

universities is also part of the attack on the people's welfare and outlook for the future, and intends to lead them to despair. While Hebron and Bethlehem Universities have been allowed to reopen, these two benefit only a quarter of all the university students in the occupied territories. Moreover, three senior classes have graduated since the closures started in 1987, without the chance to enroll in higher education (*Al Fajr*, June 10th).

The failure of economic warfare to sap the intifada in the short run was clearly seen in the rise of militancy as the wartime curfew was lifted. The war of knives resumed and escalated; petrol bombs against Israeli targets are a daily affair; and the use of firearms has increased. Recently, it was reported on Israeli television that there were 53 gunfire or grenade attacks on Israeli targets from January to June this year, as opposed to 33 in the same months last year. There have been several armed attacks on soldiers and settlers in the West Bank, but the Gaza Strip became the real focus of the recent escalation. On July 1st, an Israeli soldier was shot and injured in Bureij camp. In the second week of July, PFLP militants operating in the Strip carried out three attacks on Zionist settlers and military targets, using firearms. In one of these operations, near Khan Younis, an Israeli officer, responsible for security in the South of the Strip, was seriously injured. The next week, PFLP militants attacked the military governor's headquarters in Rafah with hand grenades, injuring at least five Israeli personnel.

The problem remains, though, that neither courageous acts nor daily mass protests, even when well-planned and executed, can by themselves bring an immediate halt to the most formidable threats to the intifada's future – massive immigration, settlement – building and Israeli government intransigence. What can erode these phenomena in the long run is the steady empowerment of the people and construction of firm, popularly – oriented, alternative social and economic structures. This would enable radical escalation of the intifada until the Israeli polity sees that the occupied territories are ungovernable. The first two years of the intifada made substantive gains in this direction, but few comparable gains have been registered since. In some fields, hard-won ground was lost as is most apparent in the functioning of the various popular committees. Besides arrests, organizational factionalism and attacks on women have retarded the work of

these committees, which are the key element in attaining real independence from the occupation's structures on a daily basis. The problem, in a nutshell, is that the intifada has lost the initiative. The current discussions reassessing the course of the intifada must focus on how it can regain its dynamics.

## Test balloon for «autonomy»

The real danger of Israel's economic warfare on the occupied territories is that it is a ground – breaker for injecting political conspiracies, with the occupation authorities banking on exploiting internal problems in the intifada. Into the pool of popular desperation they hope to have created, the Israeli authorities have begun throwing their bait – softening some economic restrictions, with a distinct class bias. For example, they have granted more operating permits to Palestinian entrepreneurs per month recently than they normally do in a whole year; these entrepreneurs will enjoy tax exemptions for three years – a real departure from usual occupation policy (*The Other Israel*, May – June).

In this context, one understands why the occupation authorities allowed and

even encouraged Chamber of Commerce elections in Hebron in June, for the first time since the 1967 occupation. This was a trial balloon for «free elections» under occupation, with an eye for conducting municipal elections in a way that would usher in «autonomy.» It is surely not by chance that Hebron was chosen – the only district of the West Bank where the Israeli government could hope for an Islamic victory to detract from the people's united adherence to the PLO. In the elections, all candidates were screened by the occupation forces; the Islamic list won six seats, while the pro – PLO bloc attained four; one independent was elected. The PFLP and DFLP both issued statements condemning these elections, and the explosion of two petrol bombs near the polling station attested to Palestinian opposition to the political aims of such «exercises in democracy.»

In call no. 71, the UNL had called on the masses to confront the occupation's attempts to make use of suspicious personages in Chamber of Commerce elections. It stipulated that such elections should be held according to a national decision and under national supervision. Notably, the Gaza Chamber of

