

# DAY OF THE LAND

We are now approaching the sixth anniversary of the Day of the Land. This national day was forged by the struggle and blood of our masses, specifically the Palestinians living under occupation since 1948. On March 30, 1976, they rose up in a massive demonstration against the Zionist efforts to confiscate and Judaize a major portion of the Galilee.

At its roots, the conflict in our area is not a question of territory, but a struggle between pro- and anti-imperialist forces. Yet in the case of Palestine and its surrounding areas, land has always been decisive due to the settler-colonial nature of Zionism and, on the other hand, the essentially agrarian-based nature of Palestinian society. It is not a question of semantics when the Israeli

government insists that 'autonomy' applies to the people and not the land. Permanent sovereignty over Palestinian and other Arab land is crucial for the success of the Zionist project. Without occupied land, there would be no Zionist state, and without confiscated land, there is no socio-economic base for this state's viability.

For our Palestinian people, loss of land has meant loss of recognized nationhood as well as loss of livelihood. It is not surprising that Palestinians everywhere have rallied behind the struggle of our masses in the Galilee, for their resistance to expropriation represents a national cause. Land is an issue that unites all our people with the exception of those few who have succumbed to the pressure of occupation by becoming colla-

borators, or the limited strata of exiles who have benefited from the wave of petrodollars in some Arab countries.

For Palestinians under occupation, land represents economic and national survival, the alternative being emigration or wage labor in Zionist institutions, building the very structures that destroy their own society. For Palestinian refugees, liberating the land represents the possibility not only of return to the homeland, but of building a new and better life for future generations.

Land represents a past, present and future dimension of our struggle. The Day of the Land is marked by the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in awareness that they share the fate of our people in the Zionist state, and that only united struggle can reverse this fate. The day is also celebrated by Palestinian communities all over the world, reaffirming determination to liberate the land in order to build a just democratic society.

## CONFERENCE IN ACCA

On February 27th, a conference was held in Acca to discuss the land and housing problems facing Palestinians living within the borders of the Zionist state. This event was arranged by the Committee for the Defense of Arab Land, Rakah and the Regional Committee for Local Mayors. The gathering of these forces was in itself an accomplishment, for a month of Zionist harassment had preceded the meeting. Organizers were interrogated by the authorities, such as in the case of Saliba Khamis, secretary of the Regional Committee for the Defense of Arab Land, who was warned not to create any unrest after she spoke at a preparatory meeting in Sakhnin.

An immediate task of the Acca conference was to plan for the Day of the Land. The participants in the conference set a goal to have the largest participation ever in this year's demonstration; the route for the march was planned from Sakhnin to Araba to Deir Hanaa.

A major topic for discussion at the conference was the situation of Palestinians in the towns of the Galilee; these towns are grossly overcrowded as the population has grown while Zionist expropriations have greatly restricted the land available for building. At present, there are roughly 65,000 Palestinians in urban areas that need new homes, because their present housing is cramped or has deteriorated. Not only has the Israeli government made no effort to improve their conditions, Zionist policy

actually prevents them from moving into new quarters. The situation is becoming more and more acute in Acca itself, due to the Israeli plan now being implemented whereby Arab citizens are being expelled to make room for incoming Jewish families. Current Zionist efforts go under the heading of a new "Law of Reform", which is actually part of the renewed surge to Judaize the Galilee. The conference also addressed the housing and land problems confronting the

masses in the Naqab and other areas of 1948 occupied Palestine.

Speakers pointed out that solutions for housing and land problems are inextricably linked to resolving the Palestinian question as such, and the Acca conference took political stands on current issues. The Israeli annexation of the Golan was condemned as was the closure of Bir Zeit University. The conference saluted the PLO and also extended a special greeting to the representative of Bir Zeit University who was in attendance.

