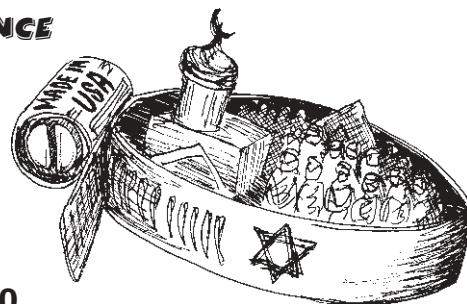


WAKE UP!! IT'S YER NOT SITTING ON THE FENCE

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SETTLEMENTAL

EYE WITNESS ACCOUNT OF LIFE IN PALESTINE

“The poll, this stilted, shotgun wedding, had a strange energy — drained, anaemic, and hesitant. Few seemed genuinely enthusiastic. Universal human rights and international humanitarian law were not honoured guests at this celebration. Inviting them might have elicited passions. Had that happened, Abu Mazen might have lost his title of “moderate candidate.”... this was a marriage of convenience, a union without passion or much optimism, hastily arranged by the tribal elders in Fatah and the Israeli government to serve their interests.”

- Quote from www.electronicintifada.net

While the Palestinians were electing a man many said was a thief who had laundered Palestinian Authority funds, but was the best chance for negotiations with Israel, I was in the West Bank, Palestine. Being Jewish and concerned about the blurring of Jewish and Zionist identity from all sides, I thought it was time to go and see for myself what Israel is up to. The absurdity of the Jewish ‘right to return’ to a country many Jews have never even visited was made explicit when the Palestinian number plated car I was in was pulled over by three terrified looking young soldiers. With M16s pointed at us, one of the soldiers looked at my passport, saw from my surname that I’m Jewish and demanded to know why I didn’t have an Israeli passport, as it is my right to claim one. He really couldn’t figure out why I was spending my festive season with a Palestinian, on a Palestine road subjecting myself to army harassment.

What is most instantly noticeable about the West Bank is the day to day level of the military occupation. The occupation makes life as undignified, dehumanised and difficult as possible, not just in the incursions, house demolitions and massacres but in daily things like the separate and inferior road systems. Then there’s the check points and road blocks cutting people off from their families, friends and work, where all Palestinians have to navigate on foot over mud, concrete mounds and razor wire, with degrading ID checks and searches. Everyone I met told me of people, ancestral homes, places like the seaside that they would like to take their kids, but were unable to visit.

UNSETTLING

With imposing hill top settlements and smaller obnoxiously placed outposts, the Jewish settlements in the West Bank vary from massive established ‘towns,’ (such as Ma’ale Adumin with a population of 30,000 of mostly poor settlers lured by state incentives) to rural settlements consisting more of fundamental-

ist settlers intent on terrorising their Palestinian neighbours. A huge amount of construction work is visibly expanding the settlements beyond what Sharon defends as ‘natural expansion,’ and building roads cutting off sections of Palestinian land where it can be stolen to join settlements together and disrupt Palestinian life.

The settlers of Itamar and its outposts harassed the 100 villagers of Yanoun, near Nablus, so much that when settlers murdered a 24 year old harvesting olives the villagers packed their bags and left, only to return later when internationals offered to live with them. Staying in the international house I was struck by the peace of the magnificent landscape, but where outposts dotted the hills above, keeping constant watch and shining a huge search light all night on Yanoun below. The Itamar website calls for donations to fund night surveillance equipment and armoured cars, whilst the village lives in its shadow.

Visiting Hebron, where over 120,000 Palestinians live alongside 500 Israeli settlers protected by 1200 soldiers, is like visiting a ghost town. Its market of 500 shops was closed on military order after a settler fired a machine gun in the Ibrihimi mosque, killing 29. I saw few amongst the bullet holed and settler graffitied shop fronts open, and met a shopkeeper who told me of the collapse of the Hebron economy. He pointed out the settlers who have moved in to houses overlooking the narrow lanes of the market, who chuck out so much litter onto the Palestinians below that the army has built mesh above the streets to protect them. As we passed under the mesh I noticed it was dented from the impact of great lumps of concrete thrown down, along with fibreglass roof insulation, bricks and plastic bottles. An English activist living in Hebron took me to his home, the only building on the street leading from the market to a settlement that has not been seized by the army. Closely observed by a soldier visible only by the butt of his rifle rustling under combat netting from the house opposite, I was told about his work accompanying children to school after they were attacked by settlers with sticks and chains. More recently the Israeli army have not allowed him to accompany the children, preferring to do the job themselves, leading me to wonder how a Palestinian parent might feel handing their child over to an Israeli soldier for protection.

