

# From Stones to Civil Disobedience

With stones and collective action, the Palestinian people are challenging the army of one of the world's top-ranking military powers, in order to end the occupation of their country. This article evaluates the current uprising in terms of its nature, organization, methods and political perspective.

The mass uprising in occupied Palestine that started on December 8, 1987, is the culmination of years of mass struggle. Our heroic people have been engaged in mass movements since the turn of the century. There were mass revolts confronting Zionist immigration to Palestine in the 1920s. In 1936, Palestinians staged the longest general strike in history (six months), beginning a three-year rebellion against British colonialism and the Zionist invasion of Palestine. After the establishment of the Zionist state in 1948, there was a lull due to the dispersion of the Palestinian people and their lack of an independent organization. After the PLO's establishment and the rise of the armed resistance, Palestinian struggle entered a new phase. The Zionists' occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 was met by an upsurge of mass and armed struggle.

The Palestinian national liberation movement relies on two main bases of struggle: inside and outside occupied Palestine. There are objective differences between these two arenas of struggle. Due to the ferocity of the occupation, it has taken longer to develop an organized framework for the revolution inside Palestine. On the other hand, the role of the Arab governments and official politics has less impact inside Palestine. There is a high degree of militancy due to the direct, daily confrontation with the enemy, and the relative absence of the bureaucratic practices of the rightist trend in the PLO. Despite these differences, the relationship between the two bases is a complementary, dialectical one, due to the unity of the Palestinian people and their goals.

After the exodus of the PLO from Beirut in 1982, occupied Palestine took its rightful place as the main arena of confrontation. Mass activities and uprisings became a permanent feature of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in

particular. In 1987, there was a remarkable upsurge in mass action. The position of the Palestinians under occupation was a main factor mitigating for the reestablishment of Palestinian national unity in the PLO, as was achieved at the April 1987 PNC session in Algiers. Restored unity in turn spurred the masses to stage a series of demonstrations. These continued in June to mark Palestinian rejection of 20 years of occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In autumn, there were several weeks of uprising, in particular protests against US Secretary of State Schultz's visit to occupied Palestine, and the Amman Summit's neglect of the PLO. On this backdrop, confrontations with the Israeli army in early December unleashed the current uprising which has become the most sustained struggle since the 1936-39 revolt.

As of this writing in mid-March, over 140 Palestinians have given their lives to end the Zionist occupation; over 5,000 have sustained serious injury and thousands have been detained. (The divergence between Palestinian reports on the death toll and the count of 85 registered in the media is that the latter is based on deaths confirmed by the Israelis who count only those shot by their troops, while ignoring, for example, the many who have suffocated from tear gas, including a number of babies and elderly.) Though the occupiers' terror tactics have ranged from shooting to kill, breaking bones, maiming and mass arrests, to curfews, food blockades and economic sanctions, the Palestinian masses have persisted.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE UPRISING TOTAL PARTICIPATION

All classes and sectors of the Palestinian people are taking part in the uprising, if we exclude a negligible

minority of traitors, many of whom have fled to the Zionist state to escape the masses' wrath. Besides those who take to the streets to confront the Zionist troops, all are participating according to their place in society. Merchants have sustained a prolonged commercial strike despite the Zionist soldiers' attempts to force reopening. Palestinian landlords have announced that they will not collect rent for the first three months of the uprising. Trade unions are ready to make the needed repairs on houses and shops free of charge. Workers went on strike, and many are still boycotting work in 'Israel'. Students and teachers have turned schools and universities into battlegrounds for confronting the enemy. Churches as well as mosques hold funerals and services for the martyrs, which often grow into demonstrations. Christian as well as Muslim clergymen issue calls for solidarity in the uprising.

The uprising has included all age groups and both sexes. In the first month, the most visible participants were the youth armed with stones. Soon Palestinian mothers were seen in the streets, taunting the Israeli soldiers and trying to prevent the arrest of their sons. By the second month, young women participated almost equally with young men. Older women could be seen carrying loads of stones on their heads to provide ammunition to the younger. It became common to see elderly men attempting to compete with the youth in throwing stones. A look at the list of martyrs and injured makes clear the participation of all ages and sectors.

## ALL OVER PALESTINE

The current uprising differs from previous ones in its scope. All camps, villages and towns are involved. The leadership inside occupied Palestine has the ability to coordinate mass activities