

Zionist Robbery and Brutality in the West Bank

by Hyman Lumer

(The following is based on one of a series of articles appearing in the Daily World.)

The confiscation of Arab lands by the Israeli authorities for settlement by Jews is by no means confined to Israel itself; it has been taking place even more extensively in the occupied territories. Despite hypocritical declarations to the contrary, it has long been crystal clear that the Israeli rulers have no intention of returning these territories but seek to annex them permanently to achieve the Zionist goal of a Jewish state including all of Palestine.

This aim is to be attained chiefly through a process of "accomplished facts," that is, by honeycombing these territories with Jewish settlements and by driving out as much of the Arab population as possible, thus changing their demographic composition to the point where the process becomes irreversible. (It should be noted that more than 200,000 Arabs fled the West Bank in 1967 and that only some 14,000 have been permitted to return.)

It began by surrounding East Jerusalem with an extensive complex of apartment houses and other buildings (all occupied by Jews) so that this area has been effectively isolated from the rest of the West Bank and has come to be known as "Fortress Jerusalem."

This has been accompanied by the building of settlements

throughout the occupied territories. Today these Jewish settlements number about 55, situated along the Jordan River and in other parts of the West Bank, at Sharm el-Sheikh, in the Golan Heights, in the Gaza Strip and in adjacent areas of Sinai. And there are plans for the construction of many more settlements. In the Golan Heights a ten-year plan of construction of an urban center surrounded by a group of agricultural communities is under way. In the West Bank plans are being projected for a similar ten-year program of construction between Jerusalem and Ramallah.

Along with these "legal" occupations of Arab land, illegal incursions have been undertaken by groups of ultra-Right or religious fanatics. Such a group, for example, established a squatters' settlement called Kiryat Arba on the outskirts of Hebron despite Arab protests. Subsequently this action was legalized by the Israeli government. Last year an ultra-Right group known as Gush Emunim attempted similarly to settle in the town of Sebastia; however, they were removed by the occupation forces, though not to Israel but to a nearby police camp.

At the same time, the Israeli government has authorized land purchases on the West Bank both by official agencies and private individuals. As of April 12, according to *The New York Times*, the Israeli Land Authority and the Jewish National Fund had purchased some \$6.6 million worth of real estate. These purchases had been carried out in secret, although they had been publicly known for some time.

The confiscation of Arab land for Jewish settlement has involved in a number of cases the brutal eviction of the Arab inhabitants. Especially outrageous is the case of Pithat Rafiah, an area in the Sinai adjacent to the Gaza Strip. Here 1500 families were forcibly evacuated from their homes and some 33,000 acres of land belonging to them was fenced in. Their houses, wells, crops and orchards were destroyed. When this action first came to light, the excuse given by the government was "security." But subsequently the land was opened to Jewish settlement. A seaport, Yamit, is being built as the urban center of the area, to be surrounded by six kibbutzim and nine villages.

Needless to say, all such settlements are open only to Jews. Furthermore, according to *New York Times* correspondent Terence Smith (November 13, 1975): "The new settlements are on those portions of the occupied Arab territory that Israeli leaders frankly admit that they intend to keep and eventually incorporate into Israel. 'Look at the chain of settlements on a map,' Israel officials say privately, 'and you will see what we intend to be the future borders of Israel.'" And the map shows that precious little, at best, is to be left to the Arabs. Indeed, as in Israel, the purpose is to break up the major concentrations of Arab population and to reduce them to enclaves surrounded by Jewish communities provided with modern living conditions while the Arab population remains at a comparatively backward economic level and serves as a source of cheap labor. Again one is reminded of the racist South African apartheid system.

Accompanying this wholesale robbery is the subjection of the people of these territories to the most brutal repression. The territories are governed not under the Geneva Conventions but under the infamous British Emergency Regulations which are greatly in violation of these Conventions. There is large-scale resort to administrative arrest--without charges, with no trial and for an indefinite period. The use of torture is widespread. Collective punishment, including the destruction of houses in which someone is suspected of harboring "terrorists" and the imposition of endless 24-hour a day curfews. Hundreds of leading figures have been forcibly and illegally deported. All political activity and organization is forbidden (other than local administrative activities). And so on. The aim, clearly, is to stifle all resistance to the occupation and to the process of annexation.

