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Fourth International statement

Tribute to hunger strikers in Palestine

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Between 17 April and 27 May, more than a thousand Palestinian political prisoners detained in Israeli jails stopped eating. This historic hunger strike movement was organized around two slogans: freedom and dignity. The prisoners were demanding improvements in their conditions of detention (access to medical care, increased visiting rights, access to telephones, etc.) and the end of certain practices by the Israeli authorities, such as administrative detention or isolation.

Faced with this unprecedented movement, Israel decided to go for a showdown by explaining that there was nothing to negotiate with "terrorists." Some Israeli officials even referred to Thatcher's attitude during the 1981 hunger strike of Irish political prisoners, during which ten of them died. Palestinian strikers were subjected to sanctions, pressure, ill-treatment, and Israel threatened to force feed them if they continued their action.

After 40 days of hunger strike, the prisoners obtained satisfaction on most of their claims. This strike, carried out by members of all the political factions, was a demonstration of the determination of the prisoners but also of the power of the Palestinian mobilizations when they are carried out in a unitary way and without direct stake of institutional power. This mobilization contrasted strongly with the inability of the Gaza and Ramallah leaderships, jealous of their meagre material and symbolic advantages and entangled in their rivalries, to propose a strategy of liberation to the whole population.

Faced with an extreme right-wing government backed by the imperialist powers, which reinforces and expands Israel's colonial hold on Palestine every day, the Palestinian people suffer from a lack of leadership, strategy, and programme for liberation. While a new generation has entered the struggle during the last two years with the rise in individual attacks against soldiers and settlers, the gap between the PLO and the Hamas on one side and the population on the other has never been so wide.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that the prisoners' movement was widely supported in the Palestinian territories, with days of general strike and regular demonstrations, violently dispersed by the army of occupation. Without overestimating the medium- and long-term impact of the hunger strike, it has been noted that it has contributed to the re-mobilization of significant sectors of Palestinian society and to putting an anti-colonial perspective on the political scene.

We salute the victory of the prisoners, our solidarity with them is total, and that is why we have joined and will continue to join in international mobilizations in support of their struggle. Beyond that, we reaffirm our support for the demands of the Palestinian people: the end of the apartheid regime, the right to self-determination and the right of return for refugees. We will continue to maintain and develop ties with our regionally and internationally isolated Palestinian comrades and build the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS) Campaign, which will weaken the colonial power.