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Scenes from the Uprising

Noam Chomsky

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242 does not contain territorial provisions with regard to Jordan,” meaning that it excludes the West Bank. At the end of April, the Labor Party once again adopted a campaign platform rejecting Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, and Rabin clarified that the plan was to allow 60% of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to be part of a Jordanian-Palestinian state, with its capital in Amman. In Jordan in early April, Shultz announced that the PLO or others “who have committed acts of terrorism” must be excluded from peace talks, which would leave the bargaining table quite empty. He also “explained his understanding of the aspirations of Palestinians,” Times reporter Elaine Sciolino wrote, by citing the example of the United States, where he, Shultz, is a Californian, and George Bush is a Texan, but they have no problem living in harmony, so the Palestinian aspirations into which he shows such profound insight can be handled the same way.⁴⁶

Official doctrine remains that the U.S. and the Israeli Labor Party seek peace, blocked by the extremists on all sides. The fact that this pretense can persist without challenge is evidence of our failure to exploit the opportunity afforded by the Palestinian uprising.

Despite everything, Israel remains, in many ways, a very appealing and attractive place, particularly — as elsewhere — in its community of dissidents, who are by no means marginal, and could become a significant force with American support. Alone, Palestinian courage and determination will not suffice; with the solidarity of others, it can lead the way to a better future.

⁴⁶ Ha’aretz, April 12; JP, April 13; Thomas Friedman, NYT, April 17, Jan. 6, 1988; Ha’aretz, April 7; Toronto Globe & Mail, April 26; Tony Banks, Jane’s Defence Weekly, May 7; AP, April 8; Elaine Sciolino, NYT, April 6, 8, 1988.

of Lebanon, and particularly after the war, when Israel was driven from large areas of Lebanon by unanticipated resistance, causing losses that Israel was unwilling to absorb. But, it was confidently explained, these are fanatic Shi'ites, unlike Ahmed in Gaza and the West Bank, docile and controllable. The uprising has shattered this myth as well, again creating shock waves in Israel.

The pattern is common. In another recent case, until the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa was attacked by angry crowds in April, U.S. authorities ignored the rising anger over their treatment of Honduras as a docile client, including the landing of the 82nd Airborne, bitterly denounced across a wide spectrum within the country.

The point is that repression and domination breed racist contempt as a mechanism of self-defense; how can the oppressor justify to himself what he does, if the victims are human beings? Racist contempt in turn breeds ignorance, and compels the resort to violence when the Ahmeds of the world finally explode in anger and resentment.

While I was in Israel in April, headlines in the Hebrew press reported yet another endorsement of partition by Yasser Arafat, referring explicitly to the *principle* of a two-state political settlement, not the borders of 40 years ago. The next day, Defense Minister Rabin of the Labor Party announced that Palestinians must be excluded from any political settlement, and that diplomacy can proceed only "on a state-to-state level." In Jerusalem, Thomas Friedman managed to miss these facts once again, and following the practice that won him a Pulitzer Prize, reported 4 days later that the problem remains the PLO, still unwilling to consider a diplomatic settlement because "the minute Mr. Arafat makes a decision about entering into direct negotiations with Israel" — as he has been offering for years — "the unity of the Palestinian uprising will explode." Earlier, he had falsely reported that Peace Now "has expressed support for an independent Palestinian state." A few days before Arafat's latest call for a diplomatic settlement, Prime Minister Shamir had informed George Shultz that "UN Resolution

One of the great themes of modern history is the struggle of subjugated people to gain control over their lives and fate. In April, I visited Israel and the occupied territories, where one of these struggles has reached a level of dramatic intensity. A few months earlier, I was in Nicaragua, a remarkable example of the will and ability of a desperately impoverished country to survive — though just barely — and to resist the assault of a terrorist superpower. Somehow, whatever the amount of reading and intensity of concern, it is just different to see it at first hand.

The privileged often regard these struggles as an assault on their rights, violent outbursts instigated by evil forces bent on our destruction: world Communism, or crazed terrorists and fanatics. The struggle for freedom seems inexplicable in other terms. After all, living standards are higher in Soweto than they were in the Stone Age, or even elsewhere in Black Africa. And the people in the West Bank and Gaza who survive by doing Israel's dirty work are improving their lot by standard economic measures. Slave owners offered similar arguments.

Being so evidently irrational, the revolt of the dispossessed must be guided by evil intent or primitive nature. Why should one care about humiliation and degradation if these conditions are accompanied by some measure of economic growth? Why should people sacrifice material welfare and rising expectations in a quixotic search for freedom and self-respect? On the assumption that the basic human emotion and the driving force of a sane society is the desire for material gain, such questions have no simple answer, so we seek something more sophisticated and arcane. Two hundred years ago, Rousseau wrote with withering contempt about his civilized countrymen who have lost the very concept of freedom and "do nothing but boast incessantly of the peace and repose they enjoy in their chains.... But when I see the others sacrifice pleasures, repose, wealth, power, and life itself for the preservation of this sole good which is so disdained by those who have lost it; when I see animals born free and despising captivity break their heads

against the bars of their prison; when I see multitudes of entirely naked savages scorn European voluptuousness and endure hunger, fire, the sword, and death to preserve only their independence, I feel that it does not behoove slaves to reason about freedom.”

These words kept coming to my mind as I was travelling through the West Bank, as they have before in similar circumstances. It is a rare privilege to glimpse a moment of a popular struggle for freedom and justice. Right now the uprising is just that, wherever it may lead under the conditions imposed by the occupier and the paymaster.

Repression and Resistance

Israel has tried killing, beating, gassing, mass arrests, deportation, destruction of houses, curfews and other forms of harsh collective punishment. Nothing has succeeded in enforcing obedience or eliciting a violent response. The Palestinian uprising is a remarkable feat of collective self-discipline. It is quite different from the struggle of the Jews of Palestine for a Jewish state, with the murder of British officials, the assassination of UN mediator Folke Bernadotte, the hanging of British hostages, and many atrocities against Arab civilians. The current Prime Minister of Israel, commander of the group that assassinated Bernadotte, lauded terror as a moral imperative. “Neither Jewish ethics nor Jewish tradition can disqualify terrorism as a means of combat,” he wrote. “First and foremost, terrorism is for us a part of the political battle being conducted under the present circumstances, and it has a great part to play...in our war against the occupier.”¹ Some would have us believe that such thoughts, and the practices that follow from them, were only the province of extremists,

¹ Yitzhak Shamir, *Hehazit* (LEHI, the “Stern gang”), 1943; reprinted in *Al-Hamishmar*, Dec. 24, 1987; translated in *Middle East Report* (MERIP), May-June 1988.

he reported: “If the aim of the Israeli measures is to cow the locals, the effect is, if anything, the opposite.”⁴²

On May 11, 47 villagers were charged with the killing of Al-Ayed, including one man carried to court by his neighbors, paralyzed from the waist down as a result of Al-Ayed’s shooting into the crowd.⁴³

Few people in Israel seemed aware of these and many similar events in the territories. The killings and dreadful beatings, sometimes reported, do not give an accurate picture of Israeli repression or the goals and achievements of the uprising.

