

Palestine Focus

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U.S. Orders Palestine Information Office to Close

By Douglas Franks

On September 15, 1987, the U.S. State Department ordered the Palestine Information Office in Washington, D.C. to "cease operation" within 30 days. The closure order—recently extended until December 1—is the Reagan administration's latest volley in its anti-Palestinian offensive. Alleged to be an action taken over "U.S. concern over terrorism," closure of the PIO would eliminate one of the few sources of information in the United States about the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian diaspora from the perspective of the Palestinians themselves. Without that source, the lopsided "debate" in this country over the question of Palestine could become altogether one-sided.

Upon receiving the order, PIO Director Hassan Abdul-Rahman noted some of its implications: "The closing of this information office has the effect of denying the American public their right to hear, unfettered, another side of the Middle East conflict—one which has rarely been heard. It is the fulfillment of the Israeli dream—to limit the flow information to the American public to only that information which the Israelis want heard."

Closing the PIO by Any Means

Abdul-Rahman's inference of Israeli pressure, routed through the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), touches on one of several troubling aspects of the process by which the PIO was closed. On the whole, the manner in which Congress and the State Department have singlemindedly and recklessly moved to dash Palestinian efforts to peacefully and lawfully voice their concerns to the people of the United States is just what we have come to expect from a scandal-prone administration.

Several months prior to the closure order, legislation which would force both the PIO and the United Nations PLO Observer Mission in New York to close began circulating in Congress—and still is. The State Department, in an apparent show of separate initiative and after previously *defending* the right of the PIO to operate, ordered the office to close. Thus it quickly accomplished what the Congress still hopes to do on an even larger scale.



Palestinian women protest occupation in Nablus. The people in the West Bank and Gaza have recently staged innumerable protests and strikes. Many have been imprisoned, shot, or killed.

Ever since it opened in 1978, the PIO has complied with all applicable laws under the Justice Department's Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938; moreover, there is no allegation of any illegal activity—"terrorist" or otherwise—hence no legal grounds for action against it, let alone closure. To circumvent the PIO's utter legitimacy, the government changed its status from "foreign agent" to "foreign mission" literally moments before issuing the closure order. A foreign mission officially represents a foreign government on U.S. territory. Embassies and consulates, for example, are foreign missions. A public relations firm—or the PIO—is a foreign agent whose existence is contingent solely upon obeying the laws set forth in the 1938 Registration Act. Establishing a foreign mission in the United States is a privilege extended to foreign governments, not a right. As such, the privilege may be revoked at any time.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, however, "the information office is not a foreign mission

under any permissible constitutional standard and has never applied for such status." It seems a cruel joke that the U.S. government technically "recognized" the Palestine Liberation Organization—something it vehemently refuses to do in a political or diplomatic sense—when it realized the only way to close the information office was to do so.

A formidable lobbying campaign by AIPAC and some 40 American-Jewish organizations in favor of the closure is a major driving force behind the closure. Although AIPAC members would have preferred shutting down the PIO and PLO Observer Mission, they settled for the State Department precipitating the PIO closure in exchange for their withdrawal of support for pending anti-Palestinian legislation.

Closing the U.N. Mission, according to the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, would amount to the United States dictating to the United Nations who its members

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Editorial

November 29, 1947 UN Partition Plan: 40 Years Later

Forty years ago, on November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the newly established United Nations voted to partition Palestine after the departure of the British colonial authority. World opinion thus attempted to solve a particularly intractable problem—the growing power of Zionist colonization in the face of the national aspirations of the indigenous Palestinian population—in an equitable and reasonable manner. Two states were to be established, one predominantly Jewish and the other predominantly Arab.

To understand how the partition plan was conceived, it is important to recall what the world was like in 1947. Europe and the Soviet Union were still devastated in the wake of World War II. The world was in shock at the horrors of Hitler's atrocities, particularly those suffered by European Jews, and sympathy for the plight of Jewish

refugees served as an emotional lightning rod for the Zionist movement to attract support to its cause.

The Cold War was rapidly turning to ice. The United States still maintained nuclear monopoly. The British empire, which had ruled Palestine since the end of World War I, once the mightiest in the world, was contracting and on the verge of collapse. Insurgent independence movements such as the fight for India's freedom, led by Gandhi, were close to victory.

The Arab countries were predominantly ruled by conservative monarchies subservient to Britain (and, increasingly, to the United States). These regimes were incapable of effectively confronting the military and political sophistication of the Zionist movement.

And, not least in importance, the Palestinian national movement was not well-de-

veloped and was still dominated by its pre-war conservative leadership. The emergence of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the authentic defender and voice of Palestinian self-determination was still decades away.

The Middle East and the entire Mediterra-

nean were then, as now, a tinderbox, a possible arena for the eruption of new wars in a world weary of conflict. The partition plan was an attempt by the United Nations to deal with these volatile contradictions in dangerous circumstances.

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Interview with Ramon Hernandez

“What happened in Texas 150 years ago is happening in Palestine right now!”

Ramon Hernandez is a Mexicano community activist from Austin, Texas, who participated in the first Latino delegation to Palestine in August 1987.

Our trip this summer was the first Latino delegation arranged by the November 29th Committee for Palestine. I was asked to participate by the Austin chapter. The trip is one of the important stepping stones in my active political life; it was very exciting. I had never been there, first of all. I was aware of the general situation and some of the conditions, but I was not really up-to-date and could not defend a position. After this trip I am better able to articulate some of the issues, and I gained a very strong conviction to support the Palestinian cause because of the things I saw and learned.

The conditions of the people under occupation were a lot worse than I ever imagined—carrying identity cards, labeled from certain villages or parts of Jerusalem, and not being able to travel the way we take for granted across the country or across a state; the denial of the culture; denial of their flag; even prohibition of the mention of the word “Palestine”: all of this was a harsh reality for me.

Then the social and especially the economic conditions impressed me, the fact that the Palestinians are gradually being driven into more and more poverty. Even the middle-class people, who have some money, are being driven into poverty, let alone the people in the refugee camps. At one time Gaza was well-known for its citrus production; now a lot of the citrus groves have been demolished or taken over by the Israeli government. It really brings the economic conditions to a point where they are doing everything to try and kill these people off.

One of the other reasons I went—and I developed this as I traveled over there—is the comparison between the occupation of Palestine by Israel now and similar events that happened in Texas and parts of the South-

west 150 years ago. Israel was created as a state by the United Nations, whereas Texas and parts of the Southwest belonged to Mexico and eventually were taken over by force.

Texas was opened first by U.S. settlers who agreed to obey the laws of the Mexican government and become Mexican citizens. But once the settlers grew in strength and numbers, they knew there was no way Mexico could control them because of what was happening politically in Mexico at that time. So the settlers created the rebellion.

The conditions that existed after that rebellion are what I am interested in. The people on the Texas side of the border were supposed to be granted full citizenship rights; their land was to be protected. They were to be integrated into the new country—

What is happening now in Palestine, in El Salvador, and other parts of Latin America—is like the whole “manifest destiny” mentality of conquer and defeat the people.

Texas was first an independent country, not a state; that came later. But the government agencies and people with an interest in the better land went to all extremes to get that land, either scaring people away, killing them, threatening their families.

It was the same as in Israel where mobs of settlers take out their frustration on groups of Palestinians. This happened in Texas; it continued right up to the 20s, 30s,

and 40s, when the KKK had a resurgence and did a lot of killing. It was not only private citizens. Agencies of the state as well, like the Texas Rangers, are notorious throughout history for the fine job they did in conquering and subduing the people. They were responsible for a lot of the killing and for a lot of the police brutality at that time. What happened in Texas 150 years ago is what is happening in Palestine right now. The only difference is now it is 1987 and at that point it was the 1800s. But I saw the same conditions, the same tactics—although more sophisticated—now in Israel.

I am interested because as a Mexicano I have come to the conclusion that realistically we have lost our land, we have lost everything in Texas and parts of the Southwest. But the Palestinian people are going through that right now. They are putting up a real strong fight, and I am real glad to see that. Our culture, like theirs, has been under attack. It has been stifled for many years, but some of us, like the Palestinians, have resisted that acculturation and still speak our language and maintain our cultural traditions. It is getting harder and harder for the Palestinians, though, with the laws and with the whole oppression around them, but I am convinced they will survive at any cost with their language and culture.

I like to compare 150 years ago to what is happening now and educate not only other Latinos, but progressive whites and other third-world people. What is happening now—not only in Palestine, but in El Salvador and other parts of Latin America—is like the whole “manifest destiny” mentality, the same mentality of conquer and defeat the people.