Such is the background of the current rebellion of the West Bank Arabs. But the background also has another side. The past few years have witnessed the recognition of the Palestinian question as the central issue in the Middle East conflict and the emergence of the PLO as the almost universally acknowledged representative of the Palestinian people. In the West Bank a Palestinian National Front has been formed, affiliated to the PLO, and the Palestinian Communist Party, formerly part of the Jordanian party, has been established as a separate organization. These, as well as other organizations which are making their appearance, are of course illegal, and numbers of their members have been subjected to administrative arrest. But a growing organized base of opposition exists, with which the Israeli occupation authorities are increasingly compelled to reckon.

A rash of mass protests against the occupation has developed, which the Israeli occupation authorities have met with growing violence and brutality. The first of these was a huge demonstration in Nablus last December, in protest against the efforts of the Gush Emunim to settle in nearby Sebastia. There followed, at the end of January, mass demonstrations in Jerusalem, touched off by an Israeli court ruling permitting Jewish religious services on the grounds of the al Aqsa mosque. Though the immediate impulse was religious, the demonstrations were basically political, and they were followed by a wave of actions in Jerusalem and other cities which have continued up to the present.

The Israeli occupation troops have countered these with police clubs, fire hoses, tear gas and bullets, even firing directly into unarmed masses of people. Many, including schoolchildren, were brutally beaten, dragged away by the hair and otherwise brutalized. A number were killed, many more were wounded, and large numbers were thrown into prison. Detailed accounts of these events appear elsewhere in the pages of the *Daily World*.

What is noteworthy is that the occupation authorities have not succeeded in containing the rebellion despite the mounting brutality. It has delivered a serious setback to the Zionist plans for the West Bank and to schemes for a deal with Hussein and the Israeli government's stooges in the local West Bank governments.

These schemes were dealt a further sharp blow by the smashing defeat of these stooges in the local elections which have just taken place. Of 191 councilmen elected, only 43 of the stooges were holdovers. In 10 of 24 towns, new and more radical and militant mayors were elected. The Communist Party showed considerable gains and the elections, in sum, showed the PLO to be a potent political force in the West Bank.

All these developments further exposed the racist character of Zionism. They have greatly enhanced the fight for liberation of the occupied territories and for the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

But none of these possibilities can be realized without the sharpest protests and demands for an end to such policies both from the Jewish people of Israel and this country. And such protests are being increasingly heard. Especially notable is an open letter to Israel from the New York organization Breira, signed by such leading figures as Rabbi Joachim Prinz, Chairman of the World Council of Jewish Organizations; David Tulin, Chairman of the Philadelphia Zionist Federations; Rabbi Max Ticktin, Assistant National Director of B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations; and Rabbi Balfour Brickner, Director, Department of Interreligious Affairs, Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

They call for a scrapping of the present Galilee program and substitution of a program of development on government lands for the benefit of the whole people. They call also for legalizing non-violent political assembly of the Palestinian Arabs in the occupied territories. And they call for an expression of willingness by the Israeli government to negotiate a peace settlement including the creation of a Palestinian state side by side with Israel, and for an end to establishing Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

Another important development was the appearance in *The New York Times* of April 4 of an ad sponsored by several peace organizations including the Committee for a Just Peace in the Middle East, and calling for a program including, among other things, mutual recognition of the right of self-determination of both the Israeli and Palestinian Arab peoples, inclusion of the PLO in negotiations and the early convening of the Geneva peace conference.

No doubt such expressions will grow, and the opportunity exists for the building of a broad movement in this country to end the present policies of expansion, aggression and violence of the Israeli ruling circles, as well as the support to such policies by Washington. An aroused people can bring about real peace and friendship in the Middle East, and an end to racist brutality and repression.

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