

Felicia LANGER

CONDEMNED TO EXILE

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"The people you're looking for are no longer here," says the warder in an indifferent, dry tone. He keeps ignoring my questions about the number of visitors who are allowed to see relatives of the imprisoned persons and also whether it is possible to speak with the prisoners in a normal way or only through a latticed window.

In this prison Palestinian Arabs who are to be deported from the West Bank by the occupation authorities are held temporarily. The local population is becoming increasingly indignant over this practice of the Israeli authorities. This has been particularly noticeable in recent months in connection with an order of the military commandant of the occupied areas, dated October 27, 1985, for the deportation of Dr. Azmi Ash-Shuaybi, deputy head of the city council of Al-Bira, Ali Abu Hilal, a trade union activist from the town of Al-Aizaria, and journalist Hasan Al-Farrarij from the Dahisha refugee camp. Under Article 112 of the state of emergency law introduced by the British mandate authorities in Palestine back in 1945 the military authorities of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were vested with similar powers.

TO SECURE "LEBENSRAUM"

The practice of deporting Palestinian Arabs was launched by the occupation authorities immediately after the "six-day war" of 1967. Today the number of exiles is estimated at 2,000 people, not counting those who were banished *en masse* in the course of that war and immediately following it. The aim of this unlawful practice of the occupation authorities is

to secure for Israel the largest possible area in the West Bank of the river Jordan and in the Gaza Strip with the least possible number of the local Arab residents. When Golda Meir was Prime Minister she spoke quite openly about this.

The deportation of Arabs from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was stepped up during the rule of the Likud bloc (1977-84). The events connected with the banishment of the mayors of several Arab towns by the military authorities, which was approved by the Menachem Begin government, are still fresh in many people's memory. And in 1985 the government headed by the leader of the Labour Party—a party affiliated to the Socialist International and advocating in words the observance of human rights everywhere in the world—also resorts to one of the harshest and unlawful measures in dealing with Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Such actions, just as Tel Aviv's policy toward the occupied lands as a whole, are largely determined by an ideology based on the vile formula, "I'm the best of all, the rest are non-entities compared with me." It is this formula which often governs the day-to-day actions both of the individual who shares the prevailing ideological principles and of groups of people in Israel. The policies of all Israeli governments are pervaded by an essentially racist spirit. It also underlies Tel Aviv's policy toward the Arab people of Palestine many of whom have been living under the yoke of military occupation for 19 years now.

The principle of "preserving the integrity of families", which the Israeli press keeps harping on and which Israeli officials bring up time and again, they apply in fact only to Jewish families, just as the slogan of "caring for children" implies taking care of Jewish children. When you read or hear in Israel about the feelings of a mother mourning over her lost son, you may rest assured that the talk is about a Jewish mother and a Jewish son.

Today one cannot speak without pain and bitterness about the practice of banishing Arabs from their homeland, nor can one be indifferent to the fact that the authorities' persistence in carrying out such measures meets with little protest in Israel. Quite a few people in the country have resigned themselves to this situation, just as one resigns oneself to the inevitable or to natural calamities: it's useless to oppose them. When I heard the words spoken by Azmi Ash-Shuaybi, Ali Abu Hilal and Hasan Al-Farrarij during a closed

session of a special military commission, I thought that, if all this had been said publicly, many people in Israel would probably have raised their voices in defence of the victims who were being condemned to exile. For these people spoke about their love of their homeland, their striving for a just peace, and the need to coordinate the efforts of all peace-loving forces both in Israel and other countries of the world. However, these words were heard only by very few people. The press published only photographs of the persons condemned to exile, accompanied by comments, inspired by the authorities, to the effect that these were "dangerous people" posing a serious threat to security on the occupied lands. It should be added that all the materials on which the charges brought against them were based are strictly classified. They were never shown either to the accused or to their lawyers.

