

Maimon's appointment. He said that 70 prisoners had presented a complaint about torture, and that the strikers' morale was high.

The progressive Israeli lawyer Lea Tsemel spoke on behalf of the Committee to Defend Prisoners, confirming that a large number of prisoners were continuing the strike, and that a strike had started in Nafha prison. Palestinian lawyer Walid Fahoum, president of the Committee of Friends of the Prisoners, spoke of the Zionist practices in Jnaid. He added that on April 11th, 140 prisoners in Ramallah prison had joined the hunger strike. The lawyer Abdul Rahman Abu Nasr spoke about Ansar II prison in Gaza, where scores of prisoners have become sick, and the minimal living conditions are absent.

Tawfiq Toubi of Rakah said that despite the authorities' attempts to impose a news black-out on the strike in the first days, the strikers were determined to continue their struggle for the sake of their lives and dignity.

ZIONIST STRIKE— BREAKING

The Zionists attempted to play down the strike and the prisoners' demands from the start. One day after the strike started, the prison administration claimed that it was a 'seasonal' strike dictated by hostile, external forces, and that the strikers had ended their fast. Maimon insisted that he would not «allow the security prisons to become a school for the fedayeen», or kneel to the prisoners' politically motivated demands. Speaking to Israeli radio, Police Minister Haim Bar Lev claimed that the prisoners had staged the strike due to disappointment at not being exchanged with the four hostages in Lebanon.

Over one week after the start of the strike, the prison administration claimed that the prisons were calm and that the prisoners were under medical supervision. It threatened that if the prisoners continued their strike, they might be deprived of all 'privileges'. The administration admitted that, upon directions from Maimon and in coordination with the police minister, steps had been taken to eliminate organiza-

tional activities in the prisons; prisoners were prohibited from moving between cells and sections of the prison. Maimon declared that he would not recognize any representatives of the prisoners.

SOLIDARITY PROTESTS

In support of the strikers, demonstrations erupted on April 2nd in the occupied West Bank. The Israeli army tried to disperse these by shooting in the air and arresting many demonstrators. Meanwhile, families of prisoners staged a sit-in at the Red Cross offices in Jerusalem, Hebron, Bethlehem and Nablus. Women's organizations called on humanitarian and juridical organizations, Arab and international, to intervene in support of the prisoners' just demands.

There were demonstrations in Balata camp near Nablus, in support of the striking prisoners. In Dura, near Hebron, the occupation forces brutally prevented students from demonstrating. In Askar camp, demonstrators stoned military vehicles and the occupation forces opened fire on them. In Beit Sahour, the people woke up to find slogans covering the walls, calling for solidarity with the striking revolutionaries and condemning the prison administration.

On April 7th, the occupation troops opened fire on demonstrators in Ramallah, injuring one person according to the Israeli military spokesman who claimed that the demonstrators had attempted to grab the pistol of an officer. Shops closed down in protest of the Zionists' atrocities against Palestinian prisoners. Students at the Polytechnical Institute in Hebron went on strike in support of the prisoners, erecting barricades and stoning military vehicles. The occupation forces threw tear gas bombs to disperse them. The Palestinian Press Office in Jerusalem reported that the Zionist forces stormed the institute, confiscating books and documents. This office also reported that Zionist settler gangs had blocked roads leading to Halhoul, and broken the windows of a number of houses in the town.

Demonstrations and sit-ins continued in support of the striking prisoners. The occupation authorities imposed curfews

on Ramallah, Tulkarem and Duheisheh camp, after the April 9th demonstrations where five persons were wounded, including one Israeli. A spokeswoman for the occupation troops said that the curfew on Ramallah was imposed after a molotov cocktail was thrown at a settler's car. Settlers opened fire on a group of youth in Ramallah. In Al Bireh, settler thugs went on a rampage, looting, breaking windows and damaging cars.

UNITY IN STRUGGLE

The prisoners ended their strike on April 13th, after some of their demands were met, and the prison administration had promised to look into the other demands. On April 16th, Maimon, who initially refused to recognize the prisoners' representatives, met with such representatives in Jnaid prison. However, according to the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, the police minister is still forbidding visits to the prisons.

The strike and the broad popular support it generated revitalized Palestinian unity in confronting the plans of the prison administration, that aimed at breaking this same unity and strength. The Zionists were counting on the fact that the great majority of prisoners today are relatively young and inexperienced, after the 1985 prisoner exchange liberated over 1,000 veteran militants. However, this strike disproved the Zionists' calculations. Palestinian prisoners showed that they are no less capable than their predecessors. The experience accumulated in the struggle against occupation is not confined to any one group. It has become part of all the Palestinian masses' struggle.

The scope of the Palestinian prisoners' confrontation against the occupation alerts all Palestinian nationalist forces to the need for upgrading support to the prisoners' struggle, and working for a broad international solidarity campaign. Such a campaign could help to pressure the Zionist authorities to back down from their fascist practices against imprisoned Palestinian militants. It would expose the Zionist propaganda which tries to gloss over the ugly picture of its occupation in the face of international public opinion. ●