but also (as Arafat reminded the European Socialists) a nuclear power. It is the Palestinians who are short of both a state and recognition.

Toward a just peace: Stated or not, recognition of Israel was implicit in everything Arafat said in Strasbourg, starting with his emphasis on United Nations Resolution 181 of Nov. 29, 1947, which legalized the partition of British mandate Palestine between the two states. Arafat cited former Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban to the effect that the international legitimacy of Resolution 181



EUROPE

Yassir Arafat urged members of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament to do their part in an international movement toward peaceful settlement of regional conflicts.

PLO's Yassir Arafat on the stated and unstated

was "Israel's only birth certificate."

"We respect international legitimacy," said Arafat. "At the same time, we believe that a just peace cannot be achieved through the selective application of half what international legitimacy provided for and the dumping of the other half."

"We endorse the Charter of the United Nations and all its resolutions, including 242 and 338," the PLO chairman said. Those two resolutions, passed by the Security Council following the 1967 six-day and 1973 Yom Kippur wars respectively, called for withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories they had occupied in Gaza and the West Bank and for respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of all the states in the region, as well as their rights to live in peace within safe and recognized boundaries.

This acceptance implies not only recognition of Israel, but also a Palestinian state within the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, that is, a smaller area than granted in the original 1947 partition. The precise boundaries, as well as the right of Palestinian refugees to return home, would be the main tough business of peace negotiations at the international conference. Israel itself has never defined its own boundaries.

According to Arafat, the PLO would accept a European force under international U.N. supervision to replace Israeli occupation forces in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. The international force "could stay on after the establishment of the independent Palestinian state for as long as the Security Council deems necessary to guarantee the security of everyone concerned," he said.

A call for pluralism: Implicit and unstated in Arafat's appeal to Europe was not

only recognition of Israel, the other state in the two-state solution, but also a demand for solidarity in defense of democratic pluralism against the danger of religious war.

The Palestinian state, Arafat said, "will have a republican, democratic and multi-party system; it will abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and will not discriminate among its citizens on the basis of color, race or religion." The Palestinian people, he said, have "given the world its three monotheistic religions—Judaism,

PLO leader Yassir Arafat made it clear that he seeks to negotiate a final peace settlement with Israel in the context of a United Nations-sponsored international conference.

Christianity and Islam." The people of the *Intifada*, the Palestinian people "whom I represent," said Arafat, are committed to peace based on justice. "Our heritage and culture and our Islam, Christianity and Judaism disallow hatred and repudiate aggression...open our minds to peace based on justice...."

At his news conference, Arafat greeted Israeli peace activist Abie Nathan with a friendly "*Shana Tova*," wishing Happy New Year on Rosh Hashana to Jews in Israel and throughout the world. He said he hoped Jews in Israel would choose "a year of peace."

"Peace is worth sacrifices," Arafat observed to Nathan, who risks a three-year jail sentence in Israel for interviewing the PLO leader for his radio station "Voice of Peace." Arafat again stressed that a new Palestinian state would be "the land of Jews, Christians and Moslems."

Necessarily unstated but implicit in this ecumenical emphasis was the warning that if the secular, democratic West fails to support the secular, democratic PLO as representative of the Palestinians of the *Intifada*, then leadership may slip away from the PLO into the hands of anti-democratic, anti-pluralistic, Moslem fundamentalists.

In Gaza, where the Israeli occupation is particularly hard to bear, the Movement of the Islamic Resistance, known as Hamas, is challenging the PLO leadership. Hamas opposes Arafat's bids for peace and calls for holy war against Israel. The Israeli security forces' tolerance of Hamas contrasts strangely with the arrests and crackdowns against PLO people who call for dialogue and coexistence among different religions. The *New York Times* quoted a Western diplomat who found it "remarkable," with so many people being arrested, that "someone like Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who just goes on saying the most awful things about Jews, isn't touched."

Israel's choice: Israeli security forces can be expected to favor Islamic fanatics against PLO moderates for the following reasons: the rise of Moslem extremists would split the Palestinian uprising and put Christian Palestinians in a particularly difficult position; a Moslem religious interpretation of the conflict would comfort the extremist Jewish interpretation of Israel's destiny; and Israeli leaders may secretly feel confident they can defeat a backward, irrational Islamic religious movement.