The one interesting aspect about Israel is that they want the land without the people, whereas in other parts of the world they want the land and the people to work the land to help in the economic development

of the forces in power. So that comparison is very interesting. The fact that they are committing genocide against the Palestinian people is, in my eyes, something not exactly new, but for them to do it so blatantly and for the whole world to know what is going on without an outcry against the crimes of the Israeli government with the help of the U.S. government ... this astounds me.

People in the Latino community are ready to learn, to hear about the Palestinians because people are becoming more and more aware of what is going on in Central America and are taking positions contrary to the government. With that background, people are also ready to hear about struggles in other parts of the world. They try to be a little more analytical to make sure that all they hear is not the evening news or what they read in the newspapers.

I think that people like the November 29th Committee for Palestine and the other organizations which are pro-Palestinian will be listened to. It will be very hard because you are talking to working-class people who have never been involved in a political process, political training, or political consciousness aside from their own immediate situation. If they have any time, they go into other subjects, but their immediate needs are felt first.

But when people come around and take the time to talk with them on a one-to-one basis on a personal level—not as someone coming in to preach or teach but just to have a conversation with them—people will be really receptive. They in turn can go to their church or school organizations and speak a little bit more about other things than their immediate problems. The Spanish literature produced by the Latino Task Force, along with regular Latino delegations to Palestine, will have a big impact in reaching our community. □

FOCUS on Action

By Steve Goldfield

In the last few months, there has been a significant and qualitative increase in all forms of resistance to occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, from demonstrations and strikes to armed resistance. Palestinian demonstrators—and bystanders as well—have been shot to death by Israeli occupying troops. Israeli soldiers and officials have also been killed.

Five years ago Lebanese fascists, under the watchful eyes of their Israeli allies, massacred thousands of Palestinian and Lebanese men, women, and children in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps over a three-day period. Five years later the terrible event, symbolic of the decades of suffering of the Palestinian people, continues to be marked.

The Palestine Human Rights Campaign (PHRC) held its annual conference in Washington, D.C., September 18–19. Nurse Ellen Siegel, an eyewitness to the massacre, was joined by Ben Alofs, a Dutch nurse who worked in the Tal al-Zaatar camp during the 1976 siege and massacre, and Dr. Pauline Cutting, a British surgeon in Bourj al-Barajneh camp, to testify on their experiences. Later, two hundred joined a candlelight vigil in front of the Israeli embassy in memory of those who died and in protest of Israel's current military attacks in Washington, General Amos Yaron, who commanded Israeli troops which surrounded Sabra and Shatila during the massacre,

A major New York event was held on September 27. Cosponsors included PHRC, *Jewish Affairs*, American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), Mobilization for Survival, November 29th Committee for Palestine, International Jewish Peace Union, U.S. Peace Council, and the Palestine Aid Society. Representatives attended from the United Nations Division for Palestinian Rights, the African National Congress, Casa Honduras, Puerto Rican Committee Against Repression, and Chilean solidarity organizations. Progressive Lebanese musician Marcel Khalife, who had just completed a national concert tour, also attended. Speakers included Sheila Ryan,

director of the Network for Peace and Justice in the Middle East, Jonathan Boyarin of the IJPU, Zehdi Terzi, PLO representative at the United Nations, Dr. Cutting, and Mr. Alofs.

Other events were held in the following cities: Paterson, New Jersey, September 13; Brooklyn, September 13; New York, September 16; San Antonio, Texas, September 22; Austin, September 23 and 24; San Francisco, September 24; Chicago, September 27. Many groups organized these events, including the Student Committee for Palestinian Human Rights at Columbia University, National Association of Arab Americans, PHRC, U.S.



Labor Committee on the Middle East protests Histadrut fundraiser in San Francisco.

Palestine Focus

World Community Mobilized for Palestinian Rights

By Riyadh Khoury

The Fourth International Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) Conference on Palestine was held in Geneva, Switzerland, September 7-9, 1987. The conference was attended by over five hundred participants from Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, the Middle East, and Australia. Organizations attending ranged from the World Council of Churches, to both the world YWCAs and YMCAs, to the National Federation of Indian Women, the Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation, the World Peace Council, Oxfam, and to the Committee for Palestinian and Jewish Studies in Japan. There were strong delegations of peace activists from both Israel and the United States.

The NGO conference is an annual meeting of organizations, individuals, and institutions who support Palestinian rights. The meeting is held under the auspices of the United Nations Division for Palestinian Rights. This year's conference was yet another international confirmation of the importance of the Palestine question, and the level of attendance indicates the increasing international support enjoyed by the Palestinian people and their elected representative, the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The participants came to discuss, network, strengthen ties, plan future international activities, and to gather more support for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Attending such an international gathering and meeting the broad array of delegates helps in the exchange of information, knowledge, and experience in order to improve the level of support and widens the international consensus which demands a just solution to the Palestine question.

At the opening ceremony, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat addressed the meeting on behalf of the Palestinian people and their representative, the PLO. Arafat urged conferees to expand their activities in support of the Palestinian people and their quest for a just and peaceful solution to the Palestine question, based on the universal principle of self-determination. He observed that only the United States and Israel fail to support the United Nations call for the convening of an international peace conference with the participation of the PLO as a party to the conflict. Arafat also described the plight of the Palestinian people in the refugee camps in Lebanon at the hands of Amal militias and called for an end to this bloodshed immediately.

Omen, November 29th Committee for Palestine, General Union of Palestinian Students, and the Union of Palestinian Women's Associations. As reported in our last issue, Archbishop John Quinn of the Archdiocese of San Francisco presided over a special memorial service and Arabic mass at St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco to remember the victims of the massacre on August 15.

Amidst the flurry of legislation to harass national liberation movement offices and representatives in the United States, the role of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in supplying defamatory information to federal agencies and legislators has become particularly blatant. The FBI had cited the ADL as a source of information in the Los Angeles 8 deportation case, and the ADL has become notorious among academics in the last few years for the "blacklists" it has published of names of opponents of the Israeli government and its policies.

A notable example of the ADL's function came up in the Swindall amendment to the bill authorizing operating funds for the State Department. Swindall's amendment proposed to prevent African National Congress and SWAPO UN representatives, along with the PLO office and representatives from socialist countries (some of which were already covered under executive orders), from traveling outside New York.

Swindall read several articles into the Congressional Record which purported to smear the ANC by linking it with the PLO and other "Arab terrorists." One of these, from a May 1986 ADL Bulletin article on the ANC, "The African National Congress: A Closer Look," by Nathan Perlmutter and David Evanier, linked the ANC with the November 29th Committee for Palestine. The article described the controversy concerning ANC member and State University of Stony Brook Professor Ernest Dube, who also serves on the ANC's National Educational Council. Dube was denied tenure by the school administration



PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat addresses International Conference on the Question of Palestine in Geneva, 1983. International nongovernmental organization meetings on Palestine began at that time.

Several speakers represented the UN: Massamba Sarre, chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and Diego Cordovez, who spoke on behalf of the Secretary-General. The keynote address was given by Congressman Nick Joe Rahall, Democrat of West Virginia. Congressman Rahall commented that "it is inconceivable to me that serious negotiations can take place without the participation of all interested parties. To exclude the chosen representative of the displaced Palestinians clearly deprives them of a voice in their destiny. It is an injustice which must be corrected." Rahall continued, "The refusal of my country, the United States, to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization as the representative of the Palestinians has undoubtedly hindered our ability to act as a credible broker of peace in the Middle East. It is said that they are a terrorist organization, that they are not worthy of recognition, without a true and objective examination of reality." Commenting on the U.S. Congress, Rahall said, "The United Nations is filling a deep void in the Middle East. There is room for debate on the question of Palestine at the United Nations. There is no such room within the Congress of the United States when it comes to actual decision-making."

after an Israeli professor and Governor Mario Cuomo objected to Dube's psychology course on racism discussing Zionism.

The ADL article and the Congressional Record report: "Dube spoke at a teach-in on Palestine in New York in December 1983, sponsored by the November 29th Coalition, a pro-PLO organization of radical leftist and Arab-American groups. In an interview published in the July-August 1985 issue of *Palestine Focus*, a publication of the now renamed November 29th Committee for Palestine, Dube said that 'what the Zionists did to the Arabs in Palestine was exactly the same that the whites did to us' in South Africa." The pamphlet went on to note that "the ANC and the November 29th Committee for Palestine cosponsored a meeting in New York in April 1986 on the subject, 'Israel-South Africa: The Apartheid Connection?'" Similar meetings have since been held in many other American cities."