*Palestinian homes deteriorate in Jaffa, while next door Tel-Aviv builds for Jews alone. About 20,000 Palestinians remain in Jaffa, concentrated in AlAjami quarter where one-third of the houses are unfit.*



# CURRENT ZIONIST SETTLEMENT POLICY

For the Zionist movement, settlements have been a major means for controlling the land. Every Israeli town was founded by settlers, and settlements are still seen as the key to development – consolidating the annexation of the Golan and the *de facto* annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, merging these occupied areas into 'Greater Israel', whose boundaries have yet to be delineated.

On this anniversary of the Day of the Land, it is relevant to take stock of the current Zionist settlement policy. Our purpose is twofold:

1. to give greater insight into the conditions under which our masses in occupied Palestine are struggling
2. to contribute to an analysis of the direction which Zionist policy is taking in this period when the Egyptian-Israeli treaty is being finalized without even the pretense of resolving the Palestinian issue.

This article does not pretend to be comprehensive in the sense of recording all instances of land confiscation or every single settlement announced by the enemy. Nor can we cover in detail what the presence of settlers means for our people in terms of harassment, depletion of water resources, etc. Rather we will concentrate on three trends which are indicative of current Zionist settlement policy:

1. sandwiching the 'green line'
2. the increased role of private enterprise
3. the Zionist reaction to 'peace' on the Egyptian front

## The Sandwich Master Plan

Perhaps the most telling aspect of the past year's Zionist settlement activities is what has been termed 'sandwiching the green line'. This refers to the intensive efforts, started in the spring of 1981, to establish settlements on both sides of the dividing line between the 1948 occupied lands ('Israel' proper) and the West Bank, literally squeezing this boundary out of existence. This is the physical implementation of the Zionist annexationist policy as it was verbalized by Israeli Chief of Staff, General Eitan:

*We should no longer talk of the 'green line'. It has been erased... Since the Six Day War the whole of Eretz Yisrael is ours. But we must set up many many more settlements in Judea and Samaria.*<sup>1</sup>

The aims of sandwiching were set out more specifically by the head of the Jewish

National Fund's Land Development Authority, Haim Tzaban, who is also deputy to the Executive of the Jewish Agency's Settlement Department:

– *The prevention of continued growth of Arab villages.*

– *The establishment of a clear dividing line between the Arab villages on both sides of the green line.*

– *Putting an end to isolation of Jewish settlements established in the north of the West Bank.*



Gaza – fenced off for settlement.

– *The creation of opportunities for young Jewish couples to improve their standard of living and condition by moving from dense and over-populated outlying areas of Tel Aviv... to areas located only tens of kilometers away and where the land is ten-fold cheaper.*<sup>2</sup>

A major target of sandwiching has been the land between Wadi 'Ara (in the 1948 occupied territories) and Jenin (the main town in the northern West Bank). Here seven new settlements have been established. Three – Harish, Katzir and Givat Oz-B – are inside the 'green line'. Four are beyond – Hinanit, Shaked, Mevo Dotan and Mei Ami – situated in the midst of the Palestinian villages of Barta'a, Ya'bad, 'Araqa, Yamun

and Birqin. Most of these settlements are still under construction with only a limited number of settlers living in temporary housing, like the *mitspe* (watchtower) settlements in the Galilee, but all are charted for expansion. The 1982-3 budget of the Jewish Agency's Settlement Department, as announced on Israeli radio in February of this year, provides for 10 more projected settlements and specifies the Wadi 'Ara area as an area of concentration. Actually these new settlements comprise part of the Reihan bloc – in all 10 settlements spanning the 'green line'.