The Political Prospects

The uprising was not anticipated by the Israeli authorities, and it is possible that they understand very little about it. Thus if Abu Jihad was assassinated “because army and intelligence officials believed he was directing the uprising,” as reported, then we are observing yet another failure of the much-overpraised Israeli intelligence services.⁴⁴ In 1973, the Egyptian-Syrian attack on their territories occupied by Israel was unexpected, and its early successes came as an enormous shock. Israel had dismissed Sadat’s warnings about the consequences of Israel’s rejection of a peace treaty and its settlement of the northeastern Sinai, even the maneuvers of the Egyptian army, on the assumption that “war is not the Arabs’ game,” as Israelis were assured by former director of military intelligence and Arabist General Yehoshaphat Harkabi, and many other experts.⁴⁵ The collapse of this myth caused a severe psychological shock. The same occurred in 1982, when Israel’s forces proved ineffectual against fixed Syrian defensive positions during the invasion

⁴² Cohen, *Hadashot*. March 27; Database Project on Palestinian Human Rights, Update, March 21-April 5; JP, March 30; *Globe & Mail*, March 31.

⁴³ AP, May 11; Database Project Update, May 14, 1988.

⁴⁴ John Kifner, *NYT*, April 25, 1988.

⁴⁵ See Amnon Kapeliouk, *Israel: la fin des mythes* (Paris, 1975).

March, the smell of tear gas made it difficult to breathe. A house where he stayed had signs of a fire, caused a week earlier by gas grenades dropped from a helicopter, the family reported. Food and medicines were in short supply, the one clinic and pharmacy had been closed, and the town's only doctor could not handle the many patients.

The visiting delegation were told by villagers that morale improved as the curfew was extended and the community organized in response. One said: "If you want to balance the situation — on the one hand put all the Israeli practices: torture, hunger, beating, imprisonment. We are ready to accept them, but not to accept occupation. We would rather continue if that is the way to get rid of the occupation." Having heard the same things said with obvious sincerity and simplicity, I do not find it hard to believe that the sentiment is genuine. The villagers returned to the subsistence economy of earlier generations, reopening old wells, eating bread and wild greens, finding wood for cooking in place of kerosene. What most impressed the delegation was "the consistently bouyant and determined spirit" in Qabatiya, as elsewhere in the territories (my observation as well). Journalists who managed to enter Qabatiya agreed. Joel Greenberg of the Jerusalem Post, visiting just hours before the press was banned from the territories completely, found the people "surprisingly resilient" and "defiant" after a month of the curfew, and without remorse over the fate of the collaborator, who "was morally degenerate, hated by everyone, and was only attacked after he fired on what was a peaceful march, they said." They are prepared to survive on herbs from the hills if necessary. Hugh Schofield reported in the Canadian press that soldiers manning roadblocks at the town entrances were turning away supplies of food and fuel; much of the town's agricultural land had been placed off limits; the town was forbidden to export to Jordan from its stone quarry, employing half the workforce; and of course workers were forbidden to travel to jobs in Israel, leaving the town without economic resources. "The residents' spirits are strangely high,"

and were abandoned with the establishment of the state that the press describes as the "symbol of human decency," "a society in which moral sensitivity is a principle of political life" (New York Times), which has been guided by "high moral purpose...through its tumultuous history" (Time).² There is an extensive record to undermine such delusions. Furthermore, the political leadership was reluctant to condemn terrorist practices. In laudatory reminiscences, Isaiah Berlin observes that Chaim Weizmann "did not think it morally decent to denounce either the acts [of Jewish terror] or their perpetrators in public...he did not propose to speak out against acts, criminal as he thought them, which sprang from the tormented minds of men driven to desperation..."; David Ben-Gurion kept secret the confession of a close friend that he was among the assassins of Bernadotte.³ National movements and struggles typically have a record of violence and terror, not least our own, and Israel is no exception to the norm.

During its struggle for independence, the Jewish community in Palestine could assume some degree of restraint on the part of the British forces. Palestinians know full well that they could expect no such restraint were they to follow the course of the Zionists. Even nonviolent actions — political efforts and merchant strikes, for example, even verbal and symbolic expression — have long been repressed by force, failing for lack of support from outside, not least among those who laud the virtues of such means. If the British had treated the Jews of Palestine in the manner of the Israeli repression over many years, there would have been an uproar in England and throughout the world. Imagine the reaction if the Soviet police were to deal with refuseniks in any way comparable to the Israeli practices that briefly reached the television screens. Israeli commentators have noted the sharp contrast between the

² Editorials, NYT, Feb. 19, 1988, Nov. 6, 1982; Time, Oct. 11, 1982.

³ Berlin, *Personal Impressions* (Viking, 1981, 50); Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion: a Biography* (Delacorte, 1978, 180–1).

restraint of British forces and Israeli brutality in response to Palestinian resistance that has remained remarkably disciplined, something that may not last forever. As I write, the press reports — in one single day — violent protests in Taiwan, France, South Korea and Manila with firebombs and clubbing of police, and hundreds of injuries, very few among the demonstrators and rioters. These are not states known for their delicacy; still, the picture is remote from Israeli practices in less threatening circumstances.⁴

There is a double standard, as commonly alleged by apologists for Israeli violence; it is just the opposite of what is claimed, and has been so for many years.

Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit compares the “ethos of restraint” of the South Korean police to the doctrine applied by Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin of the Labor Party: that brutal beatings are “necessary...to restore the soldier’s honor in the face of the challenge from Palestinians.”⁵ The difference, he argues, lies in cultural differences with regard to the concept of honor. Perhaps so, but the factor of racism should not be overlooked. As the uprising gathered force, Orthodox Jews protesting movies on Sabbath pelted cars and police with stones and metal frames hurled from houses; no killings or sadistic beatings were reported then, nor six months later, when hundreds of Jewish workers broke into the Finance Ministry, smashing windows and injuring police and officials in a labor protest.⁶

Margalit comments that “the announced wish of the Israeli government...to restore ‘law and order’...has been accurately translated: ‘to erase the smile from the face of Palestinian youth.’” The phrase is apt. Soldiers beating Arabs on a main street in West

⁴ Boston Globe, May 21, 1988; on the attack on the US embassy in Seoul, also NYT, same day. Charles Glass, discussing Israeli violence, estimates the death toll in two years of violent riots in South Korea at “under ten”; Spectator (London), March 19, 1988.

⁵ Margalit, New York Review, June 2, 1988.

⁶ AP, Dec. 12, 1987; June 1, 1988.

of calls on the collaborators, who are well-known because of their flaunting of privileges afforded for their services, to come to the mosque, repent, and promise to refrain from serving as Shin Beit informers. One result of the uprising is that Israel appears to have lost its network of collaborators and informers.

