

## **Article by Peter Hadden from February 1988 analysing the first Intifada.**

### **Palestinian youth revolt**

- 7.1. The occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank are in open revolt against Israeli rule. Starting with one incident – the running down of four Palestinians by an Israeli army vehicle – the fighting has spread from Gaza to the West Bank to Jerusalem.
- 7.2. Apart from the rioting, two general strikes have been called, the second continuing as we go to press. Solidarity strike action has been taken by the 750,000 Arabs living within Israel's pre-1967 boundaries and support has been echoed by demonstrators in Egypt and other Arab states.
- 7.3. This is the most extensive movement of the Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank since these areas were annexed by Israel in 1967 and the biggest movement of the Palestinian people as a whole since the six-month general strike and three year uprising against British rule between 1936–39.
- 7.4. While the youth of the occupied territories have resisted with barricades and stones, the right-wing led coalition government in Israel has replied with brute repression – arrests, deportations, tear gas rolled in canisters from army vehicles, rubber bullets and lead bullets. There have been reports of Israeli army snipers positioned to pick out and murder identified targets during rioting. And still, despite these methods, and despite, to date 38 deaths, the revolt has not been contained. Israel has been forced to commit three times as many troops to the task of holding down the people of Gaza as were involved in capturing this area in 1967.

### **Causes of upheaval**

- 7.5. This upheaval may have been triggered by one incident but it is the underlying problems of poverty and repression which are the real cause. Repression is no new phenomenon. An estimated 200,000 Palestinians have passed through Israeli jails since 1967. Half of the students of the West Bank's leading university, Bir Zeit, are already graduates of prison.
- 7.7. These territories, particularly Gaza, are the Israeli equivalent of South Africa's bantustans. Of Gaza's half million population over 400,000 are refugees, many living in camps which lack proper housing or amenities. Every day 100,000 Palestinians cross into Israel to provide cheap labour. They receive no social security benefits and the only return these areas see for their taxes is in the form of Israeli soldiers.
- 7.8. When the right-wing Likud came to power in 1977 it stepped up its policy of settlement of Gaza and the West Bank by Jews, switching resources from the development of the Negev region to the detriment of those Jews who had been encouraged to settle there. So extensive has been this policy of annexation by settlement that 36% of the available land in Gaza has been given to 2,500 settlers ,

while 50% of the West Bank is either for military use or in the hands of 65,000 settlers.

- 7.9. Add to all this the extreme youthfulness of the Palestinian population, 60% of Gazans are under 20 years of age and the real causes of the discontent and the revolt are established. The historical roots of this conflict lie first in the divide and rule policies by which British imperialism maintained their grip on Palestine, and second in the creation of the Israeli state in 1948. Israel's foundation led to the expulsion of some 900,000 Palestinians to the West Bank, Gaza and surrounding Arab states. In the main these people and their descendants remain today as refugees.
- 7.10. On the other side the Israeli state has been consolidated. Its population was quickly swollen by an influx of Jews fleeing persecution in Europe and by Jews driven out in reprisals from Arab states. Iraq for example expelled the greater part of its Jewish population. Within three years of its birth the population of Israel had doubled. After almost 40 years these people, their descendants and the immigrants who came after, see Israel as their home and have nowhere else to go.
- 7.11. Today, the destruction of Israel and the creation of an even bigger Jewish refugee problem is no answer to give to the problems of homeless and stateless Palestinians. So there is no capitalist answer, only more instability and worsening conflict. The present situation is intolerable for the Arabs and untenable in the long term for the Jews. The promised land of milk and honey has not materialised. Instead the Israeli state is a state under permanent siege, the youth are forced to take to arms, military expenditure eats up 20% of GNP, and its survival depends on hand outs from US imperialism.
- 7.12. Israel is surrounded by 100 million Arabs. Its 3.5 million Jews co-exist within Israel with 750,000 Arabs and directly rule a further 1.5 million in the occupied territories. By the end of this century the Jews will be in a minority within the post-1967 state.

### **Choices of regime**

- 7.13. To contain the situation the regime has to choose from the cleft stick of concession or repression. Rule by repression points towards a South African scenario of virtual apartheid with all the explosive consequences. But there is a limit to the concessions they can grant. They cannot withdraw from the occupied areas and allow the establishment of genuinely independent Palestinian state. They fear this would be a radical state, that it would radicalise the Arab population, within Israel and be used as a base for PLO attacks.
- 7.14. Ultimately they will be driven more and more to military methods, continuing the pattern of the past 40 years and of the current disorder. Nor is there a capitalist way out for the Palestinians. The policy of the PLO majority, particularly of Arafat, of wheeling and dealing with the reactionary Arab regimes and attempting to court the major imperialist powers has been and will be a recipe for disorder.

