

# From our Correspondents

## The American Debate Builds Up

An unprecedented foreign policy debate, which could herald an historic realignment of political forces in the US, may have major repercussions for American Middle East policies. Mark Bruzonsky reports from Washington.

Political battle lines in the US are now being drawn over two central issues: American military aid to Israel, and a role for the PLO in future peace negotiations. But, as usual, the specific issues mask deeper sentiments. For an increasing number of Americans, US complicity in Israeli terrorism in Lebanon and the occupied areas is becoming intolerable, while the PLO is now viewed by many as the legitimate expression of a Palestinian right to self-determination.

Returning from a fact-finding trip to southern Lebanon, former Attorney-General Ramsey Clark has begun a crusade to cut American military relations with Israel if Israeli policies do not change. "We ought to stop supplying Israel with all arms while these aggressions continue," Clark told

a cheering audience at the second national conference of the Palestinian Human Rights Campaign on 21 September. His ten-minute speech was given extra force by the fact that he flew from New York to make it and returned immediately afterwards. Never before has such a call come from such an establishment source.

A heated debate took place in private, last week, among members and staff of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee on the topic of military aid to Israel. A draft solution sponsored by Republican senator Mark Hatfield proposed a cut of 10% in military aid because of "Israel's continuing destruction of southern Lebanon and its policy of constructing settlements".

Speaking at the same conference as Ramsey Clark, within hours of his own return from meeting Yasser Arafat in Beirut, Southern Christian leader Joseph Lowery startled US Jews not only by endorsing Palestinian nationhood but also by declaring: "We shall stay involved in foreign policy until this nation reacts with the kind of sensitivity

that brought it into being". And to Jewish charges that Blacks are being manipulated by the PLO, Lowery replied: "I reject that racist arrogance. I deny the allegations and I defy the allegators (*sic*)."

In a reaction to this and other Black statements, rabbis throughout the USA took to their pulpits over the Rosh Hashana holiday to denounce Black efforts to legitimise the PLO. As one Maryland rabbi put it: "Jewish-Black relations have undergone a 180-degree turn in the past several weeks." Another prominent Jew added: "We'll just have to write off their support... It's probably already too late to prevent a major Jewish-Black schism."

On top of all this, the anti-war activist David Dellinger met considerable enthusiasm when he called for a new political coalition to alter US Middle East policy, "on the model of the anti-Vietnam-War coalition of a decade ago... which will reach across the borders and underneath the governments to the people of the Middle East, both the Palestinians and the Israelis. We have to include in our movement people who are unhappy and protesting." And then, breaking with traditional US peace activist practice, which condemns violence on both sides, Dellinger added: "You cannot equate the terrorism of the weak with the terrorism of the powerful Israeli army and air force."

The very fact that the conference received massive media attention, including a special 5-minute feature on the NBC Evening News last Monday, further underlines the new realities of American Middle East politics and the new political power of what has begun to be called the "Palestinian lobby". □