Concurrent with this settlement drive is drastic infringement on Palestinian pasture

land. The Jewish National Fund has fenced off land and initiated car patrols around the Wadi 'Ara area settlements to prevent the neighboring villagers from grazing their sheep. In 1978, the Fund established a Pasture Authority to control what is considered state lands, i.e. blocking Palestinian access to what has long been communal grazing land.<sup>3</sup> As an integral part of the campaign to Judaize the Galilee, this authority had, by August 1981, laid down 650 kms of fence, preparing 250,000 dunums to serve some 80 settlements; 100,000 more dunums are under development. These pastures can be used to reinforce the 47 *mitspe* set up in the Galilee in the two years prior to the last Israeli elections, at which time they were recogni-

zed by the government as official settlements so that the settlers could vote. Since then new settlements planned for expansion have been founded in the Galilee, such as Jeninit near Um al Fahem in June, and Yublim between Sakhnin and Tamra, where work started in September.

*Settlements before law*

Farther south, the Palestinians of the Tulkarem, Qalqilya and Ramallah areas have also been affected by sandwiching. The following sequences show quite clearly how Zionist military control of the occupied territories enables the settlement drive to surge forward, bypassing all legality, even that of Israeli courts.

In early April, Zionist settlers uprooted citrus trees and vegetables in the Qalqilya

area. Later in the month, a cornerstone was laid for a new colony on Qarnin mountain, to be part of a network. By the end of April, Palestinian landowners had obtained an order from the Israeli High Court of Justice, stopping work on Qalqilya lands, i.e. the construction of a street to a new settlement under the pretext of 'public purpose'. As pointed out by the progressive Israeli lawyer, Felicia Langer, the real reason was to add to Karnei Shomrom settlement bloc. A month later, settlement activities had been resumed despite the court order.

In late July, Israeli surveyors entered Beit Amin, south of Qalqilya, claiming that the land had been purchased from local residents. The landowners disputed this and stopped their work. Later Beit Amin was put under curfew, the village mukhtar arrested

and the residents warned by the Military Government not to interfere with surveyors. The landowners took ownership documents to the Nablus court, reversing the illegal sale of their land to an Israeli company through documents forged by a middleman. They then appealed to the Israeli High Court of Justice. However, several of the owners who appealed were detained by the Israeli authorities, and in early October surveyors and bulldozers were at work on the land, despite the fact that the High Court decision was still pending.

In September, residents of the Tulkarem and Ramallah areas found Israeli bulldozers on their land; hundreds of dunums had been sold without their knowledge to the Israeli Bartu and Hamnuta companies, both affiliates of the Jewish National Fund. Through





Swimming pool at a settlement in the Jordan Valley.

legal procedures, some of the landowners were able to prove that this land was theirs and they had not sold it. This has slowed some of the settlement activities at least for a time, but the area continues to be targeted for expropriations, especially due to its proximity to the "green line". On August 17, the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* reported that a new settlement Yehudit will soon be begun west of Ramallah, straddling the 'green line'.

It is to be noted that the shady land deals to which the Zionists have resorted in the above-mentioned cases are not an exception, but one of the standard devices used for confiscation. Such deals have broader political implications as well, for a number of the middlemen who have been exposed are also associated with the treacherous village leagues. Moreover, such outright corruption is institutionalized. For example, in May a group of Al Khalil and Jerusalem area lawyers demanded the dismissal of the chairman of the Israeli land case appeals committee when it was discovered that he was also the lawyer for Ma'ale Adumin settlement, east of Jerusalem.

The apex of the Sandwich Master Plan, whereby settlement blocs in the West Bank are engineered so as to merge with metropolitan areas in 'Israel', is seen in Jerusalem — already annexed and encircled by settlements in the form of suburbs and highrise apartments, displacing Palestinian presence not only in the city itself, but in the entire area.

#### Trans-Samaritan Highway

Crucial to the merger is the Trans-Samaritan Highway, planned to link Zionist

settlements from Tel Aviv to Patzael in the Jordan Valley. This road cuts close to five Palestinian villages in the West Bank and will be flanked by at least six settlements: Tapuah, Elkana, Barkan, Ariel (planned as a city for 50,000), Ma'ale Ephraim (planned for 20,000) and Emmanuel (initially planned for 6,000 housing units, but now projected as the largest residential settlement in the West Bank).