Despite what the ADL and Swindall say, our committee is very proud of our association with the ANC. Indeed, the ANC's work and relationships as cited by Mr. Swindall and those he quotes are among the strongest reasons to oppose his legislation and to insist that the ANC retain its ability to travel throughout the United States to testify to the reality of apartheid and to insist that Americans retain the right to hear what the ANC, SWAPO, the PLO, and the other targets have to say.

On October 15, the Israeli trade union federation Histadrut held its annual fundraising dinner at the Fairmount Hotel in San Francisco. A phalanx of local labor leaders and California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown showed up to demonstrate their support. Outside, the Labor Committee on the Middle East showed up to express its abhorrence of "the only trade union in the world that has a direct political and economic partnership with South Africa's apartheid regime." The press was not allowed into the

The conferees participated in two main panels. The first dealt with "The Need for and the Urgency of Convening the International Peace Conference on the Middle East, in Accordance with the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 38/58c." That panel included Shafiq Al-Hout of the PLO; Tawfiq Zayyad, mayor of Nazareth; Mattityahu Peled, member of the Israeli Knesset; and Dr. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, professor of political science and a member of the Palestine National Council. Additional panelists came from the Soviet Union, India, Australia, Austria, and Canada.

The second panel, on "Palestinian Political and Human Rights" included Dr. Hatem Abu Ghazaleh, chairman of the Society for the Care of Handicapped Children in Gaza; Latif Dori, founder and secretary of the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue; and Raymonda Tawil from the Palestinian Press Service in Jerusalem.

In addition to these important panels, several workshops dealt with grassroots issues. They included "Mobilization of Public Opinion" with Don Betz, chair of the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ICCP), and James Graff and David Watkins of the ICCP; "Creative Arts and the Palestinian Struggle for National Identity" with Palestinian artist Kamal Boulatta; "Community Development and Relief

"The steadfastness of the Palestinians inspires us to continue our work, to carve stones of hope out of mountains of opposition until that opposition no longer stands."—Don Betz, ICCP

Work"; and "Mobilizing the International Peace Movement for a Nuclear-Weapon Free Middle East" with Amnon Zichroni, executive director of the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace.

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dinner on the grounds that it was private.

The labor committee wrote to a number of those scheduled to participate, asking them not to attend, including Walter Johnson, head of the San Francisco Labor Council and John Henning, head of the California AFL-CIO, both of whom were on the dinner committee. Speaker Willie Brown did send a letter to the committee, saying: "I have decided, however, that I will attend this dinner and that I will take the opportunity to address the issue directly to the California supporters of the Histadrut who will be there. I respect your intentions to picket outside this dinner as a means of drawing attention to the relationship between the Histadrut and South Africa."

Four Bay area groups—Bay Area Free South Africa Movement, San Francisco Anti-Apartheid Committee, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, and the November 29th Committee for Palestine—issued a joint statement calling on Willie Brown and Richard Katz, another assembly Democrat from Los Angeles to denounce the dinner. The statement not only notes the Histadrut's relationship with South Africa but its contribution to the repression of Palestinian workers.

For more information contact the Labor Committee on the Middle East at P. O. Box 421429, San Francisco, CA 94142.

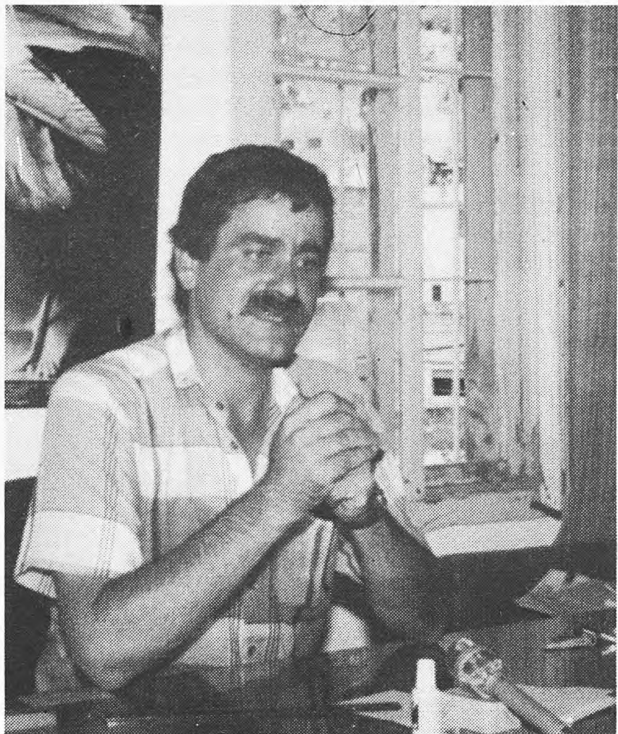
Gideon Spiro is an Israeli activist who opposes the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, particularly through his work in such groups as the Committee in Solidarity with Bir Zeit University, the Committee Against the War in Lebanon, Yesh Gvul (soldiers who refused to fight in Lebanon), and the Committee to Confront the Iron Fist. He lost his government job because of a series of letters published in Israeli newspapers.

Now he faces imprisonment for up to three years and heavy fines because of another letter, this one sent to judges in the military tribunal in occupied Ramallah to protest a five-year sentence for a 14-year-old Palestinian

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Interview with Johnny Jahshan Member, Nazareth City Council

Nazareth Fight



Steve Goldfield/Palestine Focus

Johnny Jahshan is an elected member of the municipal council of Nazareth, the largest Palestinian city within the 1948 border of Israel. He was interviewed for Palestine Focus by six members of a delegation of the National Executive Committee of the November 29th Committee for Palestine in August 1986.

JJ: I am a member of the Directive Committee of the Municipality. From 1948 until 1975, the Municipality of Nazareth was run by a municipal council that was an extension of the foreign affairs office of Israel. So the Israelis used the municipal council of Nazareth politically against the wishes, the will, and the interests of the Arabs who stayed inside the borders of Israel in 1948.

Politically this was against the wish of the people here, but the problem was that during elections we had internal difficulties. In 1975 things were different; our people recognized the dire necessity for a political exit from this situation. Some people tried to portray it as if there is nothing to do with politics inside the municipal council. But our view was different. We felt that most of the things that we were denied as a people in Israel as Arabs, we were denied for political reasons, on the basis of racial discrimination.

This is why we didn't have good sewer systems. This is why we didn't have enough territory to build on. This is why our land was confiscated. This is why we have so many difficulties in getting our students into high schools and universities. This is why we don't have laboratories. We do not have parks.

We do not believe that this is an outcome so-to-speak of a lack of a wish to develop as some people try to put out, a kind of product of our background, the way we think. "We do not like gardens. We do not like to develop." No. This is an outcome of direct racial discrimination against us as Arabs. This is why we thought that politics is directly involved in the workings of local councils, municipal councils.

So we came to the people first with a coalition of four parties in Nazareth. The four parties were mainly the Communist Party, which had always been in the municipal council; its votes always ran around 40 to 45 percent. So all it needed was a little bit of coalition with people who could cooperate. The other three groups were the local university graduates of the town, the university students of the town, and the nationalists. Those four groups joined what is still the Democratic Front of Nazareth.

Program of the Democratic Front

Our program was a mixture of services and politics, general points on politics and, of course, a detailed program about services that we thought we could give to the people. The title of our program was then and is still "Dignity and Services."

We then managed—the elections were on December 9, 1975—to make our local revolution. The press gave it a great deal of coverage. Everybody spoke about it. Everybody wrote about it. We managed to take eleven out of seventeen of the seats on the council. The mayor, Tawfiq Zayyad, was also elected by a percentage of 65 percent in a direct election. This was the first time direct elections were held in Israel. They experimented in Nazareth.

PF: Was that the only experiment?

JJ: No. They went on with it. Ever since then we have the same composition on the council. The effect of this event on Nazareth spread very rapidly to the surrounding villages. Most of the councils in the area formed what they called their local Democratic Front. They took the example of Nazareth and imitated it: Self-Dignity and Services.

In the elections of 1976, a year after Nazareth, about twenty Democratic Fronts managed to seize the councils. They had their own success there. Even in the occupied territories, there are direct links with Karim Khalaf and Bassam Shaka'a. They will tell you that the elections of Nazareth even influenced what went on in the occupied territories because they had their own elections a few months after. Again, they thought that what happened in Nazareth affected their own elections because people thought if they can do it there, why can't we, why don't we do it?

During 27 years of occupation (1948–1975), we were always misrepresented. After 1967 even direct relatives of ours—when I first met my first aunt, for example, she did not believe that we still speak Arabic, we still teach Arabic, that we still dress and wed and do everything the way we used to do—thought that after 27 years of living with the Jews things would have changed so much.

We proved the contrary. So they thought that if we can maintain a national political program, why don't they? If we can form coalitions, why don't they? It seems like this idea went out rapidly and affected things there.

The idea was that services were at a minimum. We were deprived of so many things, and we are still deprived. For instance, more than 65 percent of the town's houses were not connected to a sewage system, which is very terrible concerning health and so on. Schooling was in very bad shape. Elementary schools were located, most of them, in rented rooms. By rented rooms, I don't mean rented schools, I mean two or three rooms in a single house. So you would have the school located in five, six, seven different places. And, of course, the buildings were never meant to be schools, so the facilities were very bad: no laboratories, no libraries, no yards, no gymnasiums.

If you want to speak about children's facilities: no youth clubs, no parks. If you want to speak about older children, fifteen-, sixteen-, seventeen-years-old: no sports equipment, no sports clubs, no swimming pools, no tennis courts.

If you want to speak about the teaching syllabus of the schools: very empty as far as Arabs are concerned. We did not study our history as much as we studied Jewish history. We studied the Bible, the history of the Christian and Muslim religions. We studied the history of the Jewish religion, while 1 percent of the Jewish syllabus spoke about the Arabs. Our syllabus of history, most of it spoke about Jewish history. Our poetry was always old, the poetry you studied—always ancient poets, never patriotic poems, never recent poems that we know, that we come to hear about from the Arab world.



Demolished houses, familiar in the West Bank and Gaza, also happen to Palestinians with Israeli citizenship. This one is in Jaffa.

Streets were in very bad shape and still are. The same for the water system. Most of the high schools were privately run by missionaries. Seven out of our nine high schools are private missionary high schools; the government never invested its money in schooling in Nazareth. Our three hospitals are private missionary hospitals run by priests and nuns.

There is no single aspect of life unaffected, social workers, psychological help, nothing. All those services turned into zero. So what we managed in the first few years was to improve everything, mainly in schooling, sewage system, the water system, youth clubs, sports clubs, education, and arts and so on. We had priorities, and we started working on all those priorities with all our force.

But then we met the hard rock of discrimination in financing the municipal councils. We never expected a smooth life in the municipality. But it was a very hard life. You have all the will and the need to do things, but yet you cannot move.

Israeli Municipal Finance

This is the Israeli system in financing local councils. You present your budget to somebody, a representative of the Ministry of Education who lives near Nazareth; his office is in "Upper Nazareth," a totally Jewish town built on the expropriated land of Nazareth. There he is allowed, almost with no restrictions, to say yes and no without explaining things. What he did most of the time was to say no to things that involved projects and to say yes to things that spoke about taxes. So he always tended to make the deficit a minimum.

He said, "You want to spend this much. Your income is so much. So you should cover the deficit exactly like every other budget you do at home." So he managed always to raise the taxes and to diminish the projects so that the deficit is very small. And even this was never given on time.

Most of what we were denied as Arabs in Israel we were denied on the basis of racial discrimination.

The second way of financing the local councils according to the Israeli system is what is called the development budgets. Development budgets were never available to the Arab local councils in Israel. So this is why we could not think of new projects like traffic lights, widening streets, opening new streets. They turned us systematically into salary payers: collect taxes and pay the salaries. This is all we can do.

The third way of help, according to the Israeli system, is direct investment from the different ministries. The Ministry of Interior would come and say, "This is a gift, a school, a street, a traffic light." The Ministry of Tourism may come and say, "Nazareth is very holy for Christianity. So I will finance a street or a parking lot, toilets for the visitors." To date they have never invested a single penny.

In fact, they did it once very badly. We used to have a very nice old building which had existed for hundreds of years. They came and leveled it and built another one. This was the only time they invested money in Nazareth, about twenty years ago. Until now they have never come back with any investment. Nazareth is one of the most attractive places in Israel for tourism. They use the name of Nazareth.

So how did we manage? First, by getting the people to know exactly what is the situation. People noticed what was happening, but what they needed was that those ideas should be explained very clearly. So we could have the people of Nazareth with us, the majority of them, of course. We used to explain to them our difficulties.

This is why in 1978, when we held new elections, three years later—according to the Israeli system it should be four years, but they thought maybe that the results of the elections were sort of a passing trend so after three years they held another election—we had the same program. We had some personal difficulties then. Some of our friends left us. But with the same coalition, new blood, and the same program, in spite of not solving most of the problems of Nazareth, we were re-elected and in spite of our personal difficulties then, we were re-elected with

nts for Justice

almost the same percentage, eleven out of seventeen, and Zayyad was elected with the same percentage.

The system of Nazareth, mainly the political system, spread rapidly to every single village inside the borders of 1948 and even outside to the territories occupied in 1967. We succeeded in spreading many political ideas also, mainly what we thought was the main danger: expropriation of land. This problem still exists, and it is still one of our main problems today. Many people liked the slogan, "No more expropriation of land."

In 1976, four months after the elections in Nazareth, when the Israelis were trying to confiscate more land in Galilee. Many people, with the formulation that we will not give any more land, resisted the expropriation, and we had the Land Day, March 30, 1976. I believe that the elections of Nazareth affected many people, and the determination was an outcome of what happened in Nazareth.

Voluntary Work Camps

A few months later, in July 1976, we had our first voluntary camp in Nazareth where thousands of people from all over Israel, democratic Jews, people from outside the country, people from the occupied territories came and joined the camp which was trying to challenge the government that we can develop the city in spite of all the closed faucets, financially speaking. We can develop Nazareth, and at the same time we can change politically.

Those people came to show solidarity with Nazareth and its municipal council and, of course, with its political program. This year we had our eleventh work camp. This idea also spread to most of the villages. Those camps came to be also big projects, not only financial projects that we can benefit from, but also to show political solidarity with the municipal council of Nazareth and with the people of Nazareth for their political program.

In 1982 we had our third election, and again due to the combination of the political program plus the service program, we succeeded again in the elections with the same percentages: eleven out of seventeen and Zayyad was elected with 64 or 65 percent.

Nazareth's Problems Are the Problems of the Arabs in Israel

From Nazareth, you can learn about everything that is going on with the Arabs in Israel. The situation here is even a little bit better than other places. We manage—maybe because of the size of the town, because of our experience—sometimes to play the role of the leader. So whatever starts with the Arabs, starts usually in Nazareth. Even if you speak about art exhibitions, if you speak about schools, if you speak about paving streets, voluntary camps, it usually starts in Nazareth. In some cases, we manage to make things better than in other villages, but yet we can be used as an example.

The first of the problems that Nazareth suffers from is the expropriation of land. Since 1948, the inhabitants of Nazareth, who were then twelve thousand, have grown to fifty-five thousand, an increase of approximately 400 percent. The territory of the town has diminished by two-thirds from what it used to be. It used to be 21,000 dunums; today it is 7,000. So they are trying to turn Nazareth into a big village. They took the land. They did not manage to put industry in Nazareth. Most of the industry in Israel is either owned by the government, by the Histadrut, (the labor federation, "labor unions"), or by private investment directed through the government Ministry of Industry.

They did not manage to put a single factory all over Israel in any single Arab village. In one Druze village, they have a factory which is intended to be a tourist attraction, not a site of industry. They took the land. They turned all the people into simple workers. So most of our villages and towns today look more like hotels than like towns and villages because all the workers leave in the morning to go to their simple jobs in the nearest industrial areas—sometimes not in the nearest, sometimes very far.

The third thing that they did in Nazareth was to move all the official offices of Nazareth to "Upper Nazareth" (Upper Nazareth is a derogatory term which Nazarenes prefer not to use). They wanted to make the exclusively Jewish "Upper Nazareth" the capital of the Galilee and change the historical status of the town of Nazareth. They succeeded in moving most of it; they left us the police, of course, to stay in town and the income tax office.

We thought that very hard because it is also a bad thing economically to move those offices. For most of the people from the villages, Nazareth was always the place



Tawfiq Zayyad, mayor of Nazareth, speaking in San Francisco.

to come to the government offices and, at the same time, Nazareth succeeded in being an attractive place for them. So they did all of their marketing in Nazareth.

We have another problem because the Ministry of Construction never invested in building apartments for our youth. We have the problem of the newly wed couples. This is very hard because people do not know where to go. The territory of Nazareth is surrounded from almost all sides so there is no place to expand. Our system of building does not usually go up, it spreads. You don't see high apartments. So we had a difficult problem.

We intended to solve this problem in the municipality by persuading the Ministry of Construction to invest in some of new kinds of building. The way they did it is that people pay fully for their housing while in other places, mainly in Jewish cities, they are almost given as gifts. They pay in long-term loans, the way it is done in the States, in New York, for example.

Recently, we are going to solve part of this problem, mainly not because they want to be so generous to us but because many of our land capitalists moved to Upper Nazareth. Some of them built even secretly by which I mean they go there only at night. They don't change the name on the electricity meter, the water meter.

Upper Nazareth was, from the first moment they started building it, meant to fill the place of Nazareth. They announced a development area class A, which means tax-exempt, priorities in industry, priorities in construction. So it is very attractive today for a family who lives in Tel Aviv to come and buy a house here. They pay it off very slowly; the prices are very low. If they open a small factory, it is tax-exempt. They can do all of those things and then rent the house, if they pay off the mortgage, to an Arab family and move back to Tel Aviv. If their down payment is \$50 per month, they can easily find an Arab family who very badly needs the house and get something like \$150 or \$200 for it a month. And they can come back and live in Tel Aviv. So after three years, the Israeli will own the house and make a net profit of \$100 or \$150 per month.

The Israelis recognize the Palestinians only as religions, as folklore, as heritage, but never as a people.

Today we have about 1,500 people who live in Upper Nazareth. The Israelis always try to hide this number because they don't want any new common cities. According to the Zionist dream, they were supposed to offer the settlements in the Galilee two big Jewish cities, Upper Nazareth and Karmiel. So they don't want this nightmare of Upper Nazareth turned into a common city where Jews and Arabs live together.

In schooling, we managed to build a few new schools, but yet we are short about nine schools—I am counting the missionary schools as if they are municipalized schools. We do not want schools in place of the missionary schools but along with them in order to achieve the objective of having no more rented rooms, but having only suitable buildings for the schools.

We have some new youth clubs, new clubs for older

people. We have dentists especially for the students. We have a club for gifted students. We have an active folklore group. We are trying with the minimum of the money that we receive to solve part of our problems. We have still a long way to go in solving those problems, and the voluntary camps helped a lot in solving part of the problems.

For instance, today we can pave streets and even construct buildings and retaining walls, replace water pipes, paint our schools. The total value of most of our recent camps surpassed the total amount of the governmental development budget many times. We doubled it. We tripled it. In four days, our last camp even surpassed three times the development budget that we received from the ministry. This shows not only that we manage to have so many people to work with us, but it shows also how small the development budget was.

In the political field, the Democratic Front of Nazareth is part of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, which is represented in the Knesset, the parliament, with four seats. We believe that on our local program we need equality as Israeli citizens. After all, we have Israeli ID cards, we hold Israeli passports. So all we ask for now is equality in all fields.

We are not yet recognized as a people. In all their declarations, all they are ready for is to acknowledge us as religions, as folklore, as the heritage, but never as people. Today, the Arabs in Israel are 17 percent of the population, who are always misrepresented in the papers, always misrepresented in all aspects of our daily life.

As a general idea, take any positive idea that you have in mind and try to calculate our percentage as Arabs. You will always find it is less than 17 percent. Sometimes it is a drastic comparison. For instance, if you want to check how many university students are in school, you find the percentage of Arabs there is 1.5 to 2 percent while it should be 17 percent if things were in the proper form. If you look at how many social workers are in the Arab towns, villages, and cities, out of the total social workers in Israel, you will hardly find 2 percent. If you take the number of laboratories in schools, you will find this always at the minimum.

There are very few positive things that we reach 5 percent. If you take budgets of all the Arab local councils out of all the local councils in Israel, we hardly reach 2.5 percent. We do not serve in the Israeli Army; we are not asked to do so. But they use this as an excuse very many times mainly when you apply for a loan for a house or for the university or for certain subjects. They try to say, "Did your father or you serve in the army?"

On this point, we say there is no law that obliges Arabs to serve in the army, but even if we are asked, we won't go in the present circumstances. There could eventually be a certain situation where we would be ready. Our political program today asks for self-determination for the Palestinians, which would result in an independent Palestinian state near the state of Israel. This is in our political program as the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality along with, of course, several other items that have to do with the land, the refugees, and so on.

We also want to see a whole process of peace in the area. We do not wish to see individual so-called peace processes. We think that those things are only a mirage, and the Israelis are only by those things trying to avoid the independent Palestinian state.

Concerning the Israeli daily life today, we think that the official government stand encourages all sorts of fascist movements, which is today seen most clearly in the movement of Kahane. But I don't feel that Kahane is all the fascism in Israel. You have also the official fascism in Israel which is based in even Knesset rules and laws. We have fascist laws. We have fascist settlements supported daily by officials, by the prime minister. Trying to picture Kahane as all the fascism in Israel, only Kahane, is a mistake. We see those things are very dangerous for the future for us and for the state of Israel also.

After all, a state with 17 percent of its population Palestinian Arabs should learn, should think very clearly how to deal with those people. They should be given all their rights. And, after all, in spite of the misrepresentation always, we were never a security problem to Israel. In fact, today we believe that all the Arab states are not a security problem to the state of Israel. Jordan was never and will never be a security threat to the state of Israel.

They try to picture this as if they are the poor people. They are always afraid. They are always in danger of being killed, in danger of being thrown into the sea. They try to use all of those things. □

The plan was not perfect by any measure, and the Palestinian people found it bitter indeed that more than half its land would be allotted to the one-third Jewish population. This territory, moreover, was to be controlled by a colonial movement with the historically demonstrated, undisguised aim of dispossessing the indigenous people. The partition plan limited Palestinian self-determination, a right which the Palestinian people firmly believed was both indivisible and inalienable. To compromise such a right was regarded by Palestinians as presumptuous on the part of a world still dominated by Western colonial powers.

Yet, imperfect though the plan was, it never came even remotely into reality. Instead, the 1948 war resulted in the Zionist military—overwhelmingly superior in numbers and weaponry—carving out the new state of Israel in territory considerably beyond the scope envisioned in the partition plan, 78 percent of Palestine. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forcibly expelled to create an exclusivist Jewish state; hundreds of Palestinian villages were razed to the ground.

Nor did a Palestinian state emerge, even though the remainder of Palestine—the West Bank and Gaza—were in Arab hands. Jordan, in particular, seized and annexed the West Bank to prevent the development of an independent Palestinian identity, as threatening to conservative Arab interests as to the new Israeli state. Egypt, especially after the 1952 revolution which brought Nasser to power, let Palestinians run their own affairs in Gaza, but no state was formed. After 1967, all of Palestine came under Israeli control, further negating the intent of the partition plan.

Although the partition plan failed, the UN vote in its favor is often cited by apologists for Israel to justify the current situation. But such a view ignores certain key aspects of the partition plan and the unfolding of events since 1947.

While the United Nations voted to partition the land, it did not vote to expel Palestinians from their homeland to languish in refugee camps. Nor did the UN approve the establishment of an exclusivist Jewish state or the imposition of discrimination against Palestinians who have remained in Israel since 1948. Indeed, forty years of Zionism in power in Israel have graphically demonstrated the inherent racism in Zionist ideology and practice.

The United Nations did not vote in favor of continuous Israeli expansion, occupation, and militarization. In fact, after the 1948 war, the UN began approving a long series of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions calling for the return of refugees, for Israeli withdrawal from lands occupied in 1967, and for the reinstatement of all Palestinian rights, national and individual.

By 1979 the UN had recognized that one of the central goals of its November 29, 1947 vote was still unfulfilled: the realization of Palestinian self-determination through an independent state. By an overwhelming margin, the world body recognized this tragic denial and made November 29, the birthday of the failed partition plan, the day of international solidarity with the Palestinian people. Today, November 29 is commemorated around the world by all peo-

ple seeking peace and justice as the day to reaffirm support for the just aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Indeed, world public opinion has changed dramatically. Angola, Zimbabwe, India, Vietnam: The countries formerly dominated by Western colonial powers have emerged as a strong moral and political force in world affairs. World public opinion is now defined by rejection of the old acquiescence to colonial might. The Palestinian people's independence struggle is recognized as an important component of the international anticolonial movement. The United Nations, whose action forty years ago was used by the Zionist movement to justify its aggression, has today become a vehicle for a just and peaceful solution for the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

The United Nations today proposes a peace plan based on comprehensive negotiations among all parties to the conflict, including the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, the Palestine Liberation Organization. The proposal calls upon both the United States and the Soviet Union to join the negotiations in their capacity as permanent Security Council members. The framework for such an international peace conference—expressed in General Assembly resolution 38/58C—is Israeli withdrawal from lands occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem; the right of return for refugees; the right of Palestinian self-determination, including the right to establish an independent state; and security for all states in the region. The international peace conference has gained worldwide support: only Israel and the United States obstinately reject any negotiations with the PLO.