- 7.15. Arafat's proposals to resolve the present crisis show how out of touch he is from the real demands and aspirations of the Palestinian youth. In an interview with Newsweek (January 14th) he states: "In my opinion the only way, if our friends (*sic*) will help us, is for the occupied territories to be under UN control for a certain period of time, until we arrive at a final comprehensive solution by the international conference or by any means." Arafat's recent statements also represent a turn-about on the part of the PLO majority in that they now explicitly recognise the existence of Israel.
- 7.16. His proposals are a thousand light years away from reality. The dis-United Nations will no more solve the problem of Gaza or the West Bank than they have achieved peace in Lebanon. The conference he proposes is between the Israelis, the leaders of Arab states, such as Jordan, and the PLO, with imperialism breathing down the necks of all participants of course.
- 7.17. This could not bring a solution. As already stated the Israelis would not tolerate a genuinely independent Palestinian state in the occupied areas. Not would Jordan or Egypt, both of whom fear the development of proletarian bonapartism, i.e. wholesale nationalisation of the economy, as in Syria. Neither Egypt or Jordan wishes to have direct control over the areas. In the case of Jordan the Palestinians would become the majority of the population and would threaten the regime. Joint control would be unworkable in the long run. It would be the problems of the Anglo-Irish Agreement magnified one hundred fold.

## Survey

- 7.18. In any case none of these options would satisfy the aspirations of the Palestinian youth. A survey carried out in the occupied territories and published last year in the Arab magazine, Al Fazr, gave the following responses. Less than 40% favoured Jordanian or Egyptian rule. Only 17% favoured a state based solely in Gaza and the West Bank while 78% were for a state comprising the whole of what is now Israel.
- 7.19. Rule by Jordan or Egypt would mean swapping one oppressor for another. Arafat's 'friend' Hussein in Jordan was responsible for butchering between 10,000–17,000 Palestinians between 1970–71. Egypt formerly ruled the Gaza strip and did nothing to improve conditions in the camps. Significantly the Egyptian government has recently banned demonstrations of solidarity with Gazans and West Bankers among its Palestinian refugee population in camps in Sinai.
- 7.20. A state comprising of the existing occupied territories is seen as unviable. So long as poverty and oppression remain the lot of the Palestinians, so long will they retain the aspiration of their own homeland.
- 7.21. Only on a socialist basis can the conflicting aspirations of Arab and Jew be solved and a democratic settlement be reached. The only answer is the setting up of a socialist federation of the Middle East. This would allow the development of the

economy of the region and lead to the ending of poverty which is endemic under this system.

- 7.22. A socialist federation would recognise the right of the Jews to retain their own state but cater also for the right of any minority within it. It would also acknowledge the historic right of the Palestinians to a homeland. A certain redrawing of boundaries to this could be achieved. It may be that many Palestinians with their lot improved in the areas where they now live and, in most cases, have always lived, would prefer to remain where they are.
- 7.23. On a capitalist basis such a settlement is impossible, but because socialism offers the development of production and of rising living standards, and involves no coercion, the problem could be democratically resolved.
- 7.24. Capitalist diplomacy by the PLO has led the Palestinians into a blind alley. Despite the heroism of their fighters they have suffered persecution and defeat. Likewise, the methods of individual terrorism practised at various times by all the main groups within the PLO, has proved disastrous. It has reinforced the siege mentality within Israel, driving Jews behind the Likud and provoking retaliation. Similarly with the Arab states, it was the hi-jacking of three planes in 1970 which provided Hussein with the justification to launch his military offensive against the Palestinian camps.
- 7.25.** Instinctively the youth of Gaza and the West Bank have now turned to other and better methods. The mass protests and strikes have shaken the Israeli state to a degree which 25 years of PLO terrorism has failed to do. The way forward for the Palestinians is to work out a socialist programme and socialist perspective. Such a programme could be the basis of an appeal to the Jewish working class in Israel, attempting to convince them that their future lies in a joint struggle with the Arab workers, not in supporting their own exploiters. It would also allow the Palestinians to appeal directly to the discontented masses in Egypt, Jordan and other Arab states, thereby accelerating the process of revolution in these countries.

### **Marxist leadership**

- 7.26. What is necessary is the building of a Marxist leadership among the Palestinians so that a programme and strategy can be put forward. In this way the Palestinians could act as the vanguard of the socialist revolution in the entire region.
- 7.27. But there are dangers if such a leadership is not built. There are similarities between what is taking place in this area now and events in Northern Ireland in 1968–69. Then a tremendous opportunity existed to develop a mass united socialist movement. However, because no leadership existed capable of directing events in such a direction, the anger of the Catholic youth instead turned into the blind alleys of individual terrorism and nationalism. It is possible, in the absence of a class leadership, that the ideas of Islamic fundamentalism and support for new terror campaigns against Israel could gain an echo in the Palestinian camps.

- 7.28. Already there are signs that discontent with the moderate PLO leadership is turning a section of the youth to such ideas. Should organisations like the Islamic Jihad gain a firm base it would represent a set back for the socialist movement and would be a hugely complicating factor in the situation.
- 7.29. The choice is stark. Either the Palestinian masses will carry forward the struggle they have started by developing a socialist leadership or else events will ultimately take a turn towards a worsening Arab-Jewish conflict from which both the Arab and Jewish working classes will be the losers.