The village of Biddu was placed under curfew on March 7 after a collaborator was approached to ask him to repent. In retaliation, the army cut off water and electricity for 2 weeks in this town of 15,000 people and demolished four houses.⁴¹

On April 24 and May 14, the New York Times mentioned the killing by soldiers of two more nameless victims in Qabatiya, without, however, recalling the recent history of this village. Qabatiya was under military control, with all entry and exit blocked, from February 24 to April 1. Water, electricity, food supplies and medicines were cut off in this village of about 15,000 people. There was still no electricity when the village was visited by a North American delegation on April 25. On February 24, villagers had marched to the house of a collaborator, Mohammad Al-Ayed, to call upon him to repent. Al-Ayed, who like other Israeli collaborators was permitted to bear arms, began shooting wildly and continued for several hours, killing a 4-year-old boy and wounding 15 people. He then either killed himself (as villagers allege), or was killed by villagers. His body was hung on an electric pole.

The army then invaded the village, killing a 20-day-old child and a 70-year-old man with tear gas. Dozens of people had bones broken from beatings. Many were arrested; 500 remained under arrest when the curfew was lifted 6 weeks later. Four houses were demolished and others heavily damaged. During the curfew, villagers report, soldiers entered the village daily, arresting and beating people, breaking into homes, smashing furniture and destroying food supplies. When journalist Oren Cohen entered by back roads in late

⁴¹ Raja Shehadeh, personal communication; FACTS, March 5–12.

treatment in a country under attack by the superpower that funds the journal, the story might have made the press.

Elsewhere under Occupation

Other areas under curfew were only visible from the road, over barriers erected by the army. When I visited, the refugee camp of Jalazoun had been under 24-hour curfew for over a month. Jalazoun was a ghost town. No men were to be seen. A few older women, presumably less vulnerable, were working in gardens near the houses and there were several children out of doors. Otherwise, silence. All entrances were barricaded and under military guard. The inhabitants were not permitted to leave their houses except for a brief period every few days to purchase food with what meager resources they still have. There was reported to be very little medical care and a shortage of medicines. The UN relief official in charge of the camp, Mogens Fokdal, reports that “people have gone without electricity for a month. They have no oil or fuel to cook. They are starting to burn old shoes and furniture to make fires. The situation is deteriorating every day.” UN garbage trucks had been barred by the army from entering the camp since the curfew was declared on March 16. UN officials had urged the people in the camp to burn garbage to prevent disease, “but they fear the soldiers will see the fires as a demonstration,” Fokdal explained, a risk they cannot take. Inhabitants said they had no food except bread and what is left from supplies stored before the curfew. On April 17, Israeli soldiers turned back a UN convoy carrying food and other supplies to the camp. Soldiers at the camp entrance deny that there are shortages.⁴⁰

According to Attorney Raja Shehadeh of Al-Haq, the curfew was imposed after an alleged threat to an Israeli collaborator. Israel takes such threats very seriously. Typically, the “threat” consists

⁴⁰ AP, April 17.

Jerusalem shout that “they dare to raise their heads.” The lesson taught to the Arabs is “that you should not raise your head,” Israeli author Shulamith Hareven reports from Gaza, where the hallmark of the occupation for 20 years has been “degradation” and “constant harassment...for its own sake, evil for its own sake.” “A man walks in the street and [soldiers and settlers] call him: ‘come here, donkey.’” A Hebrew phrase that Arabs quickly learn is “you are all thieves and bastards.” A woman returning from study in the United States is insulted and mocked by soldiers at the border, who laugh at the “fine clothes this one has” as they display them to one another during baggage inspection; another is called out at midnight by a kick at her door and ordered by soldiers to read graffiti on a wall. Visiting Gaza shortly before the uprising, Prime Minister Shamir called city officials and notables to meet him, left them waiting outdoors before a locked door, and when they were finally allowed their say, abruptly informed them that Israel would never leave Gaza and departed; “humiliation from this source has a definite political significance,” Hareven adds, and did not pass unnoticed among people who have learned that “the Jews understand nothing but force.”⁷ These are the conditions of everyday life, more telling than the corpses and broken bones. The similarity to the deep South in its worst days is plain enough.

In the May issue of *Z*, I cited examples of the racism of the Zionist movement from its origins, including the most admired liberal elements. The phenomenon is typical of European colonialism, for example, George Washington, who referred to the “merciless Indian savages” of the Declaration of Independence as “beasts of prey, tho’ they differ in shape,” who must be treated accordingly.⁸ Today, extraordinary comments pass virtually unnoticed. I will mention

⁷ Gad Lior, *Yediot Ahronot*, Jan. 24; Shulamith Hareven, *Yediot Ahronot*, March 25, 1988.

⁸ 1783; cited by Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (U. of Minnesota, 1980, 65).

only one example, because of its relevance to the elite media here as well.

While I was in Israel, Times correspondent Thomas Friedman had lengthy interviews in the Hebrew press in connection with his Pulitzer Prize award for “balanced and informed coverage,” including gross falsification in the service of Israeli rejectionism, a few examples of which I cited in the May issue.⁹ He repeated some of the fabrications he has helped establish, for example, that the Palestinians “refuse to come to terms with the existence of Israel, and prefer to offer themselves as sacrifices.” He went on to laud his brilliance for having “foreseen completely the uprising in the territories” — a surprise to his regular readers, perhaps — while writing “stories that no one else had ever sent” with unique “precision” and perception; prior to his insights, he explained, Israel was “the most fully reported country in the world, but the least understood in the media.” Friedman also offered his solution to the problem of the territories. The model should be South Lebanon, controlled by a terrorist mercenary army backed by Israeli might. The basic principle must be “security, not peace.” Nevertheless, the Palestinians should not be denied everything: “Only if you give the Palestinians something to lose is there a hope that they will agree to moderate their demands” — that is, beyond the “demand” for mutual recognition in a two-state settlement, the long-standing position that Friedman refuses to report, and consistently denies. He continues: “I believe that as soon as Ahmed has a seat in the bus, he will limit his demands.”

One can imagine a similar comment by a southern sheriff in Mississippi 30 years ago (“give Sambo a seat in the bus, and he may quiet down”). This passed with no notable reaction.

It comes as little surprise that after the prize was announced on April 1, Friedman found it a much happier occasion than when

⁹ For further examples, see my *Pirates and Emperors* (Claremont, 1986; Amana, 1988).

are 10,000 Arabs in jail, half arrested during the uprising; close to 2000 are under six-month (renewable) preventive detention.³⁷ Moderates are particularly vulnerable. They are always the most dangerous, because they raise the threat of political settlement. At Dahariya, each demonstrator asked to see a particular prisoner. In my case, the prisoner was Gaza Attorney Muhammed Abu-Sha’ban, placed under administrative detention for 6 months immediately after he spoke at Tel Aviv University where he called for dialogue and political settlement. There are many similar cases. Five Jewish editors of the Israeli journal *Derech Hanitzotz* were arrested and the journal banned, the first time that Israel’s draconian censorship laws have been applied to ban a Hebrew Israeli journal; they were denied access to lawyers, police raided the office of one attorney to confiscate files, and two face charges of association with hostile elements that carry up to 40 years in prison.³⁸ The sister journal in Arabic was also banned. In an affidavit circulated by Amnesty International, its editor, Ribhi al-Aruri, reports that he was taken to the interrogation center in Jerusalem, beaten and kicked for an hour, handcuffed with a sack over his head, interrogated for days while deprived of sleep and food, placed finally in a “cupboard” that permits only standing and kept there for an entire day, then again for two full days without food. He was allowed to see a lawyer only ten days after his arrest, then placed under six-month detention without trial. This case, far from the worst, is known only because he was adopted as an AI Prisoner of Conscience on grounds that his detention appears to be “on account of the non-violent exercise of his right to freedom of expression and association.”³⁹ If the editor of the pro-contra journal *La Prensa* had been subjected to a fraction of the same

³⁷ AP, May 19; Minneapolis Star-Tribune, June 1; for official figures, see Joel Brinkley, NYT, April 25.

