

Palestinians march in Gaza to demand jobs

David Cohen
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An estimated 5,000 Palestinians demonstrated on July 1 in Gaza city, demanding that the Palestinian Authority (PA) provide them with either regular unemployment benefits or jobs. The demonstrators were employed in Israel and have been jobless for the past 22 months because of the Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip.

The protest was a significant expression of the underlying social hostility amongst many workers towards the PA leadership, which has done nothing to alleviate the suffering of the working class. Almost a decade after the signing of the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the PA, Arafat's promise to secure independence through a US-inspired negotiated settlement is in tatters.

The Palestinians are once again under the iron heel of a renewed Israeli occupation, which has left around 2,000 dead and the vast bulk of the population in desperate poverty. Prior to the start of the present *intifada* in September 2000, around 125,000 worked in Israel, collectively bringing \$3.4 million daily into the Palestinian economy. According to the PA, unemployment presently stands at 78 percent of the workforce, up from an already staggering 44 percent immediately prior to Israel's latest military incursion.

The unemployed workers are demanding that the PA use money from foreign donations for the purpose it was intended—to alleviate the suffering of those made unemployed due to Israel closing off the borders of the West Bank and Gaza. To date unemployed workers have only received one or two payments of NIS500 or NIS600 (\$150).

The protestors gathered outside the Palestinian National Council building and marched on Arafat's bombed-out headquarters. Security guards stood by as the crowd broke through the wrought-iron gates of Arafat's compound chanting, "We want jobs! We want food!" They carried placards addressed to the PA

leadership, but also denouncing the Israeli government of Ariel Sharon. Typical slogans read, "Work not charity" and "Lift the closure on Gaza". Some waved stale pita bread to symbolize their struggle for survival, while others raised accusations of corruption against the PA, asking, "Where are the millions?"

Taarek, 25, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "We were 5,000 people. Our decision was to protest outside the Palestinian National Council building in the centre of the city, and march towards the headquarters of President Yasser Arafat. We wanted him to see what poverty is in numbers."

Taarek explained, "We believed that after Israel had withdrawn from the occupied territories, Arafat would establish a Palestinian National Insurance Institute. It never happened, although there is a parallel institute in Israel. The Israelis took money from us and after they signed an agreement with Arafat, they gave it to him. Where is our money? No one actually knows. One thing is certain: it is not in our pockets."

"We are fighting for independence, but we will not agree to have a corrupt state. Our brothers in the Middle East sent us money when we began to struggle for our liberation at the end of 2000. Where is the money?"



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