

1948 Occupied Palestine

Survey of Zionist Policy

March 30th is the Day of the Land — a Palestinian national celebration created by the struggle of our masses in the part of Palestine occupied in 1948. On this day in 1976, Palestinians there mounted massive demonstrations protesting the Zionist land confiscations. This grew into an uprising and clashes with the Zionist occupation forces. Seven Palestinians were mercilessly gunned down. The Zionists acquired a new fear of the strong sense of Palestinian national identity kept alive in the midst of what they want to be a «purely Jewish state».

The first Day of the Land expressed grievances accumulated over the years since 1948, as a result of the Zionist policy of dispossessing and oppressing the Palestinians who remained in the state of 'Israel'. The Palestinian masses there have suffered the most abominable discrimination, unequal distribution of funds, restrictive construction laws despite population growth, land expropriation, inhuman demolition of homes, lack of educational facilities, and constant attempts to submerge their culture and national identity. This article surveys these Zionist policies and their effects, focusing on the recent period (1984-5).

Starving Palestinian municipalities

During the past two years, a series of strikes and protests have been organized by local and regional councils, the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, and other organizations to voice the grievances of the Palestinian population. A main focus of these protests has been the discrimination in funding for Palestinian towns and villages.

The total budget for the local authorities of the 1948 occupied area (both Jewish and Palestinian communities) was \$1.3 billion. Although Palestinians comprise 12% of the overall population, only 2.3% of the budget is allotted to services for them. On the other hand, \$400 million are collected in taxes from them every year. This means that less than 10% of what Palestinians contribute finds its way back to them. Moreover, devaluation and inflation have eroded the value of the existing budget to the extent that most local councils had 10% less cash in 1985 than in 1984.

The Zionist authorities' intentional lag in funding for Palestinian towns and cities has resulted in the accumulation of a \$10 million debt. In attempts to alleviate the economic situation and continue services, the councils have taken loans at commercial banks at high interest rates, which only aggravated the already shaky financial state. Despite this, the councils were unable to carry out development projects or even maintain the required level of services. Many public employees went without pay for up to five months. Moreover, funds are distributed unjustly, not taking into consideration population density or needs. In 1984, the budget allocated for Um al Fahm (pop. 25,000) was IS600 million, while a nearby Jewish settlement (pop. 10,000) was allocated IS1,200 million.

Needless to say, the Zionist authorities tried constantly to defuse popular indignation by stalling for time or making promises which were never fulfilled. However, due to the persistence of the Palestinians' struggle, the Zionist authorities were forced to meet some of the most pressing demands. In December, an amount of IS1 billion was supposed to be trans-

ferred to the municipalities and another \$4 million paid in installments. Despite this seeming concession on the part of the Zionist authorities, 50% of this amount will be needed to cover the most pressing debts. What remains will barely be sufficient to keep the services of local councils and municipalities functioning, let alone provide a radical solution to the existing problems. Many Palestinian villages and towns remain without electricity, proper sewage systems or drinking water. In many instances services are limited to street lighting and sanitation.

Choking construction

Out of 120 Palestinian municipal communities, only 72 have town plans approved, and even these are considered by the Zionist authorities to be outdated because of the extraordinary high population growth among the Palestinians. Another 22 have such plans at various stages of consideration, while 20 have no plans at all. Thus any Palestinian is liable to have his home categorized as illegal and consequently razed to the ground!

In one case, the village of Majd al Kurum submitted a town plan in 1965, which the Zionist authorities sat on until 1974 when they rejected it as unsuitable. Another town plan was submitted in 1978 and is yet to be approved. In another case, a villager was sentenced to one year of imprisonment and fined IS1 million «for living in an unlicensed house.»

Overall, there are court orders for the demolition of 7000 Palestinian residential buildings, 1000 of which are in the Galilee. These are to be demolished on the pretext that they are illegally constructed. The Zionist authorities consider a building illegal if it is (a) in contravention to their zoning regulations; (b) on agricultural land; (c) «too close» to highways or major crossroads; or (d) built in the wadis or on the hillsides of the central Galilee. However, in view of the increase in the Palestinian population, the net result of the Zionist restrictions on construction is that many Palestinians find themselves without adequate housing for their families. Due to sustained protest, the Zionist authorities have temporarily suspended the 7000 demolition orders, but these are not revoked and could be implemented at a later date.

Land confiscation

Historically speaking, the expropriation of land has been the most constant and systematic of Zionism's methods for dispossessing the people of Palestine, depriving them of their original means of livelihood and driving them to work in the Israeli economy. Current plans to expropriate thousands of dunums of Palestinian land are furthermore part of the Zionist