³⁸ Oren Cohen, *Hadashot*, March 24; Peretz Kidron, *Middle East International*, May 14; AP, May 25.

³⁹ AI, March 31.

thrown against a wall, kicked and beaten with a club by a soldier and jailer while he screamed with pain — facts too insignificant for report or comment in the Newspaper of Record.³⁴

The Dahariya prison, known as “the slaughterhouse” among prisoners, is a way station to the new prison camp Ansar III in the Negev desert close to the Egyptian border. Ansar I was a hideous torture chamber established by Israel during the Lebanon war for Lebanese and Palestinians taken hostage. Ansar II is a prison camp established in Gaza, with a similar reputation.³⁵ Ansar III follows suit. Prisoners include “a significant segment of the Palestinian elite,” the Washington Post reports: doctors, lawyers, trade union officials, students, and university officials, at least 20 journalists, and others. They are denied water, edible food, medical attention, even an opportunity to wash for many weeks. They are subjected to such collective punishments as lying with hands bound behind the back for long periods in the scorching desert sun, forced to walk in single file with heads lowered, denied newspapers, books, mail or stationary, or the opportunity to walk about freely or change clothes, sometimes for over a month. They have no names, only numbers, part of an effort to create a “sense of isolation” according to prisoners, no doubt on the advice of psychologists. There are no charges or judicial review. Families are not informed of where they are, why they were imprisoned or for how long. Journalists, even lawyers, have been denied entry.³⁶ All of this again falls under the category of humiliation, a pedagogic device to ensure that they do not raise their heads.

According to Knesset Member Dedi Zucker of the Citizen’s Rights Party, confidential government documents report that there

³⁴ BG-LAT, May 31; AP, May 30.

³⁵ For Israeli reports on Ansar I, see *Fateful Triangle*. On Ansar II, see *Al-Hamishmar*, Dec. 22, 1986, Jan. 27, 1987; *Ha’aretz*, July 13, 28, 1987.

³⁶ Glenn Frankel, *WP-Manchester Guardian Weekly*, May 22; Avi Katzman, *Koteret Rashit*, April 20; *Hadashot*, April 29, cited in *News from Within*, May 10, along with testimonies of prisoners.

he received the same prize for his reporting from Lebanon at “a moment very much bittersweet” because of the bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut shortly before. This time, however, the award was “unalloyed, untinged by any tragedy,” he said, nothing unpleasant having happened on his beat during the preceding months.¹⁰

Current Israeli tactics break no new ground; it is only the scale of violence that has extended, as the resistance has swept over virtually the whole of Palestinian society. Years ago, “opening fire in response to throwing stones” had become “a casual matter” (*Davar*, Nov. 21, 1980). Systematic torture has been documented since the earliest days of the occupation, a fact now conceded by the official Landau Commission, headed by a respected former Supreme Justice, which recommends “moderate physical pressure” — “a euphemistic expression meaning that torture is allowed for a serious purpose, as distinct from torture for pleasure,” Margalit comments.

Take the West Bank town of Halhul. In 1979, according to Mayor Muhammad Milhem (later expelled without credible charge with a typical parody of judicial process), the town was placed under a two-week curfew after two young Palestinians were killed by Israeli settlers in response to stones thrown at a bus. In further punishment, the authorities banned a wholesale vegetable and fruit project that was to be the key to the town’s development. Several months later, after settlers claimed that stones had been thrown, the inhabitants of the town, including women and children, were held outdoors through a cold rainy night for “interrogation.”¹¹

In 1982, a delegation of Labor Alignment leaders, including noted hawks, presented to Prime Minister Menahem Begin detailed accounts of terrorist acts against Arabs, including the collective punishment in Halhul: “The men were taken from

¹⁰ “The Man who Foresaw the Uprising,” *Yediot Ahronot*, April 7; *Hotam*, April 15. AP, April 1, 1988.

¹¹ Geoffrey Aronson, *Creating Facts* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987, 189, 216).

their houses beginning at midnight, in pajamas, in the cold. The notables and other men were concentrated in the square of the mosque and held there until morning. Meanwhile men of the Border Guards broke into houses, beating people with shouts and curses. During the many hours that hundreds of people were kept in the mosque square, they were ordered to urinate and excrete on one another and also to sing *Hatikva* [the Israeli national anthem] and to call out 'Long Live the State of Israel.' Several times people were beaten and ordered to crawl on the ground. Some were even ordered to lick the earth. At the same time four trucks were commandeered and at daybreak, the inhabitants were loaded on the trucks, about 100 in each truck, and taken like sheep to the Administration headquarters in Hebron. On Holocaust Day, ...the people who were arrested were ordered to write numbers on their hands with their own hands, in memory of the Jews in the extermination camps."

The report describes torture and humiliation of prisoners by soldiers and settlers allowed into the jails to participate in beatings, brutal treatment of Arabs by settlers, even murder with impunity. There was no reaction, because, as Yoram Peri wrote bitterly, the victims are just "Araboushim" (a term of abuse, comparable to "nigger" or "kike").¹² The Hebrew press provides an elaborate record of similar practices over many years.

Within Israel, workers from the territories can expect similar treatment. Under the heading "Uncle Ahmed's Cabin," Yigal Sarna, a few months before the uprising, tells the "story of slavery" of the tens of thousands of unorganized workers who come to Israel each day. "They are slaves, sub-citizens suspected of everything, who dwell under the floor tiles of Tel Aviv, locked up overnight in a hut in the citrus grove of a farm, near sewage dumps, in shelters that...serve rats only" or in underground parking stations or grocery stands in the market, illegally, since they are not permit-

¹² Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle* (South End, 1983, 130f.).

Most of the participants in an international academic conference I was attending in Israel joined a demonstration at the Dahariya prison near Hebron, organized by several of the peace groups, mostly new, that have sprung up in the past several months. These represent the most hopeful development within Israel, and American support for them could make a real difference.³³ Unlike Peace Now, which remains unwilling to separate itself clearly from Labor Party rejectionism, they are forthright in calling for an end to the occupation, and committed to find ways to protest it. Approach to the prison and the nearby village was blocked by troops, but women and children, later men as well, gathered on hills several hundred yards away and began to call back and forth with the demonstrators. A few children drifted towards us, followed by many others and finally adults as well. At the end, a man from the village took the microphone and thanked us for having come. A young man wanted to speak as well, but was persuaded not to. A few days before, he had carried away the body of his brother, killed by soldiers, and he showed us scars from beatings he had received the preceding day. There was concern over the consequences for him after we left, a problem elsewhere as well. While foreigners were present, soldiers were well-behaved, but there was a good deal of concern, on all sides, about what would happen later to Arabs they found us visiting or speaking to. As we left Dahariya, children were carrying our signs, waving and shouting. What happened afterwards, I do not know.