In September, the Jewish National Fund organized a tour for journalists to view the 51 kms completed. (17 more are planned.) On this occasion, Uri Baron, settlement aide to Defense Minister Sharon, pronounced:

*It is the most important road facing the Eastern front and will ease the mobility of our troops.*<sup>4</sup>

Besides having military purposes, the highway will facilitate Zionist exploitation of West Bank land and products. Agricultural produce for export can be at Lod airport in one-third the previous time. Moreover, the road will help in attracting more settlers to the West Bank, as it will link them with the Zionist economic and social centers along the coast and is paralleled by water, electricity and telephone lines to serve the settlements and those Palestinian villages forced into the Israeli electric grid.

#### Making colonization profitable

Sandwiching is actually one prong in the new strategy announced by the Israeli Minister of Agriculture this autumn. According to the ministry spokesman, this plan is not to rely on the 'ultra-nationalists' (Gush Emunim, Tehiya, Likud), but on the Israeli population at large. In reality, this does not

denote any real shift in which group the government relies on. Rather it reflects the consolidation of the right wing on the Israeli political scene and the degree of hegemony which its thinking exercises in the Israeli society as a whole. A September poll showed that over half the Israeli public favors unlimited settlement in the West Bank. Those who are not necessarily ideologically motivated to go to new settlements can be drawn by economic incentives, especially in view of the housing crisis in the metropolitan areas along the coast. The slogan of the new strategy is "Build (or buy) Your Own House," while the government takes responsibility for providing land and infrastructure. This denotes the increased reliance on private enterprise, which characterizes the Likud government.

To see just how this scheme works, we can look at the Judea and Samaria land settlement company, where Avner Erlich, urban planner and one of the leaders of the Entire Land of Israel Movement, is a prominent stockholder. In the Shaarei Tikva settlement, under construction near Kufr Qasim, the J&S Co. owns a 700 dunum area; over half if not all is bought from Palestinians in shady deals through middlemen at an average of US \$750 per dunum. As of October, 700 plots had been sold to settlers for prices ranging from \$1500-2600. While the company is getting up to three times what it paid for the land, the settler has acquired the plot at a price much lower than real estate in Israeli urban areas. Moreover, plans are approved for construction companies to build villas on these plots, which are ample for two such homes; the settler can live in one and sell the other at a profit. Obviously the real loser is the Palestinian who has been forced or swindled into selling at below market prices.

Prior to the Israeli elections, thousands of dunums were allocated in the "Build Your Own Home" program in connection with the settlements of Elkana and Kiryat Arba as well as the Jerusalem area. According to the WZO Settlement Department, 1870 homes were built in the West Bank in the spring and summer, and more are under construction. Another settlement being built in this way is Kochav Yair, named after terrorist leader Yair Stern and located in the Little Triangle between Qalqilya and Taiyiba, an area heavily populated by Palestinians. The original plan was a *mitspe* for a five family core from the Beitar Movement, but now 1500 dunums will be used for constructing 1400 housing units, mainly luxury apartments and villas. It is envisioned as a residential community linked to the employment opportunities of

Tel Aviv. Tzaban of the Jewish National Fund explains how this enlarged version of the settlement is to be populated:

*Hundreds of immigrant families from South Africa have expressed their interest in settling here and many young Israeli couples...*<sup>5</sup>

Private initiative is not limited to West Bank settlement. In August, the government established a private committee to supervise Judaization of the Galilee. This was the result of agreement between the Defense Ministry and Chief Economic Coordinator Meridor, shipping magnate and big capital's foremost representative in the cabinet.

