

West Bank erupts after killing of Palestinian workers

Our Correspondent
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Clashes erupted between Palestinians and Israeli occupation forces throughout the West Bank Wednesday in response to the cold-blooded killing of three Arab workers the day before.

In Hebron, near where the killings took place, scores of protesting Palestinians were wounded by Israeli troops firing rubber bullets. At least a dozen more were wounded in the nearby town of Dura, where thousands of angry residents joined a funeral procession for the murdered workers.

The killings took place at approximately 5:45 p.m. on Tuesday, as Palestinian workers returning from jobs inside Israel passed through a roadblock on the road to Hebron. Witnesses said that after an Israeli paratrooper waved through a white van crowded with workers another soldier demanded that it stop and then opened fire on the vehicle, with at least two other soldiers joining in the fusillade. According to witnesses, the van had already come to a stop when the shooting began. One of the victims was riddled with ten bullets.

The dead workers were identified as Ghaleb Rajoub, Mohammed Sharowna, and Adnan Abu Zneid. Five other workers were wounded, at least one of them seriously.

Initially, the Israeli government issued a statement claiming that the van had driven rapidly into the roadblock, striking one of the soldiers, and that the troops had fired on it in self-defense. Later, however, senior officers admitted that the incident did not justify the shooting, and the *Jerusalem Post* quoted unnamed security officials as saying that the story of a soldier being hit had been fabricated to cover up the unprovoked killings.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu telephoned Yassir Arafat, president of the Palestine Authority, late Tuesday to express his condolences over

the incident, while the Israeli parliament also expressed its regrets at the opening of its Wednesday session. While Arafat denounced the killings and Palestinian authorities supported the call for a strike, there were clear indications that they were cooperating with Israel in attempting to prevent the killings from provoking a full-scale uprising. Arafat assured Netanyahu that he would pass his condolences on to the families of the murdered workers, while the Israeli chief of staff, Amnon Shahak, spoke with PLO Executive member Mahmoud Abbas over how to contain the situation.

On the eve of the shootings, Netanyahu had indicated that he and Arafat might soon resume talks, deadlocked for over a year, on an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. The failure of the Israelis to carry through interim agreements on issues such as the redeployment of occupation troops has generated growing Palestinian disaffection with the so-called peace process.

It was a similar incident at a roadblock in Gaza in December 1987 which provoked the *intifada*, or Palestinian uprising, which swept the occupied territories. The killings near Hebron have only underscored how little has changed since then. For the masses of Palestinian workers the creation of the PLO-run administration in Gaza and the West Bank has failed to in any way ameliorate conditions of political repression and economic deprivation.



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