

# EXPROPRIATION OF ARAB LAND IN ISRAEL

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**O**N the morning of September 2, 1964, under the protection of a large police force and other security forces, twenty houses and three water-cisterns belonging to the Arab villagers of El N'eim were blown up by dynamite by the Israeli authorities. Yoel Dar, correspondent of *Davar*, a semi-official newspaper, described the operation in the following dramatic words:

A big explosion was heard yesterday before noon in the village of Arab El-N'eim in the Western Galilee. A mushroom of smoke rose high in the sky, furniture went up into the air, tin sheets were crushed and water-cisterns were demolished . . . while women screamed, children cried and grown-ups stood with threatening fists. . . .

(September 3, 1964.)

The correspondent goes on to describe how the police forced over one hundred and fifty persons out of their houses (even a woman who had given birth a few hours before was made to leave her bed), to stand on a nearby hill to watch the blowing-up of their twenty houses and water-cisterns.

This was, however, only the latest action for clearing this part of the Galilee from its Arab inhabitants. Seventy-five houses have already been demolished in this area, inhabited by Arab-Aswa'ed, under the pretext of 'illegal building'. Hundreds had already been made homeless in this area and many others are being threatened with the same fate and even worse, with being completely driven out of the area, deprived of their lands.

On June 22, 1964, M. Aloni, deputy director of the Land Authority, announced at a press conference in Jerusalem that the Government authority would not hesitate to carry out the demolition of two hundred houses in order to bring about the total evacuation of the inhabitants of Arab El-Sawa'ed. The Government authorities have more than one pretext for wanting to expel more than two hundred and fifty families, over two thousand persons, from their homes and lands. First the Government spokesmen claim that this area is being used for Army manoeuvres and the safety of the population requires their evacuation; next they claim that the land tilled by Arab-El-Sawa'ed is State-owned land, illegally occupied by them after the establishment of the State of Israel.

However, everybody that knows this part of the country and its

history, knows well that Arab El-Sawa'ed, described by the Government statements as Bedouins (to imply that they are 'nomads' who are unsettled) have actually been settled on their present lands as far back as the time of the Turkish rule in this country. They tilled the land, having 'grabbed' it from the desolation of the past hundred years; they tended their herds; they built their homes and dug water-cisterns for use in the dry months. It is worthwhile mentioning that some people even received permits to build new houses, but since 1954 building has been totally forbidden. What could the new families and the growing number of the population do except build new houses without a permit? Yet, the Israeli Government refuses to recognise all these facts, and notwithstanding facts, law, history and natural rights of people, continues to claim that these people have no right to their land—even when they hold an official certificate (Kushan) from the Government Land Offices. But the fact behind this position of the Government is the decision of 1954 to 'free' this area from its Arab inhabitants, come what may.

This area was used as a military training ground before 1954, even during the British Mandate by the British Army, and yet the population managed to live side-by-side with the military personnel without any difficulties. When, in 1954, there began to be casualties, even the school became a target. In 1961, when the inhabitants of the area were ordered by the military authorities to abandon their homes and move outside the area 'temporarily for three months' they appealed to the High Court of Justice. The order was thereupon withdrawn, and the Court ordered that the direction of gunfire should not be near the inhabited area. In 1962, the authorities, continuing their pressure to evacuate Arab El-Sawa'ed, closed the only school, explaining cynically that it was necessary for the safety of the children. But the Knesset Education Committee recommended the re-opening of the school because 'it would be safer for the children to be within the walls of the school. . . .'

However, the Eshkol administration has ordered quicker steps for 'settling the Galilee'—the Ben Gurion administration called the scheme 'Jewishising the Galilee'. The Israeli official circles consider the existing situation in the Galilee as 'dangerous'. The chauvinist racist propaganda says the 'danger' is inherent in the fact that sixteen years after the formation of Israel, the Arab population constitutes ninety per cent of the population in the area. Therefore, it is necessary to change the population character of the Galilee; it must become Jewish. Jewish settlements must be built even if this

means depriving Arab peasants of their land and expelling them from their homes.

In fact, this has actually been a planned policy ever since the establishment of the State. The Communist Party, democratic opinion and the Arab population as well, have stressed on more than one occasion that they are not opposed to the establishment of new settlements, but to the practice of depriving the Arab population of its lands. Two years ago, in pursuance of this policy, the Government expropriated about 5,000 dunams of Arab land under the pretext of building the new township of Carmiel. Later much of this expropriated land became an object for speculation by various Jewish land speculators who obtained the land from the Government. Had the township of Carmiel been planned two kilometres to the south, it would have been built on State property. But the real purpose was to expropriate Arab land.

As a result of planned expropriation, more than 650,000 dunams\* of Arab-owned land, including 418,000 dunams of cultivated land, was expropriated. This is more than 55 per cent of Arab-owned land (of those Arabs still living in Israel since 1948). As a result of this, the average cultivated area in the Arab villages in Israel, at present, has dropped from 8.4 dunams per person on the eve of the establishment of the State, to 2.2 dunams per person today. Notwithstanding what has been accomplished in this respect, the Eshkol administration is intent on expropriating even more Arab land and further pauperising the Arab peasantry. The latest case of expropriation, of 4,000-5,000 dunams of land owned by the Arab peasants of Sahnin village (Central Galilee), was under the pretext of building a new Army Camp. The administration intends to fulfil its racist programme of breaking-up what is considered to be Arab regions in the country and altering their demographic character by means of Jewish settlement, even at the expense of demolishing Arab villages.

Israeli democratic public opinion considers such a policy not only harmful and unjust towards the Arab population, but detrimental to the very interests of the Jewish people. To carry on such a policy toward the Arab population in Israel, is not only an internal matter for Israel, but has its repercussions on the whole pattern of Israeli-Arab relations to the detriment of peace and good neighbourly relations with the Arab countries. That is why the Communist Party of Israel, has persistently called upon and mobilised public action, for putting an end to these inhuman acts and to stop the expropriation of Arab lands.

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\*1 dunam = app.  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre.