

Background for the Uprising

20 Years of Dispossession, Exploitation and Brutality

The uprising in occupied Palestine has entered the fourth month with an intensity that causes political analysts to include it as a major factor in the balance of power in the region. The popular revolt has spread throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and involved the Palestinians living in the Zionist state itself. The current uprising has a dual cause: (1) the objective reality of the Zionist occupation with the political, social and economic repression it entails; (2) the subjective Palestinian factor, i.e., the structural development of the Palestinian vanguard organizations that are united in the PLO, enabling them to sustain and coordinate an advanced popular uprising. The following article focuses on the objective factor: the Israeli occupation policy against which the Palestinian people are struggling.

The Zionist occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip dates back to the 1967 war. Over the past 20 years, the occupation has altered all aspects of life for the Palestinian people living in these territories. Daily they experience social, economic and political repression. A whole generation has grown up under occupation; they also grew up parallel to the growth of the PLO, as their sole, legitimate representative and leader of the struggle for an independent Palestinian state.

THE PALESTINIAN POPULATION — DEMOGRAPHY

Before the 1967 war, there were 981,000 Palestinians living in the West Bank. Forced emigration resulting from the war reduced the number to 599,000. Since then, lack of job opportunities and political repression has caused further emigration, but this was more than balanced by natural increase. According to a 1986 estimate, there were 835,000 Palestinians in the West Bank; 542,000 in the Gaza Strip; and 125,000 in East Jerusalem.

The Palestinian population in the 1976 occupied territories is a very young one. In the West Bank, 46% are under the age of 14; in the Gaza Strip, the percentage is 48%. This means that more than half the people in the 1967 occupied territories were born under occupation. To them, any solution that entails «returning» the West Bank to Jordan, or Gaza to Egypt, is totally alien. Population forecasts show that by 1990, there will be 900,000 Palestinians in the West Bank and 600,000 in the Gaza Strip. By the year 2000, the combined population of these areas is expected to be 1,986,000.

LAND CONFISCATION

Confiscating Palestinian land has been the fulcrum of Israeli policy in the occupied land - the first step in creating settlements. Land confiscation has deformed the natural development of the Palestinian society, destroying the peasantry in order to create a reserve labor force to do degrading work in the Zionist state at substandard wages. Today 'Israel' controls 52% of the land in the West Bank and 40% in the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, 2,268,000 dunums have been confiscated by 'Israel' (41%), while another 570,000 dunums (11%) are controlled by virtue of the restrictions imposed on their use. Of the Gaza Strip's 360,500 dunums, 40% have been designated Israeli state land. Not only has the Gaza Strip's

agricultural sector been undermined by land confiscation, this has made the Strip one of the most densely populated areas in the world: 5,440 persons per square mile. In contrast, something over 2,000 Zionist settlers in 18 settlements have access to the «state land».

Recently, the pace of land confiscation slowed down. This is not, however, due to a change in Israeli occupation policy. Rather, 'Israel' has acquired sufficient land for the settlers it is able to bring to the 1967 occupied territories and for its military requirements. Only 7% of the confiscated land is designated for housing, but this can accommodate 800,000 to one million settlers, based on a gross population density of two families per dunum.

STEALING WATER

Combined with land confiscation, Israeli robbery of the water resources of the West Bank is a main factor in the decline of the Palestinians' agriculture and standard of living. The water potential of the West Bank is 600 million cubic meters per year. 'Israel' confiscates 475 million cubic meters, i.e., 80% to cover 20% of the state's annual consumption of 1,900 million cubic meters. Meanwhile, West Bankers consume 115 million cubic meters of water annually. 'Israel' overpumps the water table, exploiting it to the utmost. The Palestinians can only tap 20 million cubic meters from the water table, with their remaining consumption coming from wells and springs. Of this water, 100 million cubic meters goes to irrigation and the rest to domestic consumption. Thus, the Zionist state acquires its water needs at the expense of the West Bank, avoiding more costly solutions such as desalinization, while the Palestinian peasant has a hard time irrigating the land he has left; any expansion of cultivation is ruled out.

It is expected that by 1990, 30 Israeli agricultural settlements will have 60 million cubic meters of available water, while 400 Palestinian villages will have 100 million. Annual water consumption by the end of the decade will be 50 cubic meters per Palestinian city dweller, 25 cubic meters per Palestinian villager and 90 cubic meters per Jewish settler. (For the purpose of comparison, the annual rate of water consumption in western Europe is 83 cubic meters per person.) Approximately one million Palestinians will be consuming 136 million cubic meters, while 100,000 Jewish settlers will have 100 million cubic meters at their disposal.