This third calculation has already been seen at work in Iran, where the U.S. for many years systematically helped suppress all the rational, secular, Westernized branches of the progressive opposition as potentially communist, leaving the field clear to supposedly harmless religious movements to channel the people's revolt.

The *Intifada* has helped free the PLO from the Arab states, and given it an historic opportunity to make peace with Israel. If this chance is missed, the next cycle of violence could be unstoppable. In Strasbourg, Arafat reminded Europeans of their responsibilities.

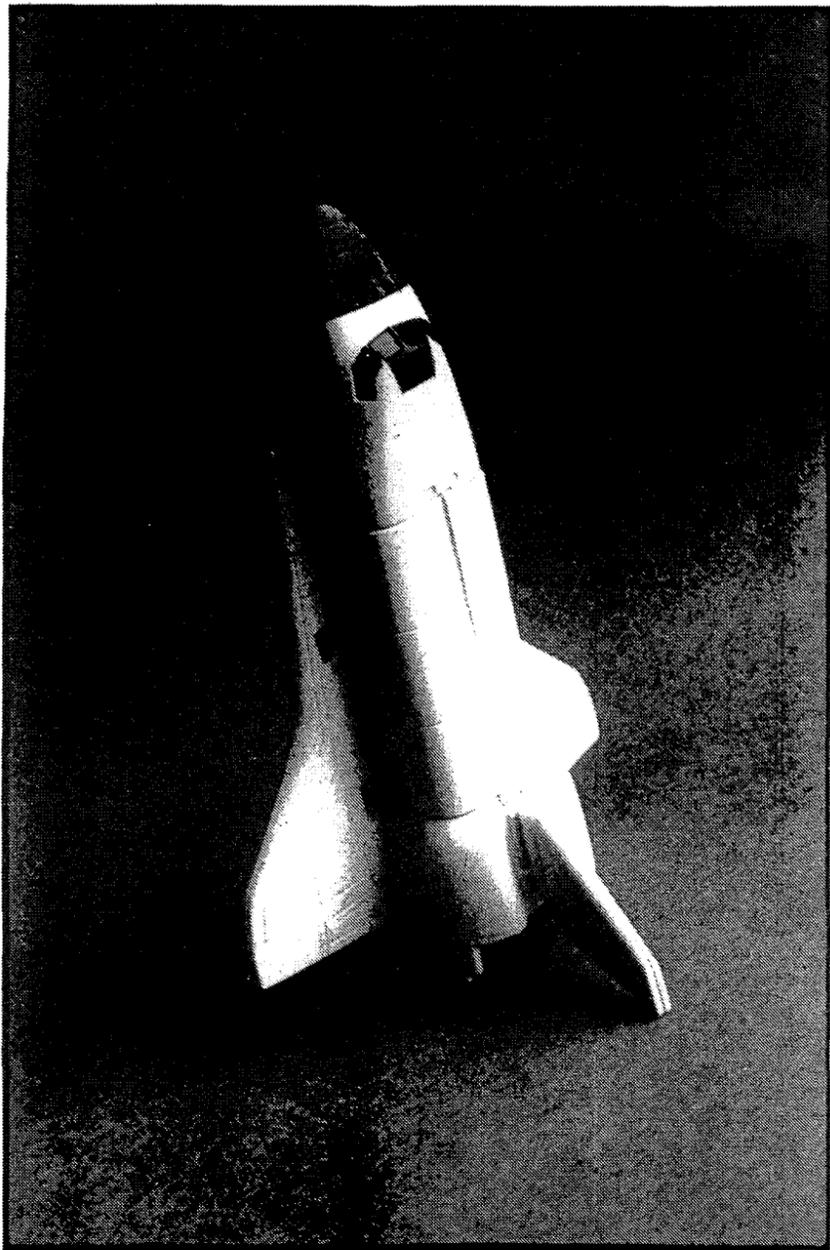
The European socialist movement, he recalled, "exerted special efforts to help set up the state of Israel." It did not cross their minds, he said, that the diplomatic solution of the problem of victims of Nazism was "at the Palestinian people's expense, in that our people have been victimized by the victim and its allies." Britain had special responsibilities, he noted, having failed to keep its mandate obligation to grant early independence to a Palestinian state.

