

# The September Massacres

Jordan 1970 Tel Al Zatar 1976 Sabra-Shatila 1982

Since the rise of the Palestinian revolution in the late sixties, Palestinians outside their homeland have been subjected to three all-out massacres in the month of September - in Jordan 1970, Tel al Zatar 1976 and Sabra-Shatila 1982. In all three cases, the shock troops were provided by reactionary Arab forces, the Jordanian regime in 1970 and the Lebanese fascists in 1976 and 1982. In all three cases, the butchers were acting in accordance with the imperialist-Zionist master plan for imposing reactionary stability in the strategic Middle East.

What is the common quality binding the Palestinian masses in Amman with those in Tel Al Zatar and Sabra-Shatila? Why were they targeted in these inhuman attacks? Each of these massacres was linked to a major thrust to eradicate the Palestinian armed revolution. In 1970, Jordanian troops slaughtered over 10,000 Palestinians in the effort to drive the fedayeen out of Jordan. The Phalangists' siege of Tel Al Zatar, where 1,300 Palestinians were killed in the fighting and over 4,000 massacred as the camp finally fell, was the culmination of the 1975-76 Lebanese civil war. Via this war, the US-Israeli-fascist alliance hoped to liquidate the Palestinian revolution. The massacre in Sabra-Shatila was a bloody 'mopping-up' operation in the aftermath of three months of Israeli bombing and invasion, intended to wipe out the PLO. Especially the case of Sabra-Shatila, where as many as 4,000 Palestinian and poor Lebanese civilians were massacred after the departure of PLO fighters from Beirut, makes clear the enemies' intentions: Their goal was not simply snatching away the Palestinians' kashnikovs, but rather to quell the whole revolutionary process associated with the fact of the masses' carrying arms.

The rise of the Palestinian resistance, first in Jordan, and later in Lebanon and the alliance with the Lebanese National Movement, generated a new atmosphere of mass mobilization and democracy. It formed the objective basis for the spread of progressive secular ideas, so dangerous to the sectarian Israeli and Arab forces. It created a new human being armed with a revolutionary spirit - a spark that would spread throughout the Arab world, threatening not only the Zionist occupiers in Palestine, but reactionary Arab forces who rely on repression,

violence and alliance with imperialism, to keep the masses underfoot.

This revolutionary spirit among the masses engaged in revolution was beautifully captured in the poetic prose of Jean Genet, the famous French writer and defender of third world liberation causes, who died in 1986. Genet's identification with the oppressed seems to have developed instinctively from his own experience of being oppressed. Growing up deprived and separated from his parents, Genet became involved in petty crimes for which he spent long years of his life in prison where he began to write. He was finally freed as a result of a broad campaign by French intellectuals who recognized the genius contained in his plays and novels.

In an interview printed in *Le Monde* after his death, Genet related how during the French mandate in Syria, he was drafted out of a youth detention center

into the army and stationed in Damascus. Reacting against being part of the colonial army, and out of boredom, he slipped away at night to play cards with Syrian friends. They played secretly in mosques as the colonial army had forbidden cardplaying in the coffeehouses.

Later, on his own, Genet visited the Middle East several times. One time was to Jordan where he visited the Palestinian fedayeen after the 1970 September massacres. Another visit brought him to Beirut in September 1982, where he entered Shatila camp right after the Israeli-orchestrated massacre. Genet combined the impressions of these two instances when writing «Four Hours in Shatila» which was printed in the *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Spring 1983. Below we print excerpts of this to mark the September massacres.

## «Four Hours in Shatila»

No one, nothing, no narrative technique, can put into words the six months, and especially the first weeks, which the fedayeen spent in the mountains of Jerash and Ajloun in Jordan. As for relating the events, establishing the chronology, the successes and failures of the PLO, that has been done by others. The feeling in the air, the color of the sky, of the earth, of the trees, these can be told; but never the faint intoxication, the lightness of footsteps barely touching the earth, the sparkle in the eyes, the openness of relationships not only between the fedayeen but also between them and their leaders. Under the trees, everything, everyone was aquiver, laughing, filled with wonder at this life,

so new for all, and in these vibrations there was something strangely immovable, watchful, reserved, protected like someone praying. Everything belonged to everyone. Everyone was alone in himself. And perhaps not. In the end, smiling and haggard. The area in Jordan where they had withdrawn for political reasons extended from the Syrian border to Salt, and was bounded by the Jordan River and the road from Jerash to Irbid. About 60 kilometers long and 20 deep, this mountainous area was covered with holm oaks, little Jordanian villages and sparse crops. Under the trees and the camouflaged tents the fedayeen had set up combat units and emplaced light and semiheavy arms. The artillery in place, directed ►