

Moral hypocrisy of US Congress

JUST listen to the chorus of voices coming from the American Congress insisting on imposing sanctions against China for the Tiananmen Square massacre and the ongoing brutal repression of the pro-democracy student movement there. And recall all the warnings to Pakistan in recent years not to develop nuclear weapons or else American aid is going to be withdrawn.

The moral hypocrisy of the US Congress has never been so blatant as it is today, a year and a half into the Palestinian Intifada.

For the congressional double-standard has never been more nakedly visible than it is today when the very country that gets most of America's yearly foreign aid is the very country where human and political rights are being abused in ever greater dimensions, and the very country whose policies are propelling a very dangerous nuclear and chemical arms race in the Middle East.

In Israel itself voices are being raised against their neo-fascist government, the terms "war crimes" and "civil war" can be heard, soldiers are in prison for refusing to serve in occupied Palestine, "Women in Black" demonstrate weekly on Tel Aviv street corners.

But in the American Congress no voices are raised, no sounds are heard. The cowards of Congress even allow themselves to be corralled into putting themselves on record—like the recent Senate letter signed by 95 of its members—endorsing Israeli policies!

Hostage

In essence, the great Congress of the United States is virtually the hostage of the Israeli-Jewish lobby. It's a kind of unholy alliance that exists between these two institutions, an alliance based primarily on money and fear. Congress, if you will, has allowed itself to become, in a strange way, "Israeli occupied territory."

The dance played by "the lobby" and Congress is one of "hear no evil, see no evil, we'll send you the public treasury, you send us campaign contributions." And even George Bush's recent suggestions for campaign financing reform do not seem to encompass "independent" or "ideological" PACs—Political Action Committees—of the kind that now epitomise one major facet of the "the lobby's" power.

At the end of the day the

From



Mark A. Bruzonsky

Washington

Where money means far more than principle and courage is nowhere to be found

simple reality of expediency is that most congressmen are held in check through their awareness that their reelection, never far off, is dependent on the financial largesse controlled and manipulated by this single-issue but multiple-tentacled pressure group.

Everyone calls it either the Jewish lobby or the Israeli lobby, but it's actually a combination of both with very deep roots in a corrupted American electoral system that combines big business, big money and big politics with the pocketbooks of wealthy American Jews and with the organisational network put in place by crafty Zionist agents.

The relationship that has come to exist is really a kind of legalised system of political payola. More candidly call it political bribery if you will or maybe political blackmail in some cases. Beyond that it's also a mechanism that combines bush-money with a system of political rewards and punishments that few are willing to stand up to.

And for those few congressman who might consider speaking up and facing the moral hypocrisy so evident whenever Israel is involved, there are the constantly invoked reminders of what is likely to happen to those who do. Remember, for instance, the two former chairmen of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, William Fulbright and Charles Percy; and on the House side of "the Hill" remember Pete McCloskey and Paul Findley, to name just a few of

the better known former residents of Washington.

A perfect example of today's ongoing congressional cowardice is playing itself out this very week on Capitol Hill.

Back on May 16 Congressman Howard Nielson, Republican of Utah, introduced a "Concurrent Resolution" that was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs. The very short "Sense of the House" resolution said little more than that the Israelis should allow the schools in the West Bank to open.

Half-hearted

By mid-June, working in a rather half-hearted manner, Congressman Nielson had managed to get just 13 co-sponsors, very few in a body that has over 400 members. That's when the National Association of Arab Americans, NAAA, decided to get onboard for a free ride.

NAAA latched onto the resolution like it was its own. Having done exceptionally little to dramatise the plight of the Palestinians, and needing to give the image if not the reality of serious involvement in Congress, NAAA came forward with an "Issue Brief" on the subject urging other "members of Congress to sign on to the resolution immediately and to work actively for its passage."

Listening to various NAAA spokesmen speak out on this subject, the impression given is one of serious conviction. But the reality is actually quite different.

First of all NAAA had no

thing to do with putting the resolution forward in the first place. Second of all NAAA only got involved as it did because its annual convention was coming up and the few delegates who were coming would need something to do when they visited their congressional representatives. And third of all NAAA's involvement may have hurt more than it helped.

When those attending the NAAA convention met for breakfast in an atmosphere of undue self-importance the morning they were to lobby on Capitol Hill they decided to drop all other concerns and focus exclusively on this resolution about opening the schools on the West Bank. Indeed former Congressman Pete McCloskey gave them a rousing pep talk about how important this single resolution really was because at least Congress people would have to vote "yes or no".

NAAA's involvement was, though, more an Alice in Wonderland performance than serious politics. Lacking anything else to ask their members to do it was rather cheap and easy to have them back this resolution. No one, it seemed, gave much thought to whether the endorsement of the so-called "Arab lobby" was helpful in this case or two whether a very poor showing would harm more than help the Palestinian cause.

Yes, they did manage to help round up a few more cosponsors. But in Congressman Nielson's office NAAA's involvement wasn't even welcomed, though he did agree to attend their Capitol Hill luncheon. When I pointedly asked the Congressman's senior staff person whose idea the resolution was in the first place, Ruth McCormack, about all this—specifically "Did you welcome NAAA support?" I asked—her response was quite clear—"Actually no".

Asked to elaborate McCormack pointed out that "we've been very low-key. We haven't really brought very much attention" to the resolution. "We don't want to polarise the issue."

Focal point

"It's not an anti-Israeli issue," McCormack added. "It's an education issue. We support the peace proposals that Shamir has proposed. And we feel that this is a step that will lead to an environment where elections can take place."

"This is the only thing any of the Arab groups have going for them," McCormack further confided. "There was a group of NGSs (non-governmental organisations) meeting at the UN and this became the focal point of their efforts and they were very anxious to do what they could to contact members of Congress. And I asked them not to because I didn't want to polarise this issue."

With such half-hearted and half-considered allies here in Washington, the Palestinian Revolution may have made great headway in occupied Palestine but the cause itself is being lost here in the seat of today's Empire, Washington, DC, just as it was lost in previous times in London, and before that in Constantinople.

A few days ago, as was to be expected, Congressman Nielson caved in. Though his amendment was introduced into the Congressional Record to preserve his right to raise it in committee, he bowed to behind-the-scenes pressures not even to require a "yes or no" vote after all. Indeed, it's very likely the entire resolution is just going to fade away in the next few days.

Defeated

The end result will thus be that even a minor resolution calling for nothing but the opening of Palestinian schools was miserably defeated in the same Congress of the United States where questions of political and human rights in such places as China and Russia and Nicaragua are of such grand concern. And this after the Intifada has been raging for 19 months and the Palestinians continue to suffer immensely due to American policies and money.

Congressman Nielson has not done the Palestinians any service by handling things as he has. They might very well be better off if well-meaning but misguided and cowardly friends didn't get involved at all.

And NAAA has once more proved itself to be something of a shame organisation eager to promote its own highly inflated image no matter how much organisational duplicity or political stupidity might be involved.

Those who organised the Intifada need to take the US much more seriously than they have. They cannot win their final goal unless the Washington situation is also properly analysed and a major political struggle unleashed.