Yet because of the overwhelming popularity of the proposed conference, some political leaders in Israel and the United States recognize that advocacy of some sort of conference is necessary—at least from a public-relations point of view. Thus Israeli Foreign Minister Peres proposes an international peace conference without the PLO, without Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, and without a significant role for the Soviet Union. Peres wants to negotiate only with King Hussein. Once again the unpopular Jordanian monarchy is promoted as the “legitimate” partner for direct negotiations with Israel along the divide-and-conquer lines of the Camp David agreement. That approach worked well to neutralize Egypt. Once again King Hussein is called upon to collaborate with Israel to nullify and eventually destroy the only independent expression of Palestinian decision making, the PLO.

Peres' proposal is a sham; still the very fact that such “peace negotiation” schemes are circulated testifies to the growing strength of world public opinion. Israel and its main backer, the United States, are increasingly isolated. A recent *LA Times* opinion poll revealed that 50 percent of Americans support negotiations with the PLO. Thus American public opinion is far more in tune with the world than are the Congress and the president. With the approach of the 1988 elections, this growing support for a real alternative to occupation and apartheid must be brought to bear upon Congress and the White House. The demand for genuine, comprehensive negotiations must be heeded. The unfulfilled promise of the partition plan—the national rights of the Palestinian people—must be fulfilled. □

PIO Closure...

Continued from page 1

can and cannot be. Despite the recent Senate vote of 100 to 0 in favor of the Grassley Amendment (part of the legislation calling for precisely the closures AIPAC wants) and despite efforts by its sponsors to covertly shove it through Congress without the usual committee hearings, closure of the U.N. Mission would be met by international censure and prove uncomfortably controversial at home.

Opposition to the Closure

The American Civil Liberties Union, legal counsel for Abdul-Rahman as he challenges the Reagan administration's decision in court, stresses the danger the closure poses to all U.S. citizens, not just Palestinians or advocates of Palestinian rights. “Once the government is allowed the power to decide which causes American citizens may choose to peaceably represent, the First Amendment rights of all are threatened.” Abdul-Rahman himself is a U.S. citizen.

The ACLU views the closure from the perspective of basic constitutional rights. “This is clearly and unquestionably a matter of the government attempting to suppress free speech,” said ACLU executive director Ira Glaser. Referring to the State Department's pretext of “concern over terrorism,” the ACLU told the press, “No one will be safer because this information booth has been closed. What will be less safe is the right of each of us to espouse and represent foreign causes.”

In addition to the ACLU's vigorous defense on the grounds of free speech, the PIO closure provoked an outpouring of protest from other prestigious quarters as well. Editorials in major U.S. newspapers spoke out against the unconstitutionality of the State Department's

action. A variety of Arab and American Arab organizations lodged protests, including the Council of Presidents of National Arab-American Organizations, itself consisting of more than a dozen separate organizations.

The Washington-based Ad Hoc Committee on Anti-Palestinian Legislation formed soon after legislation targeting Palestinians was introduced. The committee urges concerned individuals to contact the State Department and express their opposition to the closure and to emphasize that “by further removing one of the main actors from the American scene, the closure would hinder prospects for Middle East Peace.”

“For Israel, it is a clever strategy. For America to succumb is only a disgrace.”—PIO Director Hassan Abdul-Rahman

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) responded to the closure order by calling upon members of Congress “to speak out against this latest attempt to silence even a weak Palestinian voice in the United States.... To prevent its views from being heard by the American people is tantamount to working against peace and contradicts the principles that we celebrate on the eve of the 200th anniversary of the signing of our constitution.” ADC has vowed to lobby hard in Congress to protest this suppression of Palestinian political opinion.

Hassan Abdul-Rahman himself, sponsored by the National Association of Arab Americans and ADC, is touring sections of the country to meet with editorial boards of newspapers, speak at public forums, and give radio and television interviews. He was in the south from October 20–25 and appeared in San Antonio, Austin, and Dallas, Texas and Tulsa, Oklahoma. Another leg of his tour will begin in January.

Ironically, concludes Abdul-Rahman, the PIO closure would work against the Reagan administration in one respect in that it clearly belies U.S. pretensions to be the nonpartisan arbiter of peace in the Middle East. “If the United States wants to be an honest broker in bringing about a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict,” he reasons, “it cannot then act as a surrogate for Israel [by closing the PIO] and expect the Palestinians as well as the other Arab countries to trust its intentions. Its action will prevent, rather than foster, a peaceful settlement.”

Indeed, closing the PIO is equivalent to Israeli government policy inflicting itself by remote control on exiled Palestinians, Abdul-Rahman further charges: “It is merely an extension of the Israeli political strategy of trying to make the Palestinian diaspora invisible so the injustices committed against them, the crimes to which they have been made victims, the massacres, the killings, the outrages will not be noticed by the civilized world. For Israel to attempt this, it is a clever strategy. For America to succumb to it is only a disgrace.” □

For more information contact the Ad Hoc Committee on Anti-Palestinian Legislation, 245-2nd St., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, 202-547-6000.

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Palestine Focus is the national newspaper of the November 29th Committee for Palestine. The newspaper is an activist vehicle tied to an activist movement, yet aimed at a general audience with little background knowledge. We report on activities, not only of our committee, but of other groups; and we provide consistent commentary and analysis of events in the Middle East.

The November 29th Committee for Palestine takes its name from the date declared by the United Nations as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Our task is to spark and support consistent, far-reaching, and effective activity which brings the issue of Palestine before the American people and builds a growing and deepening base of understanding. Our committee organizes to stop U.S. intervention in the Middle East and to cut off U.S. aid to Israel. We educate Americans on the need to support the Palestine Liberation Organization, which is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and to oppose Israeli policies of discrimination which deny the Palestinian people their rights.

Signed articles are not necessarily the opinion of the November 29th Committee for Palestine. Letters, opinions, and other contributions are welcome.

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Focus on Action...

Continued from page 3

boy, Ahed Mahmoud Musah Al-Aisa. Ahed was accused of throwing a molotov cocktail at Israeli occupying troops. In his letter, Spiro defended Ahed as "the Palestinian David who tries to sling stones at the Israeli Goliath. In this act he did not cause harm to a single human being, and for this you send him to rot in Damun jail for five years. Are you not ashamed? You did an evil act, and for this you will pay. I hope that in the next five years you will suffer in sleepless nights from nightmares and bad dreams that will remind you of the nights of the Palestinian boy Ahed in the Israeli jail."

The state of Israel indicted Gideon Spiro on charges of libeling the court and insulting a public official because of this letter and another sent to Judge Friedman of the Haifa District Court. Spiro's attorney, Avigdor Feldman, has prepared a defense which amounts an indictment of the implicit unfairness of courts, whether in Ramallah or Haifa, in which Arab Palestinians are tried by Israeli judges. Gideon Spiro can be reached with messages of support or financial help at P. O. Box 7323, Jerusalem, 91 072, Israel.

The November 29th Committee for Palestine held its second national convention in New York, November 7-8, 1987. At the convention, delegates and members from chapters around the country reviewed the work and experience of the past two years. The committee also made plans for the next two years and elected a new National Executive Committee. On Saturday evening, following a buffet of Palestinian food, a special program was held to celebrate the convention. Featured speakers included Hassan Abdul Rahman, director of the Palestine Information Office in Washington, former Berkeley Mayor Gus Newport, cochair of the U.S. Peace Council; Nadia Habbash, an activist from the West Bank; Julie Mungai, a defendant in the Los Angeles Eight case; Leonard Weinglass, attorney in the same case; and Jeanne Butterfield, national director of the November 29th Committee for Palestine. The Sechaba singers and the Al-Watan dance troupe performed.

Reportbacks from the Latino delegation to Palestine have been held in Houston and Berkeley. The Latino Task Force of the November 29th Committee for Palestine is about to publish its new Spanish-language newsletter, *Noticiero Palestino*.

The National Latino Conference on Central America met in Chicago in August. The conference passed a resolution calling on its members to work with the Committee for Justice to Stop the McCarren Act Political Deportations in fighting the deportation of the L.A. Eight. The conference passed a second resolution on Latino-Palestinian solidarity, with several concrete sections including a joint speakers bureau, a 1988 Latino delegation to visit occupied Palestine, exchange and dissemination of literature, including *Noticiero Palestino*, and joint events on Israel's role in Latin America. A representative from the November 29th Committee for Palestine was invited as a panelist to speak on Israel's role in Central America and similarities between U.S. policies in the Middle East and Central America. □

NGOs...

Continued from page 3

A special session was held to plan and coordinate NGO activities for 1987-88. The ICCP then reported on its activities on behalf of the NGOs. The final declaration and special resolutions were drafted and a new and expanded ICCP was elected.

