

West Bank and Gaza

Keeping Israel occupied

Foreign Office man David Mellor's outrage that a 14-year old boy could be arrested for throwing a stone he didn't throw probably doesn't extend to what happens on the streets of Brixton. But his outrage at what the Israeli authorities have been doing in the Gaza Strip — one of the parts of Palestine occupied by Israel in 1967 — is a sign of the times.

He described Jabaliya refugee camp, home to 50,000 Palestinians, as "an affront to civilised values". Civilised or not, it is a symbol of the appalling reality of military occupation — the reality that has driven the oppressed Palestinians to revolt.

Palestine Liberation Organisation leader Yasser Arafat has called it "a people's uprising". Certainly the revolt — rioting, strikes, protests — centring in Gaza but extending into the West Bank and Israel itself — is the biggest wave of resistance to Israeli occupation probably ever, and certainly since 1982. At the time of writing, 24 Arab men, women and children have been killed by Israeli 'security' services, and 200 have been injured.

As we go to press, four Palestinians have been deported by Israel — in contravention of international law. Deportations and the threat of them have fired further protests.

Israeli repression has not only been too much for the British government to stomach; widespread condemnation has come from all quarters, including Israel's supposedly rock-solid support amongst American Jewry. It raises the question: might Israel be forced out of the occupied territories? As the 'Jerusalem Post' commented, "the inhabitants of the territories (have) realised their collective power to change events, despite the lack of formal organisation". What might the future hold?

The disturbances began in Gaza on December 9, supposedly following a road accident in which four Palestinians were killed by an Israeli truck, allegedly in retaliation for an Israeli death in Gaza City. It was only a spark, of course, and the flames spread rapidly. Strikes (closure of businesses) have covered Gaza; in the West Bank protests have also been intense.

The Israeli army has nearly doubled its presence on the West Bank (particularly in the towns of Hebron, Nablus and Tulkarm) and tripled them in the Gaza Strip, according to its Chief of Staff. It has more troops deployed than it originally used to seize the territories during the 'Six Day War' of 1967.

Inside pre-'67 Israel, too, there were widespread protests during a "Peace Day" strike — particularly in the towns

of Jaffa, Shfaram and Umm El-Fahm.

The Israeli authorities have shown little willingness to compromise; both Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin (the latter a 'Labour' politician, the former with a far-right history going back to pre-Israel days) have reiterated the "iron fist" policy. Shamir, denouncing his American critics, firmly said: "It is impossible to dictate to someone from afar how to defend oneself against anarchy, riots, attacks on the state, its citizens, its peace and security."

Former Labour Prime Minister Shimon Peres (Labour and the far right Likud Party worked out an elaborate job-share after the last election in which they swapped the premiership half-way through term) voiced the idea of a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Gaza (and only Gaza) to an American audience only to insist that he had been "taken out of context" when Likud accused him of defeatism.

The current crisis in the occupied territories is not new. There has been an escalating cycle of violence for several years. In 1985, the Jerusalem Post's military correspondent described the situation in the West Bank and Gaza as "something horribly reminiscent of Lebanon". And Israeli tacticians do fear yet another bloody embroilment.

It was Peres as Prime Minister who stepped up repression, particularly against student, trade union and other activists too closely identified with the PLO. In 1985, the two nations were described by one expert as "marching towards civil war".

The revolt, and publicity about it, has focused on Gaza, often ignored when the occupation is discussed. The conditions in Jabaliya refugee camp — a hideous slum — have hit world headlines. People are beginning to see that dispossessed Palestinian youth consider that they have nothing to lose.

Gaza was seized by Israel, like the West Bank, in June 1967. Before that it was run by Egyptian military authorities — who were no kinder to the Palestinians than the Israelis have been. Political parties were banned. Gazans, officially "stateless", depended for passports on Egyptian government permits.

Before 1957, 70% of Palestinians in Gaza depended upon the United Nations Relief Work Agency for their main source of income. Things haven't improved much since. It is reported to be one of the most densely populated areas of the world — with 460,000 Palestinians living there today. 80,000 people before 1948 were joined by 160-180,000 refugees from Israel when it was founded.



Gaza was a base for Palestinian guerrillas after Israeli occupation began in 1967. It was even admitted by top Israeli soldiers like Moshe Dayan that in the late 'sixties the guerrillas controlled Gaza by night. Then General Ariel Sharon changed that with his "pacification" plan in 1971 in which hundreds of guerrillas were captured and killed.

Gazan Palestinians face the creeping annexation of their land experienced on the West Bank. By 1983, 319 of the total land area of Gaza had been confiscated for purposes of Israeli settlement. Israel claims to confiscate only "state" land — meaning land never privately registered under the Ottoman land code.

The Middle East Research and Information Project (no. 136-7) describes the reality of the situation:

"Palestinian owners are frequently notified of confiscation by the arrival of a bulldozer, under military guard, to rip up vines and trees, or by a new barbed-wire fence surrounding their property. Most of the land that has been confiscated is along the seashore...The Israeli planners see this coastline, with its miles of undeveloped beaches, as a major tourist asset for the future." (p.11).

Political organisation is much weaker in Gaza than the West Bank, and trade union organisation virtually non-existent. A rise of Islamic fundamentalist groups to rival the more secular nationalist PLO has been much noted in recent years.

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But the fundamentalists' real support is hard to gauge. The current wave of resistance does not seem to be fundamentalist-inspired.

That there would be this kind of explosion was inevitable. Israel has built up 20 years of hatred and resentment by its occupation and the repressive tactics it has necessarily used. Can Israel control the situation?

Many Israelis are speaking out against occupation. 160 army reservists, including a Jerusalem councillor, three majors and five captains, issued a statement that they would "refuse to take part in suppressing the uprising and insurrection". They went on, "the uprising...and its brutal suppression...graphically illustrates the price of occupation." They said they could "no longer bear the burden of shared responsibility for this moral and political deterioration."

But the overwhelming drift of Israeli public opinion is to the right. The fascist KACH party of Meir Kahane continues to grow; and Kahane's frequent claim that he "only says what others believe" is probably true even of members of the government.

If a solution is to come from the present uprising, it will depend upon outside solidarity. Israel should be made to get out of the occupied territories and allow the formation there of a fully independent Palestinian state.

Clive Bradley

Women workers

Union maids

Over the past eight years there has been a massive growth in women's employment, in particular part-time work for women.

The Manpower Services Commission annual report for 1986-7 shows that a staggering 42% of new jobs created went to part-time women compared to only 8.6% to men working full-time. Indeed over the past two years the only type of employment (other than self-employed) which has expanded has been part-time women's work, mainly in the service sector.

Part-time workers face particular problems. They are often excluded from employers' pension and sick pay schemes and have restricted access to overtime, bonuses, etc.

They are also extremely under-unionised. Overall women's unionisation is only 60% of that of men — considerably less for part-timers. The bulk of NUPE's membership is women working part time in jobs such as hospital cleaning and school meals. But

women in the rag trade, hotels and catering, contract cleaning, are generally non-unionised.

All sorts of factors contribute to this. Women might work in small groups — maybe 3 or 4 women office cleaners for instance. Or childcare commitments may make real participation in a union very difficult. Decisively, there is a feeling that unions are 'not for us' — union meetings a night for the lads in the pub, unions as having nothing to say about the needs and problems of women workers.

This picture has on the whole been true. But the past year or so has witnessed a positive scramble by the GMB and the TGWU to recruit hitherto untapped sources of union members — CP schemes, young people, part-time workers.

Both the GMB and the TGWU have suffered massive drops in membership over the past eight years. From a membership of nearly one million in 1979, the GMB now has only 870,000 members, whereas the TGWU lost a huge 29% between 1979 and 1985. It is clear that the new orientation towards non-traditional workers has less to do with a road to Damascus flash of enlightenment than with a desperate need to boost flagging membership. As John Edmonds, general secretary of the GMB said, "without more women members, we don't have a future." Edmonds reckons that by the 1990s the union will have to recruit three women for every man to achieve any growth in membership.

This underlies the GMB's launch of its 'Flare' campaign — a campaign with a 'corporate image' designed to appeal to part-timers, women, blacks and youth. The campaign was launched with a questionnaire, geared around the individual rights of workers, representation at tribunals and the like, hoping to show that union membership can be of real relevance to people's working lives.

All very fine on paper but how does the reality match up? In the Midlands it seems that real attempts have been made to reach in particular women employed in the hotel and catering sector. But generally it remains a paper campaign, any impetus being dependent on the personal commitment of individual regional officials.

A similar picture emerges with the TGWU's 'Link-up' campaign. The TGWU has a federal structure which again means the initiative is left up to individual regions. Region 6, the north-west, has a record of attempting to reach these groups which pre-dates the initiative of 'Link-up', and seems to have attempted to continue this. But in the Midlands the 'campaign' remains a pile of glossy leaflets in the union offices.

Both the TGWU and the GMB have attempted to improve the representation of women within union structures. The TGWU now insists that each region

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sends at least one woman delegate to TUC congress, and the GMB reserves ten of its executive places for women.

NUPE has recently attempted to increase involvement of its women members. In Dudley lunchtime union meetings were organised for women school cleaners and dinner ladies. Education has been geared to developing women to take on higher positions. Transport to meetings and creche provision are now real issues.

Other unions too are finding they have to become more responsive to the needs of women workers. Civil Service unions in Cardiff have launched a campaign for workplace cervical cancer screenings and the SOGAT branch in Manchester has experimented with providing cancer screening for its women members.

The typical worker in Britain is no longer the white, male car worker or docker but the part-time woman cleaner or sewing machinist. For unions like the GMB and TGWU, recruiting women is a question of survival. It remains to be seen how far these unions can meet the needs of the women part-timers they are so desperate to court.

Lynn Fergusson

New Zealand

Labour Thatcherites

Labour's Minister for Finance Roger Douglas introduced sweeping changes to the New Zealand economy on 17 December.

Waiting until after Parliament had adjourned for Christmas, Douglas announced that: a new flat rate of personal income tax; a 50% cut in tariffs; privatisation of \$14 billion worth of assets; the end of the government monopoly over telecommunications and a slashing of company tax.

Not only had Douglas failed to allow a Parliamentary debate on the proposals he didn't even bother to consult the Labour Caucus. Caucus was only told of the details an hour before the announcement was made.

Douglas and Prime Minister Lange have overseen three years of probably the purest free-market policies in the world. These new changes continue the trend established in both New Zealand and Australia of Labour parties doing what the Conservatives have only talked of doing.

Since 1984 Douglas and Lange have floated the dollar, replaced centralised wage fixing with a system close to the American style of plant-level bargaining, privatised several of the government's key assets including 25% of the national carrier, Air New Zealand, and lifted the huge subsidies and industry protection that was a feature of the predominantly



agricultural economy.

Douglas also introduced the extremely regressive Goods and Services Tax. Similar to VAT, it has no exemptions and was set at 10% when introduced in October 1986.

As in Australia, the New Zealand Labour government has neutralised the Opposition parties by implementing the policies they were too nervous to introduce. But they have also disoriented the labour movement.

The peak union Federation of Labour which is dominated by pro-Soviet officials, refused to criticise Lange's government in the early days because of its stand on US warships. The result has been a government acting openly against the interests of workers and the thousands of small farmers and a labour movement that has been disarmed. Douglas, himself a millionaire, has been more interested in creating the environment for profit creation and speculation, and in so doing has created two New Zealands, like Thatcher's two Britains.

Douglas refutes these claims with the classic myth of social-democracy. "I've always stressed that the interests of business and the interests of workers are one and the same. They both go together, need one another, therefore what they've got to do is get together, build a bigger cake..."

The reality in New Zealand though is that the cake is being distributed in very uneven slices.

Tony Brown

South Africa

Natal's civil war

"At 22.30 there was a loud bang at our door and we heard men claim that they were the police. The men demanded that I open the door. They said that they had come looking for *gabane* — a reference to 'comrade'.

At this time, my yard was thick with Inkatha men: there could have been well over 100 about the area of my house. The men were heavily armed with assegais, spears, bush knives and sticks.

One of the leaders insisted: We want to know why he did not come to join Inkatha at our meeting.

Perceiving that there was no alternative, Bhekabantu and I decided to

wage a fight. I grabbed a stick, but the Inkatha mob said: 'No, old man, we don't want you, we want your son.'

We heard members of the mob exclaim: 'We must burn the house', and thereafter unsuccessfully attempt to get petrol from a car. In all the confusion Bhekabantu managed to slip out the back door of the house.

As my niece Mnandi later recounted, Bhekabantu entered her house in an effort to hide from the mob. Moments later, the mob broke the windows to Mnandi's house and smashed down the doors. They entered the house and repeatedly stabbed Bhekabantu.

After killing him they pulled him from the bed and dragged him outside where he was left for dead."

Willi Mpulo, who told this story, lives in Sweetwaters, outside Pietermaritzburg, Natal. His story is tragic but typical.

In the first week of 1988 over 35 people died in fighting in and around Pietermaritzburg, as vigilantes from Chief Buthelezi's conservative tribal movement Inkatha battled with trade unionists and radicals from the United Democratic Front for control of the townships.

The origins of the present conflict go back to Kwa Mashu schools boycott in 1980, when Inkatha mobilised vigilante gangs called Amabutho against the radical students.

In 1985 the violence really started to escalate. In August there was a consumer boycott of white shops in and around Pietermaritzburg in solidarity with the workers sacked by the British multi-national BTR. It led to open conflict between the independent workers' movement on the one hand and conservative black business interests and Inkatha on the other.

After August violent and murderous attacks on trade union organisers became a regular occurrence in Natal.

August 1985 also witnessed student demonstrations and boycotts to protest at the murder by unknown assailants of lawyer and UDF activist Victoria Mxenge. Mare and Hamilton in their study 'An appetite for power' tell the story.

"The boycotts and marches which began on 5 August were initially composed mostly of students and scholars but they began to draw a number of unemployed youths, looters and opportunists in their wake. The targets of people's anger, which at first appeared to be obvious 'symbols of the system' such as policemen, policemen's houses and administrative and school buildings, soon changed to shops, businesses and trading stores. Looting and arson occurred throughout the week in Umlazi, Kwa Mashu and the squatter town of Inanda.

By 7 August an estimated 1000 Indians had fled Inanda to seek safety in the Indian township of Phoenix after their homes and stores had been attacked and looted. According to Sitas, by 8 August 'a racial "psychosis", aggravated

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by the media's coverage of events, reminiscent of 1949 was gripping both Inanda and Phoenix'. Indeed the media made much of the hostility of Africans towards Indians and failed to give due weight to the burning of African-owned shops in Inanda or the fact that most of the people killed in the area were African.

From 7 August Inkatha vigilantes mobilised to protect businesses and property in the townships and to flush-out and punish not only looters and criminals but large numbers of scholars, students and UDF activists and leaders. In the process many innocent bystanders were hurt, killed or left homeless.

The week of violence left progressive political organisations generally, and even Inkatha itself, with glaring gaps in their ability to control or direct events or their supporters' responses to those events. Inkatha may have been better at predicting events than others. Buthelezi and other Inkatha leaders had frequently warned of the wrath that would be unleashed by their supporters against those disrupting schooling or destroying property in KwaZulu."

It seems that Buthelezi used the role played by his vigilantes in restoring order to the Durban townships to boost his support and increase his connections with conservatives in the Indian community.

The August 1985 battles also saw the emergence of brutal township warlords inside Inkatha. They had a certain degree of autonomy from Buthelezi and could say things that Buthelezi could not get away with. A taste of just how 'peaceful', 'non-violent' and 'legitimate' is this side of Inkatha is given by this outburst by KwaZulu MP and Inkatha Central Committee member Thomas Shabulule:

"With this pistol I will leave hundreds of UDF supporters dead on the battlefield. I long for the day when there will be open war between Inkatha and the UDF. It will prove who is who in the political battle." That open war is now taking place in and around Pietermaritzburg.

Buthelezi's movement has historically been quite weak in this area. It can boast no more than 5,000 members in an area of over half a million people. The independent unions and progressive township organisations have built up a base in the area, partly as a result of the BTR strike. They have been helped by the modern urban and industrial environment, which has loosened traditional tribal loyalties.

The immediate spark to the recent killings was an attempt by Inkatha in September to gain ground in Pietermaritzburg by launching a recruitment drive in the Edendale area.

Their approach was "sign this card or I'll kill you". A chief said in an Edendale Church meeting that everyone had to join Inkatha and "woe unto them" who did not. Within 24 hours a mother and her son who refused to join Inkatha

were killed.

Since September the violence has escalated. Community groups and trade unions have formed self-defence groups to defend themselves from Inkatha vigilantes. Mpopomeni, the township base of the BTR strikers, is like a fortress. Parts of Edendale controlled by UDF and COSATU people have been renamed Angola and Moscow. Inkatha-controlled districts are no-go areas for the left.

Buthelezi's Inkatha movement is difficult to define precisely. Buthelezi poses as a leader of the 'liberation movement', yet at the same time he is boss of an ethnically based political party and ruler of a bantustan.

He preaches black unity and liberation yet can be viciously anti-Indian in his speeches. Some of his supporters go in



Buthelezi

for tirades against Xhosa speakers and all other 'Africans' who are not Zulu. Buthelezi strikes a popular pose as a 'friend of the people' yet is a bitter enemy of the workers' movement.

Inkatha has many of the attributes of a fascist movement — terror, populism, ethnic exclusivism and murderous hostility to the labour movement. It even has a military-style training camp for the Inkatha Youth Brigade, who provide a substantial part of the Amabutho or vigilantes, and a labour front, UWUSA, dedicated to undermining and physically attacking COSATU and other independent unions.

Perhaps the best description of Buthelezi's potential historic function for South African capitalism was provided by the *Financial Mail* when they nominated him 'Man of the Year' in 1985.

"History...is made by individuals. And the question is: who can deliver SA to a new era of conciliation and relative harmony? (We use the adjective 'relative' advisedly; it would be naive to believe that anything short of a smoking ruin would satisfy many of those now fomenting violence. They will have to be put down)..."

"One name comes easily to mind ...and it is that of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi...a man of compromise...he eschews violence...against disinvestment...against consumer boycotts...an

unabashed free marketer."

To play that kind of role Buthelezi needs to break out of Natal and establish himself as a *national* political figure. To do so Buthelezi needs to drive out any opposition to him in his base of Natal.

Buthelezi's movement presents great problems for socialists. Despite coercion the movement obviously has *mass* working class support. Many ordinary COSATU members still maintain an Inkatha link though they reject Inkatha's tame union, UWUSA.

Inkatha's main power base comes from control of the structure of the KwaZulu bantustan. Buthelezi identifies himself and his movement with a long tradition of Zulu nationalism, stretching back to an earlier and different version of Inkatha in the 1930s, the Bambatha rebellion of 1906 and the prolonged resistance of the Zulu kingdom to colonialism in the 19th century.

This tradition of resistance and the powerful symbols derived from it, provide an important element in Inkatha's ability to mobilise. Zulu nationalism has real and deep roots.

Buthelezi has enhanced his status at a national and international level through his links with liberal and not so liberal forces in the white establishment in Natal. The KwaZulu/Natal Indaba represents an attempt by Buthelezi to further pursue these links with an agenda that includes the future possibility of some form of multi-racial federal regional government for Natal.

While the first priority for the liberation movement is obviously self-defence against Inkatha's vigilantes, a broader discussion is needed on the political strategy for winning away Inkatha's working class base. This discussion has started. Some people in COSATU and the UDF, on the right and on the left, had raised the question of participation in the Indaba and maybe in local government structures as a way of exposing Buthelezi and providing a platform for working class demands and an opportunity to reach the base of Inkatha. Others believe that at the moment the focus can only be on self-defence and basic anti-Inkatha propaganda and education of the base.

And some rule out any challenge to Inkatha by way of apartheid or bantustan structures on principle, as such involvement would mean collaborating with the structures of oppression.

The last argument seems the weakest. Historically the Marxist movement has always rejected such moralistic boycott arguments. For instance, Lenin argued for participation in the Tsar's pseudo-parliament, the Duma, after the defeat of the 1905 revolution in Russia.

Is a tactical reorientation away from 'boycott on principle' the way to respond to the decline of the township struggles that have swept South Africa since 1984 and to the particular problem of Inkatha in Natal?

Anne Mack