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Israel Volunteers for Slave Labor, Vicious Austerity

July 7 (IPS) — In a desperate move to halt “over-consumption” and inflation, now raging at an annual rate of 44 per cent, the Israeli government of Premier Yitzhak Rabin has launched a sweeping austerity program.

Crushing Measures

The austerity which the Israelis are gulled into imposing on each other is truly formidable. In the face of staggering trade deficit of over \$3 billion — more than five times the per capita deficit of bankrupt Italy — the Rabin government announced a total of one billion dollars in new taxes and import restrictions. “Socialist egalitarian” Rabin, under the guise of “taxing the middle class,” slapped a 10-20 per cent compulsory war loan on incomes, raised the import surcharge on consumer goods called “luxuries” from the current 25 per cent to a new high of 35 per cent, and instituted a “voluntary” war loan of 3 per cent on incomes and gains from land sales.

These taxes will raise the total portion of national income taken in taxes to an incredible 63 per cent. To encourage exports, Israeli industrialists will receive a 10 per cent incentive payment. As Israel gears up for a vast expansion of labor-intensive “developments,” Golda Meir reveals her solution in a speech to the Jewish Agency: “Jews! Many more Jews — that’s what Israel really needs now.”

The death blow to the working class is the freeze on the cost of living increase promised for July. For over six weeks the Histadrut dangled a 20 per cent wage increase in front of workers, while getting them to sign a 1974 austerity contract of a maximum wage increase of 3 or 4 per cent. The frozen 20 per cent COL increase is slated to go in **taxes** to the treasury; employers are supposed to match this sum or the government will slap another compulsory loan on wages instead. Two more horrors are

waiting in the wings — possible devaluation of the Israeli currency and a value-added tax in 1975.

Civil Guards: An Israeli Gestapo

To enforce the new austerity, the Israeli government and the CIA have encouraged the formation of vigilante squads in the wake of the CIA-orchestrated terror campaigns. The recent wave of terrorist attacks, organized by the CIA with the help of Israeli, Lebanese, and Egyptian Intelligence, has played upon deep Israeli fears of abandonment by the world Jewish population and on their victim mentality. Panic-stricken Israelis have eagerly formed a voluntary policing network, the Civil Guard, in every town and village; the Civil Guard will direct working-class rage against imaginary terrorists and “greedy” workers.

A 72-year-old veteran of the Haganah (1940s underground terrorist organization) has begun to organize Civil Guards throughout the country. From a sense of desperate impotence, people are flocking to join the guards, willingly giving hours of their time just to roam the streets looking for “strange” objects. One woman in Jerusalem put it well: “Only when every block has a team of volunteers patrolling throughout the day and night can we be sure there won’t be another Maalot.”

Shlomo Lahat, mayor of Tel Aviv, is instrumental in pushing this local vigilante scheme in his city. He is attempting what no other mayor has done so far — an experiment in fascist participatory democracy. Says Lahat, “I’m going to inculcate a spirit of volunteerism and participation in the city’s affairs. If the streets of Tel Aviv are dirty, we will all pitch in to get them clean. I don’t need laws or red tape for this. I need only someone to organize the volunteers and provide them with directions.” Volunteerism, (i.e., slave-labor) is being provided by the Histadrut in the form of organizing Arab and Israeli volunteers to build a security fence along the Lebanese border.