Four days later, according to the signed affidavit of an army reservist, young Palestinians were kicked and beaten with plastic pipes and handcuffs while their commander looked on as they were brought, bound and blindfolded, to Dahariya prison. One boy 12 to 15 years old who had been crying was raked along barbed wire,

³³ Contributions can be sent to Friends of YESH GVUL (resisters), 1636 Martin Luther King Rd., #G, Berkeley CA 94709, and DOWN WITH THE OCCUPATION (Dai l'kibbush), PO Box 3742, Jerusalem, Israel.

Such practices have been an unrecognized scandal since the founding of the state. One revealing example is the case of Shmuel Lahis, who murdered several dozen Arab civilians he was guarding in a mosque in the undefended Lebanese village of Hula in 1948. He was sentenced to seven years in prison, immediately amnestied, and granted a lawyer's licence on the grounds that the act carried "no stigma." Later he was appointed Secretary-General of the Jewish Agency, the highest executive position in the World Zionist Organization, with no qualms, since his amnesty "denies the punishment and the charge as well." The record was exposed when Lahis was appointed Secretary-General, eliciting little interest in Israel, and none here.³²

After the assassination of Abu Jihad, curfews were extended to new areas of the West Bank, among them, the Kalandia refugee camp near Jerusalem. We were able to enter through a back road, not yet barricaded, and to spend about half an hour there before being apprehended by Israeli troops. The town was silent, with no one in the streets apart from a funeral procession permitted by the army and a few young children who approached us, surely assuming we were Israelis, chanting the common slogan "PLO, Israel No." In the streets we found signs of recent demonstrations: metal remnants of the firing of "rubber bullets," a tear gas canister made by Federal Laboratories in Saltsburg Pennsylvania, with the warning, still legible, that it is for use only by "trained personnel" and that fire, death or injury may result from improper use, a common occurrence. While we were being interrogated, a man who looked perhaps 90 years old hobbled out of a doorway with his hands outstretched, pleading that he was hungry. He was unceremoniously ordered back indoors. No one else was to be seen. The soldiers were primarily concerned that we might be journalists, and expelled us from the camp without incident.

³² *Fateful Triangle*, 165.

ted to spend the night in Israel, including "slaving children" and others hired at "the slave markets of Ashkelon, Jerusalem, Ramat Gan and other places." A few days later Knesset member Ran Cohen reported the treatment of Arab workers by Border Guards in a Tel Aviv Hotel: "The Arab workers were cruelly beaten up, and were compelled to masturbate before the Border Guards, to lick the floor of their flat and to eat coffee mixed with sugar and tooth paste, and their money was stolen." They brought complaints to the authorities, but after more than two months, there had been no investigation.¹³

The key feature of the occupation has always been humiliation: they must not be allowed to raise their heads. The basic principle, often openly expressed, is that the Araboushim must understand who rules this land and who walks in it with head lowered and eyes averted. If shopkeepers try to open their stores in the afternoon as a gesture of independence, the army compels them to close in the afternoon and open in the morning. If a remote village declares itself "liberated," meaning that it will run its own internal affairs, the army attacks, and if stones are thrown as villagers try to keep the soldiers out, the result will be killings, beatings, destruction of property, mass arrests, torture.

Israeli Arabs too must be constantly wary. An Arab friend drove me one evening from Ramallah to Jerusalem, but asked me to take a taxi to my hotel from his home in East Jerusalem (annexed by Israel in defiance of the UN, while more than doubling the city's area¹⁴) because he might be stopped at a roadblock on returning home, with consequences that might be severe. On a walk in the old city with an Arab friend, he reached up and touched a black flag — many were hung in mourning after the assassination of PLO leader Khalil Al-Wazir (Abu Jihad) in Tunis by Israeli commandoes. A Border

¹³ Sarny, *Yediot Achronot*, July 3; Menahem Shizaf, *Hadashot*, July 7, 1987. see my *Fateful Triangle*, South End, 1983, for earlier examples.

¹⁴ Donald Neff, "Struggle over Jerusalem," *American-Arab Affairs*, Winter 1987-8; *Middle East International*, May 28.

Guard standing nearby whipped out a camera and photographed him, following him with the camera trained on him as we walked on, adding a menacing comment. This man does not frighten easily; he spent years in an Israeli prison, and after his release has been outspoken in advocacy of Palestinian rights. But he requested that we go at once to the nearby Border Guard headquarters to explain what had occurred to an officer he knew; otherwise, he feared, he might be picked up by the police, charged with responsibility for hanging the flags, taken for “interrogation,” and dispatched into oblivion. An Israeli friend and I went to the headquarters, where the words “Bruchim Haba'im” (“blessed are those who enter”) appear over the doorway; in the light of the (well-deserved) reputation of the Border Guards, one can only imagine the fate of Arabs so blessed. The officer we sought could not be reached at once (he was engaged in wiretapping, we were casually informed), but when he arrived, we explained what had happened and he called the patrol and ordered them to drop the matter. Luckily, there was “protection” in this case.

The pattern is common. Israeli journalist Tom Segev reports what happened when an Arab lawyer told him that a random walk through Jerusalem would yield ample evidence of intimidation and humiliation of Arabs. Skeptical, Segev walked with him through Jerusalem, where he was stopped repeatedly by Border Guards to check his identification papers. One ordered him: “Come here, jump.” Laughing, he dropped the papers on the road and ordered the lawyer to pick them up. “These people will do whatever you tell them to do,” the Border Guards explained to Segev: “If I tell him to jump, he will jump. Run, he will run. Take your clothes off, he will take them off. If I tell him to kiss the wall he will kiss it. If I tell him to crawl on the road, won't he crawl? ... Everything. Tell him to curse his mother and he will curse her too.” They are “not human beings.” The Guards then searched the lawyer, slapped him, and ordered him to remove his shoes, warning that they could order him to remove his clothes as well. “My Arab,” Segev

sergeant who ordered two soldiers to bury four Palestinians alive with a bulldozer receives four months, and two soldiers, whose prolonged beating of captured Palestinians horrified Europe after a CBS filming, received three months probation. Another soldier received a month's suspended sentence for killing an Arab by firing into a village. A settler found guilty of shooting directly into a crowd of demonstrators was sentenced to a rebuke; another received six months of “public service” outside prison for killing a 13-year-old boy after an incident on a road in which he was under no danger according to testimony of army observers. President Herzog reduced the sentences of Jewish terrorists who murdered 3 Palestinians and wounded 33 in a gun and grenade attack at Hebron Islamic College from life in prison to 15 years; further reductions are doubtless to come. Three other members of the terrorist underground were released after 2 years in prison for the attempted murder of two West Bank mayors, one of whom had his legs blown off, while a military court sentenced two Arabs from Kafr Kassem, the scene of one of Israel's worst massacres in 1956, to 21 years imprisonment for allegedly planting two bombs that exploded with no injuries. The ideologist and second highest leader of the Jewish terrorist underground, Yehuda Etzion, convicted of planning the bombing of the Dome of the Rock, organizing the attack on the mayors and other atrocities, and stealing 600kg of explosives from a military base, was released to a religious school in Afula after serving half of a ten year sentence, and a presidential pardon is under consideration. Palestinian storekeepers are threatened with the same sentence — five years in prison — “if they failed to wash anti-Israeli graffiti off their buildings and remove Palestinian flags,” wire services report.³¹