The final declaration of the NGOs addressed important elements of the NGO deliberations and included the program of work for the coming year. The NGOs renewed their call for the convening of the United Nations-sponsored international peace conference including the PLO, representing the Palestinian people,

and other interested parties. The UN's call for the conference also enumerated Palestinian national rights such as the right to return to their homeland and establish an independent state, and calls for an end to Israel's brutal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The NGOs called for a European initiative "to bring Israel and the United States to accept the international peace conference as called for in resolution 38/58c."

The statement highlighted the urgent need to end the suffering of the Palestinian people in the refugee camps in Lebanon. It condemned Israeli discrimination against Palestinian Arabs in Israel and the illegal practices of the Israeli occupation forces and called for an end to twenty years of occupation. The NGOs declared that Israel must end its occupation of southern Lebanon and stop its illegal practices of kidnapping Palestinians and other travellers in international waters. The declaration called upon all NGOs to inform maritime organizations and seamen's unions in their respective countries about these acts of piracy.

The NGOs also condemned the introduction of nuclear weapons into the Middle East by Israel and called on Israel to open its nuclear facilities to international inspection, to sign the nonproliferation treaty, and, above all, to dismantle its nuclear weapons and make the Middle East nuclear-free. The NGOs also expressed their concern regarding the kidnapping, imprisonment, and harsh treatment of Mordechai Vanunu, who drew the attention of the world to Israel's nuclear capacity. Vanunu deserves a fair and public trial.

Dr. Don Betz, chairman of the International Coordinating Committee, summarized the purpose of the NGO work in these words: "In the West, we have become familiar with the unidentified faces of Palestinian women and children on the nightly television news. We watch as they bravely dash for medical supplies, retrieve food, resist oppression and hopelessness. We watch them survive with dignity. The steadfastness of the Palestinians inspires us to continue our work, to carve stones of hope out of the mountains of opposition until that opposition no longer stands." □

Getting It All In FOCUS

By Hilton Obenzinger

The Secret Life of Saeed, The Ill-Fated Pessoptimist: A Palestinian Who Became a Citizen of Israel, by Emile Habibi (Vantage Press, \$8.95) tells the story of those Palestinians who remained within the 1948 borders of Israel, eventually becoming citizens of the "Jewish State." It's a sardonic Voltairean comic novel that explores the contradictory situation of these Palestinians.

The book takes the form of letters to an unknown friend. At the end of his misadventures Saeed perches precariously on a wooden stake until he is taken into outer space by a UFO from which he writes his epistles. A strange tale unfolds that "is surely as weird as the story of Moses's staff, the resurrection of Jesus, and the election of the husband of a lady bird to the presidency of the United States." The book follows the foibles of Saeed, the Pessoptimist, who is an informer, a coward, a victim, and, ultimately, a hero. It's the story of Israeli Arabs who faced confusion, fear and violence to emerge as a significant sector of the Palestinian people's resistance.

Saeed's comic adventures revolve around "the big man (of little stature)," a short Israeli intelligence officer of European background who controls Saeed's life through the intermediary of Jacob, an oriental Jew. One string pulls another—yet Saeed always manages to get tangled up.

During the 1967 war, Saeed heard announcements over the Arab-language broadcasts of Radio Israel. The broadcasts were directed at the West Bank for Palestinians to raise white flags over their homes for the approaching Israeli army. "The order somewhat confused me: to which 'defeated Arabs' was the announcer referring?" Saeed, always dutiful, raises a white flag over his home in Haifa only to have Jacob come bursting into his house to arrest him at the behest of "the big man (of little stature)."

A Kafkaesque conversation ensues after Jacob rages that the announcer "was telling the West Bank Arabs to raise white flags in surrender to the Israeli occupation. What did you think you were up to, doing that in the very heart of the state of Israel, in Haifa, which no one regards as a city of occupation?"

"But you can't have too much of a good thing," I pointed out.

"No," he insisted, "it's an indication that you do regard Haifa as an occupied city and are therefore advocating its separation from the state."

"That interpretation never so much as crossed my mind."

"We don't punish you for what crosses your minds but for what crosses the big man's mind. He considers the white flag you raised over your house in Haifa to be proof that you are engaged in combat against the state and that you do not recognize it."

The Secret Life of Saeed, The Ill-Fated Pessoptimist is a comic masterpiece, and its form is unique in Arab literature. The author, Emile Habibi, is the editor of the Arabic Israeli daily newspaper, *Al-Itihad*, published by Rakah, the Israeli Communist Party. Joyce Weisberger interviewed Emile Habibi in Haifa in August 1987 for *Palestine Focus*, and we are grateful to her for sharing these remarks with us. Habibi spoke critically about the situation of Palestinian literature, and Arab literature more broadly, the social and political conditions that have reached crisis proportions. Certainly, there are other outstanding works, such as the poems of Mahmoud Darwish, but Habibi, like many Palestinian artists, is not satisfied. He described what many have come to regard as the "crisis in Arab literature" in this way:

"Literary works which appear are very rare and not of a standard that could be considered good. Concerning the Palestinians, I think the main reason is their situation of being obliged to mobilize all their healthy forces in order to fight for their mere existence in their country and for defending themselves and their places of refuge from forces of annihilation.

"Many elements, if they had the time, would be able to present acceptable works of literature, but they are obliged to spend most their time and energy on day-to-day national political work. Even we, the Palestinian Arabs inside Israel, find ourselves in the same situation.

"I use myself as an example. My revolutionary and national consciousness obliges me to spend most of my time in the daily political work of editing a daily newspaper and other political happenings. I have in my mind and for a long time I have been preparing certain literary works, but I cannot free myself from having to cope with daily challenges.

"Also, the fate of my people—of being victims of massacre from time to time in different places—is hindering the natural appearance of culture in literary forces. Yet, the statistics of UNESCO prove that the percentage of university graduates among Palestinian is one of the highest in the world. Palestinians society is developing in this aspect and is becoming the equivalent of the Jews in Europe before the second world war.

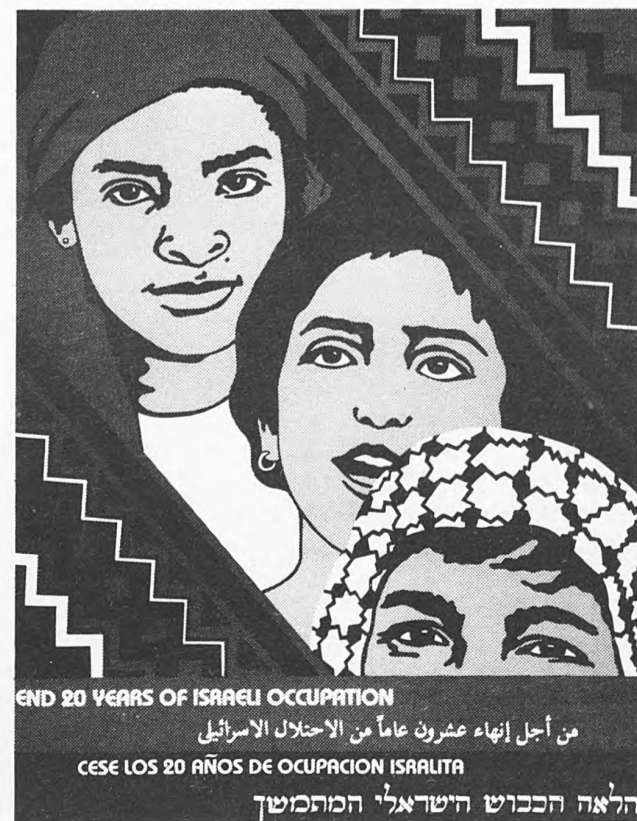
"In Israel, for example, the Arabs are becoming more and more conspicuous in different fields of arts and culture and sports, in the field of lecturing in the universities, and in medicine. Yet this new feature of the Palestinians is still a transitory situation and has not already arrived to become a basis for an upsurge in culture.

"I want to stress here that I do not believe that the worsening of a situation of a people living about forty years in destitution and twenty years under foreign military occupation helps to bring the flourishing of culture. The result is the contrary.

"In the occupied territories the Israelis are confiscating libraries, closing universities, magazines, journals, and newspapers, and expelling writers and journalists. So far as there is a real crisis, these are the main reasons for this crisis."

Despite the conditions described by Habibi, a very vibrant Palestinian literature is being created. Out of the crisis, great poets and writers have emerged. The richness of the Palestinian experience provides fertile ground for a powerful literature to continue to develop. Again, much thanks to Joyce Weisberger for the interview.

