

Palestinian Women in Neve Tirza

The situation of Palestinian women political prisoners has deteriorated to the point that the Zionists can no longer maintain their media black-out on the appalling conditions. A case in point is Neve Tirza women's prison which houses thirty political prisoners, as well as Israeli common prisoners.

On June 21st, Israeli television broadcast that a fight had broken out between Israeli criminals and Palestinian 'security' (i.e. political) prisoners in Neve Tirza. Due to the incident, some of the 'security' prisoners were moved to Abu Khabir prison in Jaffa. After extensive efforts, Charlie Biton, former Knesset member and head of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, was able to get permission from the authorities to visit the Palestinian women prisoners on June 26th. He spoke with seven of them. The following is based on what these prisoners told him, as it was printed in *Al Mithaq* (Palestinian newspaper published in occupied Jerusalem).

THE FACTS OF JUNE 21

Mariam Rajoub, who works in the prison kitchen, tells what happened on June 21st: "While I was busy taking food to the other prisoners, I saw five Israeli prisoners beating a 16 year old Palestinian prisoner. I and another Palestinian prisoner, who is 17 years old, screamed for help. The guards came and locked us in our cells. We saw the guards pulling the young girl by her hair, although the administration knows that she suffers from severe headaches. She was forced into her cell, yet she continued to scream. The guards came back and carried her away by her hands and legs, and locked her in solitary confinement".

"Suddenly she stopped screaming. We were worried about her and demanded to meet with the prison director, but our demands were denied. The guards came and sprayed our cells heavily with tear gas, even though the administration knows that one prisoner in our cell suffers from asthma. She was suffocating and would have died if it hadn't been for the help of a fellow prisoner, a nurse, who gave her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Later we were allowed to find out what had happened to the young prisoner: She stopped screaming suddenly because she was injected with valium."

GENERAL HARASSMENT

The Palestinian political prisoners told about their conditions in detail, and exposed the inhuman practices used against them by the prison administration and the Israeli criminal prisoners.

At Neve Tirza, the 30 political prisoners are kept in two wards. Ward A is designated for detainees, whereas Ward B is for those who are sentenced. "But this division was only made for publicity and the media," said one prisoner. "I was sentenced and will soon be released, but I spent my sentence in the detainees' ward."

The Palestinian political prisoners demand to be separated from the Israeli common prisoners. In Neve Tirza, the Israeli prisoners are mainly those sentenced for offenses against public morals, such as prostitution and drug dealing. Their behavior is often very disgraceful and they are constantly harassing the political prisoners, with the encouragement and protection of the prison administration. In May, as soon as some of the political prisoners were released from solitary confinement, the Israeli prisoners poured boiling water on them, causing severe burns. On another occasion, the Israeli prisoners threw garbage on Palestinian prisoners. In neither case did the prison administration or guards move to stop them.

The prison administration gives priority to the Israeli prisoners in a number of matters in the daily life in the prison. The Israeli prisoners go first at the lunch break. The Palestinian prisoners always have to eat standing up, because by the time they are allowed to go eat, all the seats are taken. The Israeli prisoners also have priority at the prison canteen. When the Palestinian prisoners are finally allowed to buy things, it is usually empty except for left-overs.

DISCRIMINATION AND DEPRIVATION

Palestinian prisoners don't get decent medical treatment. Another form of discrimination occurs through language. Hebrew is not only the official language in the prison, but it is the only language used by the administration. The Palestinian prisoners boycott the prison meetings, because the administration has rejected their demand to have the proceedings translated into Arabic. All announcements and bulletins are in Hebrew. Thus, it can take months for the Palestinian prisoners to find out their contents which deal with their daily life in prison.

There are no Arabic newspapers in the prison. Palestinian prisoners have found Arabic newspapers in the garbage, which means that the administration receives them, but does not distribute them to the prisoners. Although each prisoner is entitled to have a small radio, there are only three radios between the thirty Palestinian prisoners. The administration does not allow the prisoners' families to bring them radios, but insists that these be bought from the canteen. However, months pass before the canteen has radios for sale. Moreover, the administration confiscates the Palestinian prisoners' radios for months at a time, as a form of repression.

The Palestinian prisoners do not receive the aid given them by the Red Cross and Red Crescent, such as clothes and games. The administration has kept the basketball given by the Red Cross on the pretext that they decide the time for recreation. Furthermore, the administration prevented Palestinian prisoners, who have Israeli ID's (i.e. residents of occupied Jerusalem), from receiving any form of aid from the Red Cross.

The administration gives the Palestinian prisoners the break to which they are entitled at midday, when it is extremely hot. The prisoners come out of dark rooms into a yard where there is no shade at all. Breaks thus became a form of torture. As a result, the prisoners have boycotted the breaks for months.

HUNGER STRIKE

In the face of constant repression, the Palestinian women in Neve Tirza have developed a high degree of internal solidarity and collective action. Recently, they demanded that the administration move a psychologically disturbed prisoner to a room where she could receive special help; they offered to take care of her. The administration, however, moved the disturbed prisoner into a cell with three Palestinian teenagers. The disturbed prisoner beat the young girls. The administration reacted with collective punishment against the three teenagers, putting them in solitary confinement. The rest of the political prisoners protested by going on a four-day hunger strike, June 9-12th. They demanded the immediate release of the three young girls from solitary confinement.

A Jewish holiday came one day before the Muslim holiday at the end of Ramadan. The prison administration designated only one day for the prisoners' families to bring sweets and holiday gifts. This one day 'happened' to be on the Jewish holiday, which meant it fell on the last day of the Muslim fasting, not the holiday. Thus, the Muslim prisoners were forbidden to see their families on their holiday or receive gifts.