³¹ Hadashot, May 16, 1984; Menahem Shizaf, Hadashot, July 2, 1987; Attalah Mansour, Ha'aretz, Feb. 5, 1986; Reuter, Toronto Globe & Mail, May 16; John Kifner, April 20; AP, BG, May 18, 21; Eyal Ehrlich, Ha'aretz, April 7; Amnon Levy, Hadashot, June 30, 1987; News from Within, May 13, 1986; Uriel Ben-Ami, Davar, April 11; AP, BG, May 26.

tragic incident and its result are already a penalty” — for the murderer, that is, not the Araboushim who raise their heads.²⁹

Of the victims of the events in Beita, only the name of Tirza Porat is known, and only the circumstances of her killing merit inquiry and comment. This is only to be expected in the reigning climate both here and in Israel. Who would have heard the name of Intissar al-Atar, a 17-year-old Palestinian girl shot and killed in a schoolyard in Gaza last November 10, or of her killer, Shimon Yifrah of the Jewish settlement of Gush Katif in the Gaza Strip, arrested a month later and released on bail because, the Supreme Court determined, “the offense is not severe enough to order the arrest of the accused, and in this case there is no fear that Yifrah will repeat the offense or escape from his punishment”? Or of Jude Abdallah Awad, a shepherd murdered, his companion severely wounded, when a Jewish settler tried to drive them from a field on May 5, an incident meriting 80 words in the New York Times (and none when the settler was released on bail, charged with manslaughter)? Or Iyad Mohammed Aqel, a 15-year-old boy murdered by Israeli soldiers, his head “beaten to a pulp” according to a witness, after he was dragged from his home in a Gaza refugee camp?³⁰

The reaction here and in Israel to the grossly discriminatory treatment of Arabs and Jews by the courts stands alongside the prevailing double standard on terror and rights. Palestinian artist Fathi Ghaban receives a six-month prison sentence for using the colors of the Palestinian flag in a painting. An Arab worker caught sleeping illegally in Tel Aviv receives the same sentence, with two-months additional imprisonment if he does not pay a heavy fine. Four young Arabs are sentenced to fines and three months at hard labor for having waved a Palestinian flag in a protest demonstration after the Sabra-Shatila massacres. In contrast, a

²⁹ BG, May 25; Al-Hamishmar, May 17; Joel Brinkley, NYT, April 28.

³⁰ Chronology, Middle East Journal, Spring 1988; Attorney Avigdor Feldman, Hadashot, Jan. 1, 1988; AP, NYT, May 6; Mary Curtius, BG, John Kifner, NYT, Feb. 9; Curtius, BG, June 4.

continues, “kept silent and sat down on the ground” as the Border Guards laughed, saying again “Really, not humans,” then walked away. “People were passing by and didn’t look at the Arab, as if he were transparent. ‘Here you have your story’, said my Arab.” Others are not so fortunate, and may be beaten and taken away for “interrogation” and detention without charge. Complaints to the police evoke still further brutality, as amply documented.¹⁵

These are the conditions of daily life for Ahmed, and the background for the uprising.

Avishai Margalit writes that “within the politics of honor and humiliation it is difficult even to talk of a political settlement.” That may be true of Israeli society; it is easy to talk of a political settlement among the Palestinians, and its general form is clear enough and widely accepted. There is little point continuing to evade these central facts, as is commonly done, even by the most critical commentators in the United States, for example, Anthony Lewis, who condemns Israel for attempting to deport a Palestinian advocate of nonviolence on grounds that he wants “Israel to end its occupation — which is the goal long sought by the United States and virtually every other government on earth.”¹⁶ In fact, this is the goal long *blocked* by the United States and its Israeli Labor Party allies, a goal that has yet to be expressed clearly even by Peace Now after many years of advocacy of a political settlement by the PLO and widely under the occupation.¹⁷ As long as such illusions persist, nothing will change.

¹⁵ Segev, Ha’aretz, Jan. 8, 1988. See Gabi Nitzan, Koteret Rashit, Dec. 30, 1987, for a particularly harrowing example. Translated by Israel Shahak.

¹⁶ NYT, May 15, 1988.

¹⁷ See my article in Z, May, for recent examples; on the earlier record and the distortion of it, see *Fateful Triangle*, chapter 3, reprinted in James Peck, ed., *The Chomsky Reader* (Pantheon, 1987); *Pirates and Emperors*.

Some Personal Observations

I visited in April at the time of the assassination of Abu Jihad, an act generally applauded in Israel, and widely condoned here, on the grounds that he had been involved in planning terrorist acts; on the same grounds, there could be no objection to the assassination of the Israeli and American political leadership. The Gaza strip was entirely sealed off because of protests that led to large-scale killings by the army, and was impossible to enter. But with very helpful Arab contacts, I was able to visit Arab areas of the West Bank. Even before the assassination, the region was coming to resemble a concentration camp. The response is determination and quiet defiance, an impressive level of popular organization, the firm intent to develop a self-sustaining subsistence economy at a mere survival level if necessary, and astonishingly high morale. From leading Palestinian activists, to organizers of popular committees, to people in villages under military control, to victims of army and settler terror, the answers are the same: we will endure, we will suffer, and we will win our independence by making it impossible for the Israelis to maintain their rule.

In the Ramallah hospital, there were many severely injured patients but no doctors to be seen, and few nurses, when I visited. A confrontation with soldiers had taken place a few hours earlier outside the hospital, and the medical staff risk detention if they attempt to assist the wounded. Patients and families were at first reluctant to speak to us, wary that we might be Israeli agents masquerading as journalists. After our guide had established his credentials, they were willing to do so, describing the circumstances in which they were beaten and shot. One man, paralyzed from the waist down, with tubes coming out of his body and five bullet wounds, told us softly as we left his bedside that “If you have need of a homeland, you must sacrifice.” A 13-year-old boy, hit by a “rubber bullet” (a rubber-encased steel bullet), told us that he had been shot while returning home from a mosque and trying to leave

Polls indicate that 21% of Israeli Jews opposed demolition of the houses and 13% called for the entire village to be “erased.”²⁷ Some commentary condemned the demolition of the house of a man who had aided the hikers, but I saw no general condemnation in the mainstream press, and no call for collective punishment against Elon Moreh after settler provocation led to Aldubi’s killings.

As elsewhere, the villagers described what had happened, and their current plight, with calm and simplicity. They are prepared to endure. Their responses were considered and thoughtful. Asked how they would react if Israelis were to offer to rebuild the houses that had been destroyed (16 of which were damaged or destroyed “illegally” even by the standards of what passes for law in the territories), they responded, after consultation, that it would have to be a political decision: if Jews would come to rebuild in a spirit of friendship and solidarity, they would be welcome; if they intended only to salve their consciences or improve the image of “the beautiful Israel,” the villagers would have none of it. I raised the question of rebuilding the houses “illegally” destroyed with several Peace Now intellectuals in Jerusalem and was told that the matter was under consideration, but I know of no outcome.

