

Occupied Palestine

Land Day Portrait of Struggle

By the time this issue reaches you, the 11th anniversary of Land Day, on March 30th, will have passed. Throughout these eleven years, the memory of Land Day has been converted into the symbol of the dialectical relationship between the Palestinian people, their land, cause and revolution.

On Land Day, the Palestinian masses, especially those in the area of Palestine occupied in 1948, confirm their rejection of the Zionist occupation, and their adherence to the PLO and its national program. This is of particular importance now in view of the PLO's difficulties and the brutal experiences inflicted on the Palestinians in the camps in Lebanon by the Zionists' counterpart, Amal. That the masses still stand up and protest, and uphold their national traditions, despite the critical situation, strengthens conviction in the inevitability of the Palestinian revolution's victory.

The 1976 Land Day uprising was the culmination of a series of popular uprisings against the numerous attempts of the Zionist authorities to eradicate Palestinian national identity in the territories occupied in 1948. The declaration of the so-called «development of the Galilee» project precipitated the confrontation between the Zionists and the Palestinian peasants, leaving in its trail six Palestinian martyrs and scores of wounded, whose memory is forever marked by Land Day. This «development» project was a long-term plan intended to change the demographic structure of the Galilee, by setting up eight industrial settlements. With attractive economic incentives to Israeli settlers, the Zionist administration expected to convert the Galilee's Palestinian majority into a Zionist settler majority.

All through 1975-76, the Palestinians used all methods in their power to make the Zionist authorities reconsider this project which meant the confiscation of 20,000 dunums of Palestinian land and the eviction of hundreds of families. The masses' efforts culminated in the heroic confrontation of March 30th, which was a genuine expression of their adherence to their national identity and cause. Demonstrations and strikes in

the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip reciprocated this expression of unity.

As a result of the bitter struggle between the Palestinians and the Zionist authorities, the pace of this plan's implementation was reduced; the land of one Palestinian village was returned to the legal Palestinian owners. However, the occupation authorities continue to pursue their policies of land confiscation, using various ploys to evict Palestinians and demoralize them. Still, the Palestinians continue to commemorate Land Day and to struggle in the occupied territories and in exile, despite repeated sacrifices. The facts attest to their determination to struggle to this very day. As a result of this struggle, 900 Palestinians were arrested in occupied Palestine between June and August 1985, leading to problems of overcrowding in the Zionist jails. Between 1967 and 1985, 87% of Palestinian youth were arrested at least once. Curfews were imposed 3,027 times. Palestinian camps and villages were closed off 1,624 times. A total of 9,236 directives were issued for closing down shops, schools and pharmacies. A total of 13,317 homes were demolished, and 52% of the land of the West Bank has been confiscated.

1987 PREPARATIONS

Despite decades of repression, Land Day 1987 was planned and organized with undoused enthusiasm and determination. Rallies, demonstrations and strikes were organized in all areas by the Committee of the Heads of Local Arab Councils and the Committee for the Defense of the Land in the Triangle, Galilee and Naqab (Negev).

Preparing for Land Day, Palestinians from villages in the Triangle and Galilee protested the Zionist policies of racism and Judaization. The most prominent demonstration took place in Kafr Qasim, protesting the demolition

of a Palestinian home under the pretext that it was built without a permit. Palestinian nationalist figures participated in this demonstration: Tawfiq Zayyad, mayor of Nazareth, and Tawfiq Toubi (of Rakah). The citizens of Kafr Qasim helped to rebuild the demolished house, and replanted the trees that had been uprooted. In Ain Mahil, on the outskirts of Nazareth, there was a march to protest the bulldozing of the 320 dunums of land left to this village. This bulldozing is the preliminary step towards annexing this land to the nearby Zionist settlement, Upper Nazareth.

The Committee of the Heads of Local Arab Councils and the Committee for the Defense of the Land issued a statement calling on all Palestinians to adhere to the decisions for strikes and sit-ins, and to attend the planned rallies. Palestinian youth in all areas of the occupied homeland distributed handbills and painted slogans on the walls, calling on all to participate.

ZIONIST ALERT

The Zionist border police and army were mobilized in anticipation of Land Day activities. A military directive was issued ordering the closure of all West Bank and Gaza schools, universities and colleges for three days, starting March 29th, to minimize the possibility for Palestinians to gather and launch demonstrations and other nationalist activities. On the West Bank, occupation troops stormed Bir Zeit University and arrested students for interrogation. Others received warnings. Zionist military presence was reinforced in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, where border patrol units set up checkpoints on roads and at religious, nationalist and union institutions. Similar precautionary measures were taken in Nablus, Hebron (Al Khalil), Jenin, Qalqilia, Ramallah, Duheisheh and Jalazon camps, and the Jericho area.

In the Gaza Strip, the occupation forces erected additional structures on school walls, making them eight to ten meters high, with the schools looking more like detention centers. The Zionist authorities' justification was preventing school children from throwing stones at military patrols from the playground.