

Jewish youth charged with assault on Israeli Arabs

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A ferocious attack by a gang of Jewish youths on several Palestinian Israelis that left one 17-year-old Palestinian close to death has shocked Israel.

On Tuesday, nine of the youth involved in the attack that left Jamal Julani in critical condition were charged with assault and incitement to racism and violence.

The incident began when a girl alleged that she had been sexually assaulted by an Arab, and called on the youths gathered around her to find and attack Arabs. The girl and others made racist remarks, such as “Mohammad is dead”. Dozens of youths set off, chanting, “Death to Arabs”.

When they reached Zion Square, at least 15 began severely beating Julani, a resident of East Jerusalem, and his friends. Julani’s life was only saved by the prompt action of a paramedic at the scene.

According to *Ha’aretz*, dozens of Israelis watched the attack “without lifting a finger”. “Their apathy is only slightly less grave than the behaviour of those who perpetrated the lynching,” the newspaper said.

Of the nine youths who were charged, eight are minors. The accused who allegedly delivered the blow that caused Julani’s heart to stop beating justified himself in court, saying, “He’s an Arab, and he cursed my mother, so he should die”.

Lawyers speaking for the accused painted a picture of aimless, disaffected and damaged youths, some with severe behavioural problems, alienated from their religious upbringing and with few social outlets.

This brutal racist attack is not an aberration, however, or

due to the youths’ alienation from their religious upbringing. It flows inexorably from the racism whipped up by the government and across the spectrum of official politics, often in a religious guise, and from Israel’s constant war-mongering against the Palestinians and its neighbours in the region.

This has been accompanied by decades of reactionary social policies that have gutted education and other essential public services, for which Israeli Arabs have become a convenient scapegoat.

Just hours earlier, six Palestinians were hospitalised with serious burns after their vehicle was firebombed in the occupied West Bank, where settler attacks on Palestinians and their property are a frequent occurrence. In this incident too, the alleged perpetrators are youth. Three boys, aged 12 to 13, from a religious Jewish settlement at Bat Ayn, have been charged with carrying out the attack.

Many more incidents take place almost daily and go unreported, amid a broader culture of formal and informal discrimination. Israeli Arabs have long been treated as second-class citizens in terms of access to public services, due to far lower budgetary allocations to their towns and villages. They undergo harsher security checks at the hands of the police and security forces, with many jobs barred to them.

The number of racist attacks has increased sharply in recent years, with Jerusalem reporting the highest number of incidents. The Mossawa Advocacy Centre for Arab Citizens attributes the spike to Israel’s leaders, saying, “These attacks are not the hand of fate, but a direct result of incitement against the Arab citizens of this country by religious, public, and elected officials.”

Israeli leaders have lined up to hypocritically denounce the attacks. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared, “This is something we cannot accept—not as Jews, not as Israelis”.

Reuven Rivlin, Knesset speaker, visited Julani in hospital to apologise, acknowledging that the attack was “a microcosmos of a national problem that could endanger Israeli democracy.”

In reality, the political establishment has nothing but contempt for the well being of the Arabs in Israel or the occupied territories. Their policies have moreover brutalised and damaged a layer of youth, whose disaffection is channelled along racist lines.

At the heart of the problem are two myths promoted by Israel’s founders. The first was that the Zionist state could be established as a homeland for the Jews on a peaceful basis, without the expulsion and subjugation of its non-Jewish inhabitants. The second was that such a state could develop into a democratic and progressive society that could live at peace with its neighbours.

Instead, Israel’s mainstream parties have joined forces to reproduce within Israel and the occupied territories the ghettos, repression and civil war from which earlier generations of Jews had fled.

Politicians of the extreme right, such as Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, are opposed to any Palestinian state alongside Israel. But he is joined by many others, of the so-called left, in advocating a “transfer” of Arab citizens and the incorporation of some of Israel’s Arab towns and villages adjacent to the West Bank into the Palestinian Authority—whether or not it is granted statehood.

The advocacy of communalism and ethno-religious politics, up to and including ethnic cleansing, has engendered countless attacks on Palestinians over the years.

On the West Bank, the settlers are allowed to murder, firebomb and destroy Palestinian homes and farms with impunity. They constitute a vital strong-arm for the ruling elite, because their social interests are intimately bound up with Israeli rule of the captured territories and the

perpetuation of the country’s military machine.

They have been reinforced by waves of immigrants, first from the United States and later Russia, attracted on the basis of the explicitly anti-socialist and chauvinist perspective projected by Israel ever more openly since the 1967 war.

Over the past three decades, social and political tensions have grown due to the widening gap between rich and poor. To the extent that the majority of people became alienated from official politics, the state increased its reliance on right-wing settlers and extreme nationalist religious zealots. No party can today form a government without their support.

The settlers and ultra-religious provide the social and political bedrock for the emergence of semi-fascist tendencies within the political establishment. Their presence is felt by ever-broader layers within Israeli society, as discrimination is extended to Jews of Middle East and North African origin. Last May, racist attacks injured dozens of asylum seekers, following a rally where leading members of the ruling Likud party made inflammatory remarks against African migrants.

Racism against Arabs and others serves the vital role of dividing the working class and diverting the growing anger over declining living standards and rising social problems along reactionary channels. It encourages nationalism by focusing on demands to preserve the Jewish identity of the State of Israel, at a time when war against Iran and possibly Lebanon and Gaza is on the agenda.

The answer to such a development can be found only on a socialist perspective. It means advancing the unity of Arabs and Jews within Israel and of all the region’s diverse ethnic and religious groups against their oppressors—the Israeli and Arab bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers they serve.



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