It was raining steadily when we visited Beita. Women were trying to cook outdoors in the rain, others in semi-demolished houses. A house may have a dozen or more inhabitants. The number of people left homeless is considerable, apart from the many arrested and deported. Mousa Saleh’s mother and sister, three months pregnant, are in prison, their homes destroyed. The sister has been charged with assault, and according to Israeli reports, may be charged with complicity in the murder of Tirza Porat.²⁸ As for Aldubi, he is not to be charged, because, as the army spokesman said, “I believe the

²⁷ Ha’aretz, April 15; Hadashot, April 12.

²⁸ In August, she was given an eight-month sentence, retroactive to her arrest, for “throwing rocks and causing serious bodily harm to Aldubi”; Joel Greenberg, JP, Aug. 12, 1988.

by Jewish settlers.²⁶ When Mousa Saleh was murdered by Aldubi in the fields, villagers brought the hikers to the village to determine what should be done. Aldubi killed his second victim when he approached with hands raised to ask Aldubi to hand over his weapon and take the hikers on their way. Aldubi killed Tirza Porat after he was hit by stones thrown by Mousa Saleh's mother and sister. His rifle was then taken from him and destroyed. Settler tales about shooting by Arabs are denied by the army, which issued an official report of dubious accuracy. Israeli friends in Jerusalem told me that they had no doubt, from the first television interviews, that the hikers were lying. Though the hikers were under the control of the inhabitants for several hours after the killings, none were injured, and they were cared for by villagers, as the army emphasized in an effort to calm the hysteria that followed these events.

The official claim was that the villagers were given ample warning of the house demolitions so that they could remove their possessions. That is plainly false. 10 days later, villagers were still rummaging through the ruins, searching for pieces of broken furniture, clothes, and stored food that had been buried in the explosions. According to several independent accounts, the villagers had been gathered in the mosque and given 15 minutes notice of the demolitions. We were told that one man was indeed given time to move his possessions to his father's home, after which both houses were demolished. These are substantial stone houses; one of those partially destroyed was a two-story building which, we were told, was more than 100 years old. Apart from the 14 houses officially destroyed, 16 others were damaged, many unlivable. I noticed one house with a wall caved in by a concrete block about ten feet long that had sailed some fifteen feet from the nearest demolished structure.

The International Commission of Jurists in Geneva denounced the collective punishments, including the demolitions and expulsions, as yet another violation of the 1949 Geneva conventions.

²⁶ Zvi Gilat, *Hadashot*, April 7.

the scene of a demonstration nearby. Asked how he felt, he replied that his mood was "higher than the wind." The sentiments are common, expressed without rhetoric or anger; people lacking means of self-defense, having endured much suffering and facing more, have stars in their eyes, and a sense of inevitable victory. In contrast, in Israel, at least among those segments of the population that are aware of what is happening, there is a sense of foreboding. One very close friend of forty years asked me, after I had given a talk at Tel Aviv University on the current situation, whether I thought Israeli Jews would still be there in twenty years. The mood in the territories, and the sense that they can survive the mounting repression until the occupation ends and independence is achieved, may or may not be realistic, but it was readily apparent.

On Friday morning, with businesses closed, the city of Nablus was quiet, though Israeli troops were patrolling, in preparation for an expected demonstration after prayers at the mosque. At the outskirts of the city, a group of men and boys were clearing a field by hand for subsistence crops. The United National Leadership had designated this day for preparing a self-sustaining economy, not reliant on Israel, which has converted the territories into a market for Israeli products and a source of cheap labor. No serious effort has been made to organize mass refusals to work in Israel, because the dependence of the territories on this work for survival has not yet been overcome. One of the organizers, a municipal clerk, guided us to an apartment in the old city of Nablus, where we were joined by another local activist, a taxi driver. With its maze of narrow winding paths, the old city cannot be patrolled by the army, which has erected heavy steel doors at the gates so that the population can be locked in if need be. The two men described the network of popular committees, organized by neighborhood and function (health, production, municipal services, women's groups, etc.), that run the affairs of the city and social life, receiving regular directives from the United Leadership on general policy matters, with specific days

designated for particular kinds of activities, to be carried out as the local communities determine.

Such popular organizations have been developing for years through the initiative of the (illegal) Communist Party, which has long emphasized popular organization rather than “armed struggle” and may have gained considerable credibility by the now-evident success of this strategy, and the various factions of the PLO, particularly its dominant element Fatah. Their emergence and development in the past few months is the most striking feature of the popular uprising, with long-term significance. Shulamith Hareven observes that the uprising is “not merely a protest against Israeli power, though this is the basic and most obvious component.” It is “a revolt of women and youth against traditional patriarchal authority,” against “women’s work” and the “prosperous elders, with their connections to Israel and foreign countries,” in “a society where something very important is proceeding and changing before our eyes, and even if the current disturbances will be quelled, the process will continue.” Reporting from West Bank villages, Zvi Gilat describes their “socialist autonomy,” with mutual aid, provisions distributed to those in need and popular organization despite Israeli terror, always at hand, as in Ya’bed, where villagers listen all night to “the prisoners crying out and asking for food” from the local school, converted (as many schools have been) to a “prison camp.”¹⁸ One sees the signs everywhere.

Though Arab police have resigned under orders of the United Leadership, there is, local inhabitants say, virtually no crime or disorder, apart from confrontations with the occupying forces. In Nablus, plans are underway to raise chickens and rabbits, and to farm on the outskirts. The party structure emerges at the level of the United Leadership (Fatah, the Popular Front, the Democratic Front, the Communist Party, and in Gaza, the Islamic Jihad). It ap-

¹⁸ Hareven, *op. cit.*; Gilat, *Hadashot*, April 7.

dubi, then proceeding to blow up 14 houses while Chief of Staff Dan Shomron reported that “the Arab residents had intended no harm to the Elon Moreh hikers” and had indeed protected them. Many people were arrested (60 remained in prison when we visited), and six were later deported. General Shomron declared that “action had to be immediate. A failure to act could well have led to other action in the area,” that is, more settler violence. The collective punishment and expulsions are “the expected tribute” paid to control the settlers, Nahum Barnea observes, punishment for their violence being out of the question, because they are Jews.²⁴

Beita is — or was — a lovely, quiet village, tucked away in the hills not far from Ramallah. A traditional and conservative village, Beita had declared itself liberated shortly after the uprising began and was attacked several times by the army, leading to stone-throwing confrontations on the road to the village, which the army blockaded. During one army raid on February 14, property was destroyed and three villagers had to be hospitalized with broken limbs: two teenagers, and an 80-year-old man with an arm, two fingers and two ribs broken.²⁵ All this being normal, the town remained enveloped in obscurity.

