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Palestine

A new escalation

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The assassination of the secretary general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Abu Ali Mustafa, marks a new escalation in the Israeli government's policy of repression against the Palestinian people. Through this war of attrition Ariel Sharon seeks to impose a new treaty guaranteeing, among other things, Israeli control of nearly 50 per cent of the West Bank and the pursuit of colonization.

The assassination signalled the will of the Israeli leaders to push the Palestinians towards increasingly violent reactions, which will allow the Israelis to deepen still more their measures of collective punishment against the people of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Ariel Sharon's political objective is becoming increasingly clear: to bring the Palestinians to their knees so that they agree to negotiate a "provisional long term treaty" which will give Israel control of around 50 per cent of the West Bank as well as its borders and water resources and allow not only the maintenance of existing settlements but also the construction of new ones.

In exchange for which the Palestinians would have the right to manage the rest of the occupied territories in a "broad autonomy" under Israeli supervision. The state of siege which confines the population in increasingly reduced spaces and prevents any normal movement of people and goods, the assassinations of political leaders, the bombings and increasingly systematic incursions in the autonomous zones are intended then to crush the will to resist of the Palestinians so they accept a pure and simple capitulation. However, Ariel Sharon and the generals who surround him have got it wrong again.

It is clear that the Palestinians will not agree to capitulate: the price paid in the course of the last year has been too high for any backwards movement now. Everything indicates that the heroic resistance of this people will continue: a passive resistance to the state of siege and the daily aggressions of the Israeli regime and an armed resistance against soldiers and settlers in the occupied territories, which will sometimes spill over onto Israeli territory in the form of suicide bombings.

If the suffering of the Palestinians is great, nothing seems to indicate a falling off of resistance to the Israeli occupation. The same cannot be said in relation to Israeli society, which has seemed in recent months to show a certain breathlessness. After tasting seven years of a "normality" which combined security and prosperity, Israelis find it hard to accept the end of the seven fat years.

There is a growing sentiment of insecurity, added now to clear signs of economic recession (exports down by a third, crisis of tourism, rising unemployment and so on), which will get worse in the coming months. Beyond this, the need for a mass mobilization of army reservists to supplement the conscripts in the task of repressing the Intifada concerns Israeli leaders, for if the majority of public opinion still supports Sharon's repressive policy, those who wish to participate directly in it are rare.

In this sense, the number of reservists evading the call-up is surprising if one takes account of the fact that there is still no broad movement against the repressive policy carried out by Sharon and Peres in the occupied territories. A veritable war of attrition has been going on over the past 10 months, in which Israel's overwhelming military superiority is far from a guarantee that the Palestinians will crack first. However, this war of attrition will still demand an enormous price from the Palestinian civil population and it would be absolutely criminal to allow the blood to flow until the exhaustion of the combatants.

It seems, nonetheless, that this is the cynical choice of the imperialist powers. While the Palestinians are unanimous

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in demanding the dispatch of an international protection force, the international community turns a deaf ear and seems to await a further deterioration of the situation before finally accepting its responsibilities.

It is criminal to leave the Palestinians and Israelis in their unequal standoff and be content to propose certain measures, such as those included in the Mitchell report, while avoiding forcing Israel to implement these decisions. For the US and the Europeans, the rapist has a right of veto on the intervention of the police. The Palestinian national leadership knows it must take Ariel Sharon seriously when he says that we are only at the first stage of the "colonization of Judea and Samaria" and that there is then no question of freezing it as demanded by the Mitchell report that the Israelis have supposedly accepted, albeit with multiple conditions attached.

Only fierce international pressure can oblige the Israeli government to fulfil its commitments and the international solidarity movement must mobilize to demand that the governments decide finally to take the measures necessary to end the suffering of the Palestinians.

The civilian protection missions initiated in France by various organizations are a means to hasten the dispatch of an international protection force. Nevertheless, until this arrives, the Palestinians will have no choice but to continue to resist and fight with all the means at their disposal.

(note - this article was written before the events of September 11)