

The expulsion of the Palestinians and the origins of Land Day

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The following article was submitted by World Socialist Web Site correspondent David Merhav

Protests to mark Palestinian Land Day take place on March 29 and 30.

On February 20, 1976, the Israeli government headed by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin expropriated 30,000 dunams (one dunam = 95.408 square yards, or a quarter of an acre) of the lands of Dir Hana, Sakhnin and Arabee villages in the Galilee (northern Israel). It marked another stage in the Zionist campaign to drive the Palestinians from their land. The Zionist forces had expelled many Palestinian families and clans during the 1948 war in order to change the demographic composition of Palestine and establish a state with a clear Jewish majority. But many Palestinians refused to leave their land and country.

In 1945 in the territory that Zionist forces took over there were 368 Arab villages with 4,310,536 dunams of land. After the establishing of the Israeli state only 88 Arab villages remained with 1,236,000 dunams of land. In 1963 the Arab population had only 799,139 dunams of land, with just 385,993 dunams intended for agriculture. The aim of the Israeli government was very clear: “Judaisation of the Galilee and the Negev”, that is, clear northern and southern Israel of its Palestinian population.

In October 1975, the official monthly publication of the Agriculture Ministry published the following statement: “The main problem of the Galilee is the minority position of the Jewish population with respect to the majority non-Jewish population.... there is a need to change the present situation in the demographic field.” The new expropriation plan included more than 20 thousand dunams in the Galilee and more than a million and a half dunams in the Negev. The victims were the Palestinian Arabs and Bedouin peasants.

The Arabic National Committee for the Defense of the Lands (ANCDL) decided to call a general strike on March 30, 1976 to protest against the government’s policy. *Haaretz* daily newspaper reported on March 21, “police reinforcements will be sent to Nazareth in order to respond to any action that will take place in the city”. The Workers

Council of Haifa—the local council of the Histadrut Zionist trade union federation in the city—decided that if the Arab building’ workers struck, Histadrut would not back them against their employers. On March 19, 1976, the ANCDL with the National Committee of the Arab Local Municipal Councils (ALMC) appealed to the Israeli press and the Zionist left in order to prevent the army from entering the Arab villages. “We believe that the real interest of the state of Israel with all its citizens, Jews and Arabs, is totally opposed to the current policy of the government of expropriating and evicting Palestinian citizens from their lands. The land that still remains in Arabs ownership is not enough to meet the basic needs for survival....”

On March 27, 1976, Rabin met the police minister, Shlomo Hillel, together with representatives of the general security services, and decided that the army, the police and the border guard would suppress the strike by any and all means. On the evening before the strike, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) invaded the village of Arabee in the Galilee. Properties were burned to the ground and protestors attacked with CS gas. Many people were wounded and arrested. The IDF then moved on to the city of Sakhnin and the village of Dir Hana.

Aibrahim Muasi, a Palestinian Arab peasant, spoke to a *World Socialist Web Site* correspondent of his experiences that day: “I was an 18-year-old pupil who had finished his studying. I remember how an IDF helicopter landed in our school’s yard. The pupils were trying to run away to their homes, but the security forces saw it as a massive demonstration. Everyone, including me, was beaten by the soldiers. I spent the night in a prison and following a trial I was fined 3,000 pounds.”

On the morning of the strike in Nazareth, the IDF set siege to the city. People were beaten on the streets and IDF forces went to the house of the mayor, Tufik Ziad, and threatened to kill him. They beat his mother, his wife and his nine year-old daughter. The Palestinian people in the occupied territories—the West Bank and Gaza Strip—decided to strike in solidarity action with their brothers. In Jerusalem, the police beat Jewish students demonstrating in front of the

prime minister's residence. In Tel Aviv, the Communist Party (CP) held a small protest rally against the invasion of Arab villages. The CP was the main force in organising the strike. The result was terrible. Six Palestinian Arabs, citizens of Israel, were killed by the IDF and many more were injured.