What took place on April 6 is contested. According to villagers, the lands of Beita were under military closure at the time. They were concerned when they saw settlers entering these lands and approaching a well, which they feared the settlers might be planning to poison or destroy; that has happened elsewhere according to local inhabitants, including Ya’bed, where the well was blown up

²⁴ John Kifner, *NYT*, April 7, 8, 9; *News from Within* (Alternative Information Center, Jerusalem), May 10; *FACTS Weekly Review*, April 3–9, a publication that provides weekly summaries of the uprising; Shomron, cited from Kifner, April 9, and *JP*, April 12; Nahum Barnea, *Koteret Rashit*, April 13; Peretz Kidron, *Middle East International*, April 16.

²⁵ *News from Within*, May 10; Daoud Kuttab, *Middle East International*, April 16.

shaken, three days after the army assault. My Arab guides did not want to be apprehended in the town, so we left in another direction. No attack was reported in the press, and what happened, I do not know.

I joined several lawyers from the Ramallah human rights group Al-Haq (Law in the Service of Man) on a visit to the village of Beita, closed under military blockade that bars all contact with the outside world; gas, water and electricity were cut off, and there were shortages of milk, flour and vegetables.²³ We reached Beita over a back road and hills, guided by a man from a neighboring village, and stayed until just before 7PM, when the military closure is extended to curfew, meaning house arrest. As we left, the back road over the hills had been blocked with boulders to protect the village from possible settler or army attack.

Beita achieved notoriety when a Jewish teenager, Tirza Porat, was killed on April 6 by an Israeli settler, Romam Aldubi, after a confrontation that took place when 20 hikers from the religious-nationalist settlement of Elon Moreh entered the lands of Beita — “to show who are the masters,” as one hiker later told a TV interviewer. Two villagers, Mousa Saleh Bani Shamseh and Hatem Fayez Ahmad al-Jaber (there are conflicting versions of their names), were also killed and several were severely wounded by Aldubi, one of two armed guards accompanying the hikers. Aldubi is a well-known extremist barred from entering Nablus, the only Jew ever subjected to an army exclusion order; the second guard and organizer of the hike, Menahem Ilan, also had a criminal past. A 16-year-old boy, Issam Abdul Halim Mohammad Said, was killed by soldiers the following day.

The hikers claimed that Tirza Porat had been killed by Arab villagers, setting off virtual hysteria in Israel, including a call by two cabinet ministers to destroy the town and deport its population. Within a day, the army had determined that she was killed by Al-

²³ Yizhar Be'er and Munir Man'e, Kol Hair, April 15.

pears to be less significant, though it doubtless functions, at the local level.

The primary emphasis and concern is organization of community life, with a view towards creating the basis for full independence. The political goal is to end the occupation. When questions turn to the means for achieving this end, the answer is always the same: these matters are to be negotiated with the PLO. There was informed criticism of the PLO for incompetence, corruption, and worse, and thinly-veiled contempt for several of the figures in Israel regarded by the media as leaders and official spokesmen, though not all; Faisal Husseini, director of the Arab Studies Society in East Jerusalem, now again under administrative detention, was mentioned with particular respect.¹⁹ But the Palestinian issue is understood as a national problem, and the PLO is the national leadership, whatever its faults. It is a fair guess that if independence is achieved, conflicts submerged in the unity of resistance will surface, particularly now that local organization has achieved substantial scale and success.

The activities outlined by local organizers corresponded closely to a thoughtful analysis by Bashir Barghouti, an influential West Bank intellectual. His vision, presented with detail and a long-term perspective, is that an independent life will be established, whatever measures Israel takes to prevent it, with eventual political independence after the occupation becomes too costly for Israel to maintain. The network of popular organizations, and their activities to establish self-sufficiency and self-government, will provide the basis for the social and political structure of a West Bank-Gaza state, established alongside of Israel. Whether the plans are realistic and the prospects realizable, I do not know, but the similarity of perception and intent over a wide range is as noteworthy as the

¹⁹ See press release, Arab Studies Society, 13 September 1987; *The Other Israel*, Nov.-Dec. 1987.

spirit of dedication and the ongoing efforts — and the resemblance to earlier Zionist history.

One of the first villages to declare itself liberated was Salfit, which resisted army conquest until three days before my visit. The local committees “had organized municipal services, including sanitation, as an alternative to those provided by the Civil Administration” and had “posted guards and patrols to warn of the arrival of settlers and the army,” the Jerusalem Post reported in its brief notice of the army assault.²⁰ The story of Salfit was recounted to us in the home of Rajeh al-Salfiti, a well-known nationalist figure and folk singer, who had been arrested by the British during the Palestine revolt of 1936–9, by the Jordanians when they ruled the West Bank, and by the Israelis after their conquest. According to his account, related in vivid detail and amplified by several visitors, he was one of 80 people arrested when Israel occupied the town with some 1500 troops in a pre-dawn attack, then released with two others (one seriously ill, one disabled). The town has a dominant Communist party presence, and was well-organized. Earlier army attempts to break in had been beaten back by rock-throwing demonstrators; quite commonly, the confrontations that are reported, and those that are not, develop in this manner. At first, the army assumed that the attempt at self-rule could be overcome by sporadic terror. One man described how two Israeli sharpshooters in civilian clothes climbed to the roof of a building at the outskirts of the town and shot a person in the streets chosen at random, after which the killer called to his partner that they could now leave. Neither this nor subsequent efforts succeeded. The village remained united in resistance, running its own affairs.

On one occasion, in late March, the army did break into the town on the pretext of rescuing a tourist bus that had been hijacked, killing a 14-year-old boy and “rescuing” the bus and its occupants. But this tale was quickly exposed as a fabrication. The travellers

²⁰ April 14.

were a group of American academics attending a conference organized by Bir Zeit university (closed by the army, as was the entire school and university system). They were visiting the town, where they were welcomed by the local inhabitants. One of those “rescued” (well after the bus had left the town) was Harvard professor Zachary Lockman, who reported that a helicopter had been observing the village during the visit and that he had overheard an army officer tell his commander by radio that the group “had not been under any threat whatsoever.”²¹

When the town was finally occupied by the army assault, we were told, soldiers entered the mosque and desecrated it and one climbed the minaret where he called out in Arabic “Your God is gone, we are in charge here,” a further exercise of humiliation. The same has been reported elsewhere, for example, in Beit Ummar, where more than 100 windows of the mosque were broken, holy books and other property destroyed, and tape recordings of Koran readings stolen during a five-hour army rampage with bulldozers that severely damaged virtually every building along the main street, destroyed cars and tractors, uprooted trees and caused general havoc.²² In Salfit, union offices were destroyed and other buildings damaged. The army entered houses identified by number to seek people designated for arrest; it was speculated that helicopter flights in the preceding days may have been aimed at providing detailed maps. In prison, those arrested were subjected to beatings in the normal fashion. As we were about to leave the village, we heard boys shouting outside that the soldiers were coming. People were streaming from the houses, including women and children, to confront the soldiers once again. Morale evidently remained un-

²¹ AP, March 28. There was brief and inadequate notice in the Boston Globe, March 29 and New York Times, March 28; editorial, JP, March 29, deploring the army’s “blunder”.

²² Dan Fisher, Los Angeles Times, April 10; Uri Nir, Ha’aretz, April 13; AP, April 9. A May 3 NYT report from the village by Joel Brinkley describes none of this.