An expanded version of this column—including more from Emile Habibi—appears in a special issue of *Red Bass* on the Palestinians. *Red Bass* is "the sole journal dedicated to the interface between art and politics in the South." With articles and interviews by Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, James Abourezk and many others, this issue of *Red Bass* should be of special note. Write to Red Bass, 2425 Burgundy Street, New Orleans, LA 70117. □



Poster designed by artist Juan Fuentes to commemorate 20 years of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. Available for \$5 each plus \$1 postage and handling from November 29th Committee for Palestine, P. O. Box 27462, San Francisco, CA 94127.

Alternative Information Center under Attack

Interview with Tikva Parnass



Steve Goldfield/Palestine Focus

Tikva Parnass is a member of the board of directors of the Alternative Information Center in Jerusalem. She has also been active in the Committee in Solidarity with Bir Zeit University and the Committee Against the War in Lebanon. Maggie El-Estwani interviewed her for Palestine Focus in Geneva in September 1987.

The Alternative Information Center is a nonpartisan Israeli-Palestinian collective. It was closed in February 1987 by an order issued by the police inspector general under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The center's equipment was seized, and its director was imprisoned and interrogated by the Israeli secret police.

The police claimed that the center was linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The charges against the director, Michael Warshavsky, amounted to no more than providing typesetting services to Palestinian student, women's, and workers' organizations which the police claim are PFLP fronts. In fact, these Palestinian organizations operate openly. For example, a student came from Bir Zeit University to use our services; we are not police to ask them who they are. The police could have closed down their publication, but the police say the center should have known they belong to the PFLP. How could we have known?

They have not yet set a date for Warshavsky's trial. If convicted, he faces up to 23 years in jail according to the emergency regulations under which he is accused. Under those regulations, he is considered guilty until proved innocent. The center was recently made a codefendant in the charge sheet, which indicates that the police would like to gag us by imposing heavy fines on the center. Warshavsky is prohibited from working with the center collective in any work related to publishing and editing. He must report to police headquarters in Jerusalem three times a week. He is prohibited from leaving the country to go to the Geneva NGO Conference on Palestine to which he has been officially invited.

Although the seizure order was subsequently cancelled, the center did not back its equipment or archives. The day the center reopened in August 1987, the police confiscated all the equipment and printed material still in the center. The police said they needed them for the trial of Michael Warshavsky. Most of what was confiscated had nothing to do with the alleged charges against Warshavsky, and we must appeal to the court to get back our archives and equipment; it may take months.

Why Alternative Information?

The purpose of the center is to collect and disseminate information that does not find its way into the Israeli press. Just recently we did a report on Israeli state piracy regarding seizure of boats in international waters in the Mediterranean. These boats flew flags of diverse nations including Panama and Greece. They were docked in Israel and, in most cases, in secrecy. Some of the passengers, including Palestinians, subsequently disappeared before a lawyer or any other person was contacted to inform them that they were in Israeli jails. *News from Within* is biweekly and covers studies made on Israeli or Palestinian society, gathering unreported information on events.

We send our publications to Middle East and international centers abroad and to the press agencies. We did not expect the solidarity of the subscribers, and we ourselves are astonished at the tens and tens of personal replies and a subscriber-organized campaign to support the center and Warshavsky. They organized members of parliament from Denmark to sign a petition to allow the center to be reopened and in support of Michael Warshavsky. The campaign impressed the Israeli press. The security police themselves, we are sure, did not expect this support, which organized the campaign from abroad.

Let me give a few examples of the news we cover: the torture of Palestinian prisoners. We collected information from the prisoners themselves. A regular journalist would not bother with this. The Israeli press itself used to contact us before the closure about news from the occupied territories and within Israel itself that it did not have access

to. We had the reputation as a source of reliable information, respected by the journalists themselves. What confirms this reputation is that the Association of Journalists in Jerusalem protested the closing down of the center and made an official petition condemning the closure. Many Israeli dailies also published editorials saying we were a reliable source of information.

Warshavsky is considered guilty until proven innocent.

The Center's Future

Right now we are paralyzed. They seized our equipment, so we work in very, very primitive conditions. We have only recently started building up the connections that we had. We need to acquire the most basic equipment, for instance a computer or word processor.

We have received letters of support from members of parliament from England, Italy, and France. Nobel Prize figures in the United States have supported us, as well as university personnel, at least three professors from Harvard. The chairman of the Human Rights Association in France has also supported us.

The closure of the center was not related to the wave of closures of Palestinian newspapers. The center was the first Israeli information center. I think the police thought they could get away with it without any mass reaction because they thought no one would pay attention. The authorities themselves were surprised at the big mass reaction at the closure. But many letters came. An American political science professor wrote that they are starting with the center, but who's going to be next. The more mild press will be the next target of the same policy.

The center was not only closed because it collected and disseminated alternative information, but also because of its success in realizing its political viewpoints. The center is an anti-Zionist collective which aims at working together with Palestinians and Israelis to fight against occupation and the realization of democratic human rights of Palestinians and Israelis. During the last few months before the closure, the center had become a meetingplace for journalists from all over the world. Israelis and Palestinians met together to discuss their problems, planning things to do. This was an important target of the Israeli authorities, who see in this type of joint work contact, which is their most important enemy. □

News from Within is published by the Alternative Information Centre, P. O. Box 165, West Jerusalem, Israel. Subscriptions are (US)\$25 for ten issues. The U.S. representative is Berta Langston, Topping Lane, Norwalk, CT06854 (203) 866-0279. To whet your appetite, we include the following excerpt from an article on the Vanunu case, published in *News from Within* (Anti-Copyright 1987) September 10, 1987.

The State of Israel vs. Mordechai Vanunu

Mordechai Vanunu's trial got under way on August 30, 1987 at the Jerusalem District Court. He is being charged with treason—he betrayed Israel's exterminist designs to the world; and aiding the enemy—the "enemy" being humankind.

Is Vanunu guilty?

Is the state of Israel innocent?

Over the past year, the state of Israel has consistently incriminated itself by its handling of the "Vanunu Affair." The Israeli news blackout imposed on Vanunu's revelations to the *Sunday Times*; his [kidnapping—word censored, ed.] from Rome by Mossad agents; the state's refusal to reveal his whereabouts in the autumn of 1986 (when he was being held in Israel); the inhuman conditions of his confinement in Ashkelon Prison; and the fact that his trial is being held in camera: all point to Israel having something to hide.

Vanunu revealed what that something was, exposing Israel's nuclear [weapons—censored] program to the world. Now, the state is doing everything in its power to conceal Vanunu.

Vanunu's arrivals and departures at the Jerusalem District Court are quasi-military operations. The windows of the prison service van which transports him to and from Ashkelon Prison are whited out to prevent him seeing out and the world seeing in.

A wall of burlap strung up at the entrance to the court building conceals Vanunu's entries and exits from the telescopic lenses of the photographers and film crews that loiter outside. But for the police, this is not enough. On his way to and from court, Vanunu is forced to wear a motorcycle helmet fitted with special straps. If he screams out at the torment he is being put through, the police turn on the sirens of their vans to drown out his voice.

In the courtroom itself, wooden panels have been placed over the windows to prevent winged photographers from catching a glimpse off Israeli justice in action. A [censored] sits on either side of Vanunu, ready to cover his mouth if he strays into the forbidden area of official government secrets.

In a letter Vanunu wrote to MK Charlie Biton (of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality) asking for his help in raising the issue of his harsh prison conditions before the Knesset, Vanunu also addressed the hysteria

around the possibility that he was liable to reveal state secrets: "In regard to the claim that I may give away secrets, first of all, I'm neither a scientist nor the inventor of the Israeli atomic bomb. I was only a technician. Secondly, all the secrets have already been published in the *Sunday Times* newspaper. So I don't have any more secrets. That's just a pretext of theirs for my harsh conditions of confinement, which are meant to break me, so that I'll go down on my knees before the power in the hands of the Shin Bet. But I'm not the type of person to beg them for anything. I know exactly what I did. I know that they—Shimon Peres and his friends—have broken and are breaking Israeli and international law, and the court will have to rule on the matter. If I'm convicted, it will be damning evidence against the government of Israel, because they'll have to admit that they're producing nuclear weapons in contravention of the law.

"I've passed the stage of having to justify my action. I'm now arguing that my action was good, positive, and contributes to the peace and security of all states. I accuse the government of Israel. It must justify its actions. The time has come to tell the truth and to stop lying to the world, to its citizens. I am raising the banner—calling for the terrible truth to be revealed, for revealing to the citizens the dangers which the leaders of this state are leading them toward, to the abyss of nuclear holocaust, to a third world war."