Likud's policy has significantly increased the role of private enterprise in the settlement business. Yet it would be a mistake to view this as contradictory to Labor's colonial policy which has relied almost totally on the state and state-related institutions. While the Labor-controlled United Kibbutz Movement announced its intention in October to set up 16 settlements in the West Bank in the next five years, the construction company Solel Boneh, owned by the Labor-controlled Histadrut, is actively involved in the "Build Your Own Home" business. In Ariel, its subsidiary, Diur, has built and sold 100 cottages and there are 80 more coming up. Here and in other settlements, private and government-related companies work side by side. The point is that the realities of Zionist colonization are changing; the pioneer venture once heralded in Zionist propaganda is obsolete; for one, it is simply inadequate to fulfill the expansionist ambitions of a state which has acquired a strong capitalist base; moreover, the potential settlers of today have other expectations, and

*Resident of Tel al Milh area stands by his citrus orchard.*



'Israel' desperately needs to make immigration and settlement attractive. All trends within Zionism are responding to these needs.

#### Zionist 'peace' = more settlement

*If there's going to be a partition of the West Bank in the future, (Israel's share) will depend on what is being done there...*

*This is a historic era that has seen peace with Egypt... people wonder... whether it will always remain a peaceful neighbor, and therefore I think Israel has to be realistic and build along the border in the Negev in order to have people living there to have viable settlements...*

*So I consider that we are back almost in the pre-state era of land again, and that it is taking on a significant role in the shaping of Israel's future to come... I see new appreciation of the fact that the Jewish National Fund is again the rallying point for world Jewry in the development of the state...*<sup>6</sup>

*— Charlotte Jacobsen, chairman of the American section of the World Zionist Organization and new president of the Jewish National Fund.*

The separate peace signed between Sadat and Begin was a major step towards legitimizing and consolidating the Zionist entity in our area. The above quotation clearly expresses the fact that for the Zionist movement, the process of seeking conciliation with the Arab regimes makes control over land even more significant. Zionist actions since Camp David have amply confirmed this: more settlements and more repression against our masses under occupation, forthright annexation of all Jerusalem and the Golan, more attacks on Lebanon and other

Arab states. Thus, Camp David has meant more pressure on the Palestinian Revolution and on all patriotic forces and regimes in the area. In terms of the issue of land and settlement, let us look at some of the consequences for our masses in occupied Palestine.

#### The Naqab (Negev)

The bedouin of the Naqab are perhaps those most directly affected by the Zionist thrust to control more land to replace what they feel to be losing by withdrawing from the Sinai. The 1980 Naqab Land Acquisition Law enabled the Zionist state to grab 96,000 dunums for new airports (some are military bases) and ruled out the possibility of appeal. Since then the bedouin have become a more noticeable militant force struggling to retain their land and livelihood in the face of forcible eviction at the hands of the Israeli Green Patrol, which destroys tents and dwellings, uproots crops and confiscates the herds of the bedouin to be sold and slaughtered. This struggle has continued this past year, and one of the focal points has been the area of Tel al Milh, designated as a site for one of the new airports, whereby 6,000 bedouin will lose their land. In May Israeli bulldozers leveled land near Tel al Milh and destroyed crops. When the bedouin tried to stop this, the driver shot at them; Israeli soldiers arrived and arrested seven of the protestors. Ibrahim Abu Kush, who was detained for two days after this incident, was interviewed by *Al Fajr* shortly after. He pointed out that 96,000 dunums is a greatly oversized area even in terms of the largest airports and went on to say: "We object to this scheme which is going to take over our land, and to contain us in dormitory camps which do not have any source of work. We will be transformed from independent farmers into servants of the Jewish market... refugees in our own country." With these words, Abu Kush aptly expresses the situation of our people all over the occupied land. In the Naqab as elsewhere, land taken from Palestinians for whatever stated purpose is used for Jewish settlements. As of January, Israeli sources reported that over 20 new settlements are underway in the Western Naqab to replace those in the Sinai. In early March, Israeli radio reported that Begin had approved the immediate erection of new settlements in the West Bank to replace those in Sinai.