The Palestinian Arab population makes up more than 20 percent of Israel's population. Today, Israeli law prevents Arab citizens from buying land owned by the state, which constitutes 85 percent of all Israeli land. For example, the city of Sakhnin—the largest Arab city after Nazareth—has been prevented from increasing its municipal territory since 1948, although the population has grown dramatically. The Land Day is not only a protest against Israel's land policy, but against all forms of discrimination against Arab workers, students and youth.

W, an Arab student from the University of Haifa, told the *World Socialist Web Site*: “When I graduated from university, I was trying to enter governmental companies. I was one of the best students in my field—management and engineering—but I knew very well that Jewish students would be given preference just because they have different ethnic origins.”

N, an Arab student from Tel Aviv University, said: “I am living in a village in the Galilee with my family. My dream was to have an academic education. My parents have been encouraging me to learn and let them be proud of me. I tried to get residence in the city of Tel Aviv, after the university rejected my application to live in the students' residence. I was trying for months to secure an apartment in Tel Aviv, but time after time I was rejected because of one thing: on my identity card, under the definition 'nationality', it is written 'Arab'. It was enough for them to mark me as disqualified from renting an apartment.”

Aibrahim Muasi told the *World Socialist Web Site*: “One of our main problems is the national project of the road which will cross Israel. This road will be built on the lands of Baqa El-Garbiyee village, in order to ensure that it is the Arabs who will suffer from problems such as the lack of clean air, noise, and the destruction of lands intended for agriculture. Thousands of dunams of land are being expropriated. The broader aim of the road project across Israel is to evict more and more Arabs in order to “clean” the Galilee and the region of the “triangle” (a group of Arab villages near Tel Aviv) of Palestinian Arabs.”

The Jewish municipal councils in the Galilee are doing all they can to prevent the Arab municipal councils from increasing their territory. Their aim is to establish a “green” strip of separation between themselves and the Arab villages and cities. In the last two years a group of Jewish and Arab citizens in the Galilee have organized themselves in a

democratic group whose aim is to fight for the Arabs' rights and to struggle for a common future, the *Other Voice in the Galilee* (OVC). It was established after the police and the IDF killed 13 Palestinian Arabs in the clashes of October 2000 in Israel, while the Israeli military forces were trying to oppress the demonstrations of the Arab population.

The OVC was formed by Israeli leftists, like Dr. Uri Davis. Dr. Davis lives in the Arabic city of the Sakhnin, was close to Hallil El-Wazir (“Abu-Jihad”), the second senior figure in the Palestine Liberation Organisation who was assassinated by Israeli troops in 1988, a Jewish member in the Fatah movement and a member of the Palestinian National Council. The group's founding declaration published at the beginning of February, states: “We will act for the common interest of all the region's inhabitants, in order to establish here a civil and pluralistic society, an egalitarian and tolerant society. Here in the Galilee, we will continue working together—as neighbors—with no difference of nationality, language, religion and gender....”

Dr. Hanna Sweid, the chairman of the local municipal council of Illabon village, delivered a speech to an OVC public meeting. He noted, “In the city of Sakhnin there are 800 young couples who are waiting for a license to build their home. The government gave the city council permission to build on 22 fields, but the absurd thing is that there is no possibility to carry out the basic preparations such as paving, drainage, construction and building because there is no budget. In the regional planning committee which is federating the villages of Sakhnin, Arabee and Dir Hanna, there is no majority for the representatives of the Arab inhabitants; the chairman and the treasurer are Jewish, although the decisions are about Arab villages and their future.”

Such initiatives and appeals for united action between Jewish and Arab workers are the exception rather than the norm. Ali, an Arab worker, told a *World Socialist Web Site* correspondent that on Land Day, “The main parades are being organised by the Communist Party and a few nationalist groups and organisations, with no real appeal for solidarity and united action by Jews and Arab workers in order to put an end to years of discrimination.”



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