

# THE PALESTINIANS

## - A People in Search of a State -

- TSHIDI MALEBANE



The Arabs are being driven from their homes by the Israeli authorities who continue to build settlements in the occupied territories. Above: A Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. TASS photo

South Africans will be struck by the extra-ordinarily close parallels between the situation of the Africans in South Africa and that of the Palestinian Arabs. But in one respect the Palestinians are unique today. They are a people numbering 4-million who have been without a state since 1948, the year the state of Israel was established. They are a people dispersed with nearly half of them living in exile; mainly in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Kuwait.

While their numbers have been reduced to 12% of the population in Israel, they constitute the majority in Israeli occupied Gaza Strip (occupied in 1956) and the West Bank (occupied in 1967).

### CRUX OF THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION

The stateless Jews made themselves a home at the expense of the Arabs, one of the many injustices the Palestinians are labouring under. But one must hasten to say that the Arab-Jewish hostility, engendered in the first instance by the nationalistic and chauvinistic concept of an exclusive Jewish state held by the Zionists, is not the crux of the Middle East situation. Central to the problem is the intense interest of the imperialist powers, particularly the USA, in procuring Middle East oil for themselves. The USA has made Israel an instrument of imperialist power in the Middle East, an ally in combating the Arab national liberation movements, which are the main threat to the free supply of Middle East oil. What happens when the forces of national liberation triumph is clearly shown in Iran. All supplies of oil to the USA have been stopped.

The relationship between the USA and Israel is well illustrated by the way Israel was assisted in the October 1973

Arab-Israeli war. American tanks were flown to Israel fuelled up and engines warmed up. They rode straight into battle from Israeli airfields.

### DRIVEN FROM THEIR LAND

We are familiar with the way taxes were imposed on the black peasant in South Africa to force him off the land and compel him to seek work from the white man. In Israel a different tactic has been employed. Israeli Arabs are subject to the emergency military regulations first imposed by the British in 1945 on both Jews and Arabs as it then was. After 1948 these were no longer applied to the Jews but continued to be applied on the Arabs. These regulations have been used to close off areas of land for so-called 'security' reasons and their inhabitants forbidden to enter them. Through this device nearly half the land belonging to Israeli Arabs has been taken from them & turned over to the Jewish farmers, the Kibbutzim. Those people driven from their land became 'internal refugees' forced to live in shacks where the Zionists permitted them to squat. In the circumstances they were forced to seek work as farm labourers.

During the 1948 war some 750,000 Arab civilians either fled in panic or were driven from their homes and sought refuge in the surrounding Arab countries, mainly in Jordan. These people are not permitted to return to their homeland. Their property was taken over by the Israeli rulers, who have rejected all responsibility for the refugees.

Israel's attitude to the plight of the Palestinians is chauvinistic in the extreme. In the London "Sunday Times", 15th June, 1969, Mrs Golda Meir, the then Israeli Premier, declared: "There was no such thing as Palestinians... It was not as though there was a Palestinian people... and we came and threw them out and took their country from them. They did not exist." The true picture of how the Palestinians have been treated was given by the Israeli League for Human and Civil Rights in early 1973:

"In that part of Palestine which became Israel in 1948 there existed some 475 (Arab) villages and towns scattered throughout the land. Today, only 90 remain; the other 385 have been totally razed to the ground by the Zionist settlers". This adds up to a destruction of no less than 80% of their villages.

### THE PLO

Commando organisations came together with trade unions and independents to set up the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1964. It is a federal body uniting these

various elements, both left and right wing, controlling them loosely. The largest single component is Al-Fatah led by Yasser Arafat. Another significant commando organisation is the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which is often only symbolically represented in the PLO due to its disagreements over policy with the leadership.

### THE PFLP

The PFLP considers the PLO to be insufficiently revolutionary and refuses to sit on the PLO Executive Committee, saying that the PLO is too conciliatory towards moves for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East and must stop playing the diplomatic game. In reply the PLO states that international recognition must be sought in order to enlist maximum support for its cause, and that emphasis must be placed on collective action and not on acts of individual heroism.

### THE BLACK SEPTEMBER MOVEMENT

A proper sense of proportion must be kept when examining accusations of terrorism levelled at the PLO. Most of these acts of individual heroism are carried out by the Black September Movement, part of the PFLP. The Palestinians are faced by an enemy engaged in terror in a massive way. In Israel, Gaza and the West Bank they suffer the daily outrage of occupation and are subject to arbitrary arrest and torture. In South Lebanon the Israeli army is engaged in a genocidal war against Palestinian refugee civilians, strongly reminiscent of America's campaign in Vietnam.

Israel's attitude is clearly spelt out by her army Chief of Staff at the time, General Gur, in an interview following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in March, 1978. This was the final question put to him:

Question: Then you claim the population ought to be punished?

Answer: Of course, and I have never had any doubt about that... It has now been 30 years, from the time of our Independence War until now, that we have been fighting against the civilian (Arab) population which inhabited the villages and towns, and every time that we do it, the same question gets asked: Should we or should we not strike at civilians?

The Western press omitted to carry this revealing interview.

In contrast the so-called 'Camp David Peace Treaty' signed by Egypt, Israel and the USA in 1979 has received widespread publicity in the Western press as a step forward in international relations. It is nothing of the kind. It is no peace treaty but a pact of aggression against the Palestinians.



## THE PLA

The military-wing of the PLO is known as the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The political leadership of the PLO and the general command of the PLA have experienced periods of tense relations, when the PLA attempted to play a larger political role. It numbers six to ten thousand men and women, mainly infantry. The largest contingent is stationed in Syria.

The Battle of Karameh (March 1968) between the Palestinian commandos, helped by units of the Jordanian Army, and a large attacking Israeli force, dramatically enhanced the reputation of the commandos, while causing tension between the two largest groups, Al-Fatah and PFLP. The former accused the latter of withdrawing from the battlefield, although it was supposed to defend the northern part of Karameh.

### KEY WEAPON

The oppression of the Palestinians has its lessons for South Africans. It tells us that racism is a key ideological weapon of monopoly capital. It rules the lives of the people in countries like Israel and South Africa. The regimes of these two states have much in common. They both treat their oppressed peoples in a discriminatory fashion, exploiting them to the full. They both accept monopoly investments in large amounts. They both act as reactionary bastions of the imperialist powers against the national liberation movements in the respective countries. Without the support of the imperialist states, the economies of both regimes would collapse overnight.

**DOWN WITH ZIONISM!**



Israel continues its barbarous raids on towns, villages and Palestinian refugee camps in Southern Lebanon. Photo shows Israeli troops returning to their base after another brigand attack.

UPI-TASS photo

PRIVATE BAG X17  
BELLVILLE 7535  
TEL: (021) 959 3403  
FAX: (021) 959 3411  
ARCHIVES  
SEAVILLE 7535  
TEL: (021) 959 3403  
FAX: (021) 959 3411  
ARCHIVES

W  
MAYIBUYE  
CENTRE