#### The Gaza Strip

Also under direct pressure as a result of Zionist reaction to withdrawal are our masses in the Gaza Strip, who are to be con-



Shepherd passing a Zionist patrol in Rafah.

fronted by new settlements to serve as a barrier between Gaza and the Sinai. According to Israeli sources in October, six such colonies will be built. At present the situation in Rafah (on the border between the Strip and Egypt) is particularly acute: Hundreds of homes are in the process of being demolished, their residents evicted and cultivated areas destroyed, as the Israelis build a security belt through the town. However, in late February, Israeli radio reported that the bulldozers had stopped work due to unrest in the town. The Rafah municipality has issued a strong condemnation of the Israeli actions and pointed out that the current problems are related to the Palestinian issue as such, i.e. the right to self-determination and an independent state. Townships in the West Bank, such as Ramallah, have affirmed their solidarity with our people in Gaza.

The entire issue of Israeli withdrawal from the final portion of the Sinai serves as a rich lesson as to how the Zionist entity reacts to the 'peace' process. It is to be

noted that those settlers who are resisting withdrawal are not so much concerned with retaining their homes as with political aims. The driving force behind the Stop the Withdrawal Movement is parties and groups who opposed Camp David from the start, because they oppose any territorial concession *per se*. Many do not even live in Yamit but have come from other areas of the occupied land. The government, on the other hand, is fully cognizant that 'Israel' is gaining much more from Camp David than it can lose in the Sinai. Yet it is handling the 'rebellious' settlers with kid gloves for two reasons: first, because they are not rebels, but an important force needed in enacting Likud's settlement policy generally; second, their resistance to withdrawal is a valuable card which Begin holds over the Egyptian regime, pressuring it into more concessions with the threat that there will be no withdrawal.

The handling of the Yamit issue has also served as one more illustration that Begin's settlement policy is far removed from fur-

thering the welfare of Jews, as is claimed. This was underscored in January when the Israeli Black Panthers led a demonstration through the slum quarters of Tel Aviv, protesting the discrepancy between the rich compensation given to Yamit settlers and the insufficient welfare provided to the poor. These same sectors, mainly Oriental Jews, are also economically precluded from access to the luxury housing projects which the government is promoting on the West Bank.

It is clear that the thrust of Zionist settlement policy is heading towards outright annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In terms of land, approximately 27% of the total West Bank area of 5.5 million dunums has been confiscated for potential settlement, military or other use. (This excludes the part of Jerusalem annexed in 1967.) Moreover, Palestinians have been excluded from using another 11% by the military order of last summer which deprived the municipalities of the right to grant building permits. To this picture must be added the Zionist economic policy of subordinating the '67 occupied territories to the needs of the Israeli economy and the new judicial measures (opening an Israeli court and more recently a police station in the West Bank for the settlers).

What is happening in these areas today is a repetition of the fate of the territory occupied by the Zionist army in 1948. Then as now, Zionist settlement has only become a reality due to imperialist backing, help which is extended for reasons of economic and geopolitical control. This control is only possible on the basis of an expanded, consolidated state with a strong capital base. Though it is often cloaked under an ideology of religious mysticism, Zionist settlement policy is actually fulfilling this need for imperialism.

1 *Jewish Week*, September 20, 1981

2 *Ha'aretz*, August 20, 1981

3 This is most often land owned and/or cultivated by Palestinians. Under military order 59 of 1969, the Israeli state has the right to declare any plot government land. Responsibility rests with the owner to prove the contrary. From July 80-81 alone, 36,000 dunums were taken for settlements in the West Bank under this order. For a more comprehensive treatment of the question of state land, see the article by Janet Abu-Lughod in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42.

4 *Al Fajr*, September 13-19, 1981.

5 *Ha'aretz*, August 20, 1981.

6 *Jewish Week*, January 31, 1982.

The specific information in this article but not footnoted is mainly drawn from the past year's weekly editions of the English *Al Fajr*.

1 dunum = one fourth acre.