One Israeli soldier I spoke to told me that he was unhappy having to protect a Gaza settlement on his reserve duty. Along with most Israelis, he doesn’t agree with the set-

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For playing football... While western footballers get paid millions and have affairs with women who masturbate pigs, children as young as six in Hebron are treated slightly differently. After one child was spotted throwing a stone at another during a game of football in a deserted street all eight of them were promptly arrested by Israeli soldiers.

tlers. He talked about the fear he felt being in the front line of possible ‘terrorist’ attacks, and how this is the only context in which he met Palestinians. I spoke to many people who recounted stories from older generations where relations between Palestinians and Israelis were possible. Today, however, the potential for dialogue is impeded by total separation. For many Palestinians the only Israelis they meet are soldiers or settlers and for Israelis the only Palestinians they hear about are the suicide bombers. One Israeli man I spoke to told me that before the 2nd Intifada he had Palestinian colleagues at his work in Tel Aviv, but now they are not allowed into Israel to work and, in any case, ‘all Palestinians are terrorists and animals.’

Offering An Olive Branch

On the last day of the year I found myself with Israeli and international activists on a tree planting demonstration where land has been confiscated and olive trees uprooted from the villagers of Jayyous under the guise of enlarging an existing settlement. I wondered what had happened to the olive trees that the villagers had tended for decades and that their economy relies on. An Israeli told me that they are sold to rich yuppie house-owners, and then I remembered the newly planted but very old olive trees I had seen amidst floral displays decorating a settlement I had driven through the day before. The action felt eerie, having to walk for almost 2 hours in the mid-day heat, as the army decided our route was closed, through the deserted countryside on a symbolic action with no one to read our placards and the media uninterested.

The fence built to separate Jayyous from its land is part of the current plan to build the wall and other obstructions to restrict movement and to separate and isolate Palestinians from each other and from Israeli settlements. As one international put it “If you wanted to put up a fence between your garden and your neighbour’s you would have to put it on your side, right? Apparently the state of Israel thinks differently; as in most of the West Bank, the so called “security barrier” is being built well within the 1967 Green Line, so that yet more Palestinian land is confiscated and effectively annexed to Israel.”

See also - www.alternativenews.org
www.electronicintifada.net
www.icahd.org

G8way to Hell

Our great leader, Tory Bliar, promised "personal prosperity for all" this week if he wins the next election. But as we all know, he's full of shit. So what to do? You could wait a couple of years, realise you're still skint and then think about getting back at him. Or you could do something now...How about embarrassing him in front of all his friends? As the G8 travelling circus is coming to Britain this year, Bliar will be trying to put on a show of how happy everyone in Britain is and how everyone loves him. Lets show 'em!

The luxury golfing complex is used to hosting conferences for these types, having (allegedly) hosted the Bilderberg conference in 1986 (SchNEWS 406). The cops are trying to keep the locals sweet by giving them free photo's. Only thing is that the photo's come in the form of an ID card that they all, including children as young as 8, have to carry for the duration of the summit. Some ungrateful people haven't been won over by this generous gesture though and have started to organise protests against the summit.

So, how can you get involved? There are regular local meetings happening around the country. If there aren't any near you, why not organise one? Dissent! is a network of local groups who want to oppose the G8 but don't want to tow another party line either. The next national Dissent! meeting is in Glasgow on the 12th and 13th of February. See www.dissent.org.uk for more info on the national meeting and also for details of local groups.

Bridge Too Far

A blockade is going into its seventh week on a metal pedestrian bridge over the Panamerican Highway 130kms northwest of Guatemala City to stop mining equipment getting through to the Glamis Gold Marlin mine near San Marcos, Guatemala. One protester has already been murdered and seven injured after attacks by the police and army.

It started when the mining equipment convoy first got to the bridge and found they were up against several thousand indigenous farmers and villagers intent on stopping part of it being dismantled to get large drilling equipment past it. Then when one of the mining vehicles was set alight the convoy retreated 2km to a look-out point parking area, where it has been stuck ever since, protected by private police from the rampaging villagers. The local mayor is on the side of the protesters, but already the Guatemalan Interior Ministry have sent in troops and police to try to escort the convoy to the mine. The protesters are now threatening to push the mining equipment over a cliff where it is parked - and good luck to them!

The company Glamis have been lent \$45million to develop the mine by the International Finance Corporation (part of the World Bank) without conducting the obligatory consultation of the local indigenous communities, or complying with the World Banks' own recommendations regarding negotiations with those affected by the project (since when has that stopped a World Bank project?)

Glamis