

been all but strangled by Israeli imposed limitations on fishing grounds. These have been reduced to one sixth of their original size with daily catch reduced accordingly. Fishermen who violate the 12 mile limit risk fines, having their boats confiscated and being shot at by the Zionist forces. Yet Israeli boats fish in the forbidden areas.

The Israeli authorities' deliberate neglect of social services also contributes to poverty. Most glaring are the grossly substandard medical facilities and generally unhealthy living conditions. None of the camps, and only three towns and villages, have a sewage system. There are thus constant overflows, sometimes resulting in outbreaks of cholera. Benvenisti reported Gaza's Shifa Hospital as a scandal - patients two to a bed, mice, no X-ray machine, patients waiting up to a year for some operations, and emergency patients sent to Ashkelon bleeding, due to lack of intensive care equipment. The fact that the Israeli authorities refused to disclose the health budget for Gaza in 1985 to the WHO, is damning in itself. While before the 1967 occupation, funding to public services in the Strip was 20% of the area's gross national product, today under Israeli occupation, it is less than 10%. The result in the field of health can be deduced from indices such as the infant mortality rate which is four times higher than among Jews in 'Israel'.

THEFT

The most interesting finding in Benvenisti's report is the extent to which the Israeli authorities have actually robbed the Gaza Strip, by extracting taxes without giving commensurate services. Subtracting what the Israeli administration has expended on the Gaza population from the taxes paid by Gazans (direct taxes and income taxes paid by those working in 'Israel', plus VAT on Israeli goods paid by all), Benvenisti calculates that the Zionist state owes Gazans \$500 million for their contribution to the Israeli economy over 19 years of occupation. (One could, of course, arrive at an even larger sum if one counts the value of land confiscated and labor power exerted at substandard wages.)

A similar grand larceny has been committed against the South African masses. In a complex process of colonization stretching over three decades, the vast majority of the people were deprived of all but 13% of the country's land, i.e., relegated to the bantustans where the soil is least fertile and there are no jobs, social services or infrastructure to speak of. South African Blacks do the grueling labor in agriculture and the mines for wages averaging one-fourth those of white workers. Studies in the eighties show that the gap between Black and white wages is widening, and in places like Soweto real wages are declining markedly. In short, the African masses

have built the wealth of the country, but are deprived of political rights and basic necessities. To give just some examples: 30% of Black children are malnourished. The budget for all health care in the 10 bantustans amounts to the cost of running one white hospital in Johannesburg. The government spends almost ten times more to educate a white student than a Black. According to official figures, the infant mortality rate among Blacks is six times higher than for whites. In the Bantustans, it is higher still.

GHETTOS BESIEGED

While the Israeli and South African governments and capitalists thrive on Gaza and Soweto as labor camps, they also fear these concentrations of the oppressed. Thus, Gazans and Sowetans live under a perpetual state of siege.

It is not without reason that the racist rulers fear the masses in these two ghettos. Thousands of African youth were radicalized in the 1976 uprising in Soweto, which can correctly be termed the precursor of the current mass uprising in South Africa. Also the Gaza Strip has been a focus of resistance. Following the 1967 occupation, armed struggle reached the point that the fedayeen controlled the Strip by night, while the Israeli troops patrolled only by day. The Zionist occupation's response was a particularly brutal application of military rule. Ariel Sharon directed a counterinsurgency campaign whereby the camps in the Strip were 'rearranged'. In 1971, 3,000 shelters were destroyed to make way for wide roads to accommodate the occupiers' patrols. Thousands were removed from the most densely populated areas into 'townships' - as Soweto is also euphemistically called. This was the start of a resettlement conspiracy that continues until today; since 1971, 4,000 refugees have been evicted from Rafah. Israeli repression did not stop with the 1971 crushing of revolutionary cells, but is ongoing. This May, a number of entrances to Jabalia camp were sealed off with barbed wire, and orchard owners were ordered to uproot their trees along the main road, to prevent attacks on military patrols.

Today, Soweto is under an intense siege with the latest state of emergency, hundreds arrested and the apartheid police and army opening fire on any movement of the masses. The Gaza Strip experienced a similar siege during the spring 1982 mass uprising in occupied Palestine. A ten-day curfew was clamped on Jabalia camp. Workers returning from jobs in 'Israel' were arbitrarily beaten and arrested, as were parents who ventured out to retrieve children who had left the house. In this way, 700 men were assembled on a single day and made to pay exorbitant fines for 'violating the curfew'.

WHY GAZA FIRST?

«The whole of Gaza is becoming a labor camp for use by Israel...Gaza is a profit-making business for the Israeli

treasury,» according to Meron Benvenisti. Added to Zionism's overall expansionist aims, these statements explain the real reason for Peres' current attempt to find a separate solution for the Gaza Strip, in order to perpetuate the advantages of the status quo. This plan has previously been billed as 'autonomy first', but aware of the mass rejection of this conspiracy, the Zionists have begun shuffling their words around. The message, however, is clear. In the spring, 'Israel' named 20 so-called directors general in Gaza for administering local affairs. Commenting on this, a senior Israeli official said: «It's not Camp David. I'm not talking autonomy. It's not home rule, but instead of work being done by Israelis, it'll be done by people who are residents of the West Bank and Gaza. They will not decide policy questions. Let them improve their standard of living and the quality of their lives. We're also giving them freedom to bring in Arab money to build hospitals, schools and so forth. The better the economic situation, the less attraction to terrorism. We're not changing the structure, but only who does what» (*Boston Globe*, May 24th).

Gaza mayor Rashad Shawwa, known feudal and rightist, responded to the Israeli plan by proposing autonomy for the Strip under Arab sovereignty (Egyptian / Jordanian). The masses, however, won't swallow this. The people of the Gaza Strip understand the essence of 'autonomy' no matter what it is called, for they bore the brunt of Camp David. Though the accord included a settlement freeze, 12 of the now 18 settlements in the Strip were built after 1978. They line the southern coast close to water aquifers. Dealing another blow to Palestinian agriculture, Zionist settlers sank 35 wells, while Palestinians were forbidden to dig any. The town of Khan Younis is now boxed in by settlements. Rafah was redivided as the Israelis withdrew from the Sinai. Homes were bulldozed to create the new border; families were divided and owners separated from their orchards; commerce was totally disrupted as most people are forbidden to cross the dividing line. Swedish camp in the same area became a permanent military zone; there is nightly curfew.

Despite the extreme hardship in which they live, the Gaza masses are not likely to fall prey to the illusions which the Israeli occupiers are trying to implant in order to maintain control over the Strip, especially its work force. The rise in the number and quality of anti-occupation operations in the Strip testifies to the people's resolve to continue the struggle until genuine liberation.

Facts about the Gaza Strip are based on newspaper reports of Benvenisti's findings and issues of *Al Fajr* (English edition). Information about Soweto is drawn from the book *Freedom Rising*, written by James North and published in New York by Macmillan in 1985. ●