During the closed session of the special commission, officers of the Israeli security service put files of "classified materials" one after another on the table. Those who, like myself, had a chance to witness this spectacle could only wonder what was in those files and who in particular was interested in bringing charges against these people and banishing them from their homeland, and in hiding the truth under a thick veil of secrecy. Separating a man from his family and depriving him of a homeland is all very simple and easy here. For those sitting behind the table give more credence to the mysterious contents of the files than to the testimonies of the accused and the arguments of their lawyers.

There have been quite a few people whom the occupation authorities have exiled from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, just as they have now banished these three. And each time I came across such a case I experienced a feeling of strong bitterness: what is in store for the exiled, and what will happen to his family here? I will never forget my attempt to visit Suleiman al-Nadjab in the Ramallah prison 12 years ago. The warder's reply then was exactly the same as it is now: "The person you're looking for is no longer here." And I never got a chance to see him, for he was already in foreign parts, far away from his homeland...

PROVING ONE'S INNOCENCE IS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE

It is hard to find an instance where the Israeli Supreme Court overrules a decision by the military authorities to

banish a Palestinian Arab from the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

Take one of the recent cases, that of Ash-Shuaybi. For two years now that he has been suffering from a grave lung disease as a consequence of an illness he contracted back in 1948. There has been no marked improvement in his condition after a recent operation during which a part of his lungs was removed. Shuaybi is in need of constant care, which is only possible if his relatives are by his side. He needs social insurance in order to get medicines at relatively reasonable prices, which is ruled out in a foreign land. Being the lawyer of the accused, I forwarded the appropriate medical evidence to the Supreme Court, having attached Shuaybi's appeal to it. But the judges were inexorable.

I have in my office a large amount of material prepared and sent to me by prominent experts in international law in order to help me in my defence of the three Palestinian Arabs condemned to exile by the Israeli occupation authorities. The material comprehensively shows that it is unlawful to banish civilians from the area in which they reside, as this is clearly stated in Article 49 of the 1948 Geneva Convention and in several other international legal documents.

Thus, for example, Ian Brownlie, professor at Oxford University, just as some other well-known experts in international law, tried in vain to convince the members of the Israeli Supreme Court that there were no legal obstacles preventing the court from overruling the military authorities' orders for the banishment of the Arabs from the West Bank of the river Jordan and the Gaza Strip.

I also received a copy of a document—or, rather, a detailed analysis of the issue—prepared by leading members of two associations of US lawyers during their stay in Israel and in the occupied areas. The US lawyers also appealed to the Supreme Court, pointing out the need to stop the practice of sending Palestinians into exile. However, all appeals against the banishment of the three Palestinians this year have been rejected by the court. The court's decision on this issue reads, in part: "There is no need whatsoever for a review of the case in connection with the appeal against the deportation order. Previous similar appeals have been carefully examined and turned down."

Later on, in a private conversation court officials said quite frankly that it is absolutely futile to try to appeal against a decision adopted by the court. The more so in this case

since, according to them, the point in question is a political action rather than a threat posed by these Palestinians to security in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. I was also told that the court's decision was taken, above all, in order to bolster up the morale of the Jewish settlers living in the occupied areas and create panic among the Arab residents there.

What is the position of the United States, whose leaders so insistently call for respect for human rights all over the world, on this issue? Formally, it condemns the Israeli authorities' line of action. It was alleged that Washington even made a protest to the Israeli government in connection with the Ash-Shuaybi case. However, when activists in support of Ash-Shuaybi in the United States tried to obtain a copy of that document they got nowhere. Apparently, that document, like the numerous files containing charges against Ash-Shuaybi and other Palestinians, is also "classified".

It is quite clear that, if the United States decided to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli government in order to put an end to its unlawful and criminal practices in the occupied areas, the results would not be long in coming. Victims of the Israeli policy of trampling on human rights in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip put a large share of the blame for their misfortunes on the United States. For Tel Aviv is able to pursue a policy of terror against the Arab population only with the connivance of Washington which provides financial and political backing to the Israeli leaders. As is known, all attempts to condemn from the UN rostrum the actions by Israel on occupied Arab lands, attempts initiated by the Soviet Union, other socialist states and developing countries, were brought to naught by a US veto. Enjoying this reliable protection, Tel Aviv continues to violate international law.