Lamenting Europe's reluctance to shoulder its responsibilities, Arafat predicted that "freedom and peace are certainly in the offing" and invited Europe to abandon its spectator role and take part.

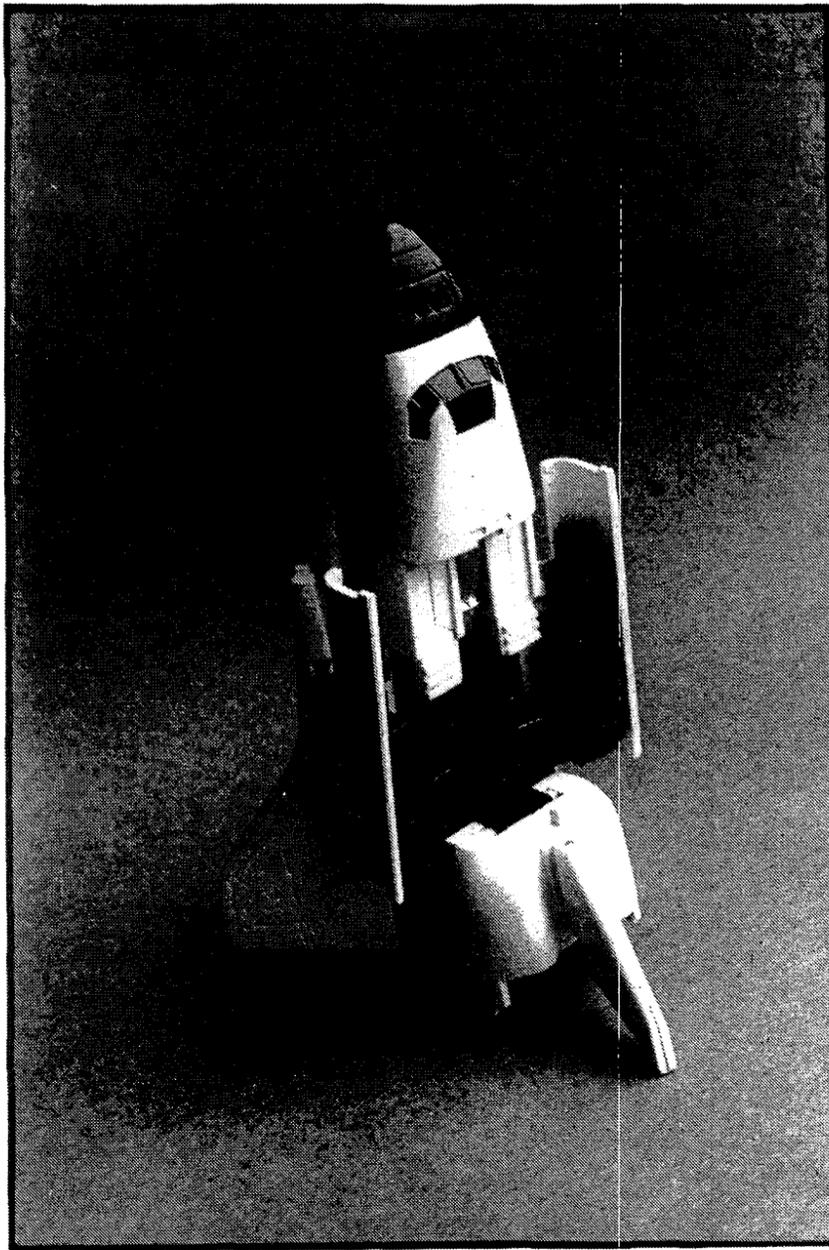
Specifically, Arafat wondered "whether Europe will recognize a provisional government. The answer will influence our decision."

The question of peace should not just be put to the PLO or to Israel but to the world as a whole, Arafat said. "This is the responsibility of the international community as a whole." □

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FLIGHTS



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By Jeremiah Creedon

AFTER MANY DELAYS IN GETTING THE SPACE shuttle Discovery off the ground it may only be a coincidence that the first shuttle flight since the Challenger accident has been scheduled to embark during the Olympics. Even so, NASA must realize this launch date poses a unique opportunity: access to a vast audience funnelled into patriotic consensus by the non-partisan appeal of sport.

Advertisers learned long ago to exploit the Olympic mood brilliantly; NASA, with its own commercial aspirations, could do so as well. A prewashed American psyche, softened to the verge of tears, may be just what a troubled space program needs to sell its whiter, brighter shuttle.

With its redesigned craft and its all-male crew, the Discovery mission is billed as America's sober, safer return to space; and yet there's concern that all the changes have created a new set of unknowns. No one can say how the ship will handle in orbit—or even on the ground, where the Discovery must escape a clouded political atmosphere thickened by the ceaseless ground chatter of public relations. If the flight succeeds, then perhaps the astronaut could be lofted again to a height in the public imagination above mere politics, back to a noble status enjoyed by only one other figure: the Olympic athlete.

But NASA may also find its fall from grace is not so easily reversed. Revamping the space shuttle may prove simpler than rebuilding an exploded myth.

Sublime propaganda: Prior to Challenger, the astronaut had served within our official mythology as the American ideal made flesh.

The media played a big role in shaping the myth, which tragically achieved its most elegant expression at the time of Challenger's end.

The Dream Is Alive, a documentary on shuttle flight, was showing at, among other places, the Science Museum in St. Paul, Minn., on the night of the accident. Narrated by Walter Cronkite, the film was meant as a tribute to the courage and technology that made NASA's program possible. The footage was stupendous, and the theater's concave screen heightened an illusion that the viewer had journeyed into space.

Just as vivid, though more complex, was the illusion of utter beauty and fulfillment surrounding the astronauts. One of them was Judith Resnick, who had died on the Challenger. On film she epitomized the perfect woman of the '80s: competent, committed handsome—a worthy companion for her

male crew mates, who epitomized the perfect man. Watching the astronauts tumble weightlessly above the blue earth suggested the films Leni Riefenstahl made of German athletes at the 1936 Olympics. However much these cinematic poems differed in what they glorified, all were examples of propaganda made sublime.

The accident, however, had turned this triumphant song to American prowess into something sad and more revealing. Overnight the documentary had become an artifact that, like any such object, was inscribed with a multitude of cultural assumptions. The film now transported the viewer through time as well as space, lifting us to a vantage beyond our historical moment.

And what one could see, looking back, was a tableau depicting America's destiny in space, as the fulfillment of an ideological vision, a "dream" of utopian capitalism that could never be realized. The astronauts played a major part in shaping this vision, but not as individuals. The deference of these perfect beings to a technocratic colossus—the state—was a tribute to the state's power, a symbolic subservience they shared with the athlete. In their playful defiance of gravity, the ultimate human triumph over nature, they were not so much people as personifications of an arrogant age—like the beautiful but nameless figures vaulting over bulls on the side of a Minoan urn.

Harnessing Eros: An age often produces a figure who personifies its greatest achievements, Leonardo Da Vinci being the common example. In our age, where the notion of genius has been challenged, a more appropriate choice might be a collective, some silicon-era beehive working on a massive project beyond any one person's com-

prehension. For decades, NASA was considered by many to be the most noble example of this group genius. The space program's success reflected a similar realignment in the country at large. America was learning to value corporate cultures more than the individuals who composed them.

An evolving American myth demanded new heroes, or rather old heroes who had been refigured. This shift was well underway within NASA when the shuttle era began in the '70s. The image of the astronaut as celestial cowboy was outmoded. The new astronaut was an idealized composite of the American character, a concept perfectly realized by the Challenger team with its mix of genders, races and professions. And where they operated—the orbiter—became the perfect workplace, a utopian arena where both sexes strove as equals on a common mission. Space flight was never to be