

Zionist Crime Met by United Palestinian Upsurge

Early in the morning, Sunday, May 20th, an Israeli clad in army uniform accosted a group of about 50 Palestinians who had come from the occupied Gaza Strip to Rishon Letzion to wait for work. He demanded their ID cards and then opened fire with his US-supplied M16; seven Palestinians were murdered on the spot and another 11 injured. The Israeli army claimed he was deranged, but the same day Israeli soldiers were just as quick to open fire on the demonstrators protesting the massacre. Seven more Palestinians were killed, making May 20th a day that will go on record alongside scores of other Zionist crimes.

Palestinian fight-back after the massacre will also go on record but in more human terms, showing the instinctive oneness of the people of Palestine, at home and in exile, and their shared determination to regain their rights.

The media described Rishon Letzion as a Tel Aviv suburb, but this is a misnomer both historically and currently. It is one of the earliest Zionist settlements, established in the 1890s, and kept alive by the finances of French Zionist Baron Rothschild until the Zionist movement had gained sufficient imperialist backing to sustain more concerted colonization. Rishon Letzion lies where there was once a small Palestinian village called Ain Qara. Today it is a «slave market,» half-way between Tel Aviv and Gaza, one of many junctions where Palestinians wait for a day's work in Zionist enterprises.

The May 20th massacre was no chance occurrence but indicative of the double victimization to which Palestinians under occupation are subject. Forced to sell their labor power cheap to the occupier who has deprived them of other means of subsistence, they are also exposed to racist attacks which are at once systematic and arbitrary. May 20th can only be viewed as the product of 42 years of Zionist state terror and institutionalized racism. For what other reason is Palestinian life considered not only cheap, but also best done away with?

This massacre could have happened anytime, anyplace in occupied Palestine, especially in the atmosphere of right-wing extremism fostered by Shamir's government which is hell-bent on blocking the peace process, meanwhile encouraging the «transfer» trend for terrorizing Palestinians out of their homeland. It is indicative that the Kach movement said outright that it would not con-

demn the killings, for perhaps some of the Palestinians who died had once thrown stones at Jews.

The stage had been set by preceding events. The five-month sentence handed down to Rabbi Moshe Levinger, leader of Gush Emunim, on May 1st for shooting dead a Hebron shopkeeper in September 1988, can only be understood as a license to kill Palestinians. (He is the second settler to be imprisoned at all for such a crime, although at least 30 Palestinians have been killed by settlers since the uprising began.)

In the context of the Israeli political crisis, rightist MKs had been deliberately whipping up a racist atmosphere. In April, Sharon called the Palestinian Knesset members «Arafat's murderers.» Tehiya's Guela Cohen and Likud's Ovadia Eli called them «agents of Arafat» - a charge equal to high treason in Israeli circles. A little over a week before the May 20th massacre, Jewish graves were desecrated in Haifa, and an attempt made to have it look like an act by Palestinians; incidentally, the same week a Palestinian cultural event opened in the city. Moledet party leader Ze'evi immediately advocated that Arabs who do such deeds be expelled, although a Jewish citizen of Israel was almost immediately apprehended for the crime.

Though Israel's friends had been tooting the lower death tolls in the occupied territories this year, as compared to 1988-89, Zionist repression has not let up, but continues to be tightened in the ongoing effort to strangle the

intifada. On the other hand, the media had busily picked up Israeli statements about the intifada «receding,» but this was not the case either. Though without media attention, the masses of the intifada have all along been steadily engaging in their militant routine of the past two and a half years - throwing stones and molotovs against the occupation troops; organizing protests, strikes and boycotts; and consolidating community organization, social services and self-reliance.

On May 28th, the Foreign Press Association, representing over 200 foreign correspondents working in Israel, protested the restrictions on their coverage of the situation in the territories after the Rishon Letzion massacre, due to widespread curfews and closure orders. In fact, curfews and closures have been the order of the day all spring. The Gaza Strip was either declared a closed area or totally curfewed for at least ten days in the preceding two months. In addition, there was a two week maritime siege on the coast after two political prisoners escaped from Ansar II in late April; this affected the livelihood of over 1,000 Palestinian fishermen. Beit Furik, in the West Bank, was under curfew and/or military siege or closure orders throughout March and April, with the population subject to arrests, beatings, collective punishment, tax raids and confiscation of property at the hands of the notorious Golani Brigade in concert with the regular army. In the village of Anabta, a long curfew was imposed to cover the Golani