

IT'S GOT TO
BE ONE HELL
OF A HOT PLACE!

Rebels

EL SALVADOR PRESIDENTIAL TICKET POLL

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ALIFEZA

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From Occupied Palestine

All persons in the occupied territories are forced to get new licence plates for their cars and the Israeli authorities collected over \$10 million from this sale in one day in Nablus alone. The 'Intifada taxes' are imposed to drive a wedge between the Intifada organisers and the common people. But the growing frustration is leading to a violent and tragic explosion any time now until next year.

WHILE the diplomacy of Mid-east peace reverberates through newspaper headlines, the greater reality is that the Intifada and Israel are building toward a greater collision.

What is striking once one leaves the hotels corridors of conferences that bring together only a few select Palestinians and Israelis is the growing sense of frustration on both sides — a building sense of unending confrontation that will most likely result in further tragedy, further hatred, further fear, and inevitably further bloodshed.

In their effort to halt the Intifada the Israelis are coming up with new repressive tactics all the time. Having managed to push the press out of the territories to a great extent the Israelis have more of a free hand than before. Furthermore of course the story of the Intifada is no longer front-page news simply because it has become commonplace, the violence becoming an accepted reality a bit like Northern Ireland.

Using clever tactics designed to divide and demoralise, the Israelis are squeezing the Palestinians more and more. Now taxes and computerised means of checking are among the newest tactics being added to those of shootings, tear-gassing, beatings, imprisonment, home-demolitions, deportations, curfews and collective punishments.

In February, for instance, the Israeli military authorities forced all persons in the territories to trade in their car licence plates for a new set. This may not seem like a big deal to outsiders, but it has been to the Palestinians.

First of all, the Israelis use such tactics to show that they are in charge of daily life and can force Palestinians to do what they say.

Second, they are bleeding the Palestinians of funds as nearly everyone with a car has had to pay between \$500 and \$3,000 — an "Intifada Tax" according to the Palestinians — just to be able to continue using their cars.

Coming after 14 months of economic slow-down and the collapse of the Jordanian dinar, these are considerable amounts for most Palestinians to have to pay. In one day alone, I was told, the Israelis collected in Nablus alone nearly 20 million shekels, over \$10 million.

Furthermore, the new car plate numbers are tied into a master computer system giving the Israelis the ability to track Palestinians much more closely than before. An additional way this is being accomplished is by new identity cards that in some cases restrict the holders from going to Gaza or going across the Green Line to pre-1967 Israel.

Not only is the "Intifada Tax" a means of money-collecting and travel control. Additionally the Israelis are carefully checking those that come to them to get their new car plates or for travel documents to see that all past taxes have been paid. If not, cars or business property are being increasingly confiscated and other restrictions applied all in an effort to further demoralise the Palestinian population.

The goal, of course, is to drive a wedge between the Intifada organisers and the common people who suffer under the weight of these Israeli restrictions, all in an effort to cause frustration and hardship so that support for the Intifada will lessen.

This new policy is being carried to ludicrous extremes. Even the donkey carts that collect garbage are now being "licenced" by the Israeli military occupation authorities!

Quite literally, practically every Palestinian I met during this visit had a sad or tragic story to tell. The taxi driver who took me from the airport to Bethlehem had two sons in prison and the Israelis wanted nearly \$10,000 to let them out. The little boy I had known before in one of the refugee camps had been kicked that very morning by soldiers and his brother was in the hospital awaiting amputation of his leg after being shot by "plastic" bullets — bullets with a metal core and a tough hard plastic coating.

The man whose home we had lunch at told of carrying the latest shooting victim in his arms to his car and trying to get him to the hospital. But the Israelis blocked the roads and as he tried to find a way the boy died. Then the Israelis came to his home in the middle of the night and made he and his son stand out in the very cold temperatures most of the night demanding that the body be given up to them.

The young woman from the old city in Jerusalem whose cousin is in prison about to be deported.

The journalist who was taken to prison, beaten, and had his personal photos and records taken of his life over the past 40 years destroyed.

The family that had tear gas thrown into their home for no apparent reason at all, causing the wife to miscarry and the children to be sick for days.

The doctor who could no longer drive outside the city limits or his car was subject to confiscation.

The little girl grotesquely transfixed when Israeli soldiers threw boiling water all over her.

It is very hard to find any Palestinian at this point who has not been directly touched by death or hardship in recent months. For in the relatively small population of 1.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza not only about 600 have been killed but as many as 40,000 have been injured with a similar number imprisoned. If this were happening in the US, this would mean about 10,000 killed and more than six million injured!

While the Israelis have stepped up the level of violence and repression, the Palestinian underground has also stepped up its attempts to mobilise and discipline the population. While I was visiting a three-day general strike had nearly the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip shut down on orders from the Popular Committees. There is talk of refusing to pay taxes, destroying identity cards, and other forms of civil disobedience and mass protest.

In a very real sense the Israelis themselves are bringing about the solidification of Palestine into a more coherent whole than ever before. The tortured birth of Palestine is underway.

Sooner or later the tactics of repression and those of growing assertive will collide. It may happen on Land Day in a few weeks, or later this year, or someday next year. It may happen when Yitzhak Rabin makes good on his publicly stated threat to destroy the Casbah in Nablus. Or young Palestinians may go on the rampage and burn down some section of an Israeli city.

Just as the sparks of the Intifada took many years to ignite this unique popular insurrection, the current frictions are sure to explode in more violent and tragic ways if the so called "peace process" does not find some other course — and soon.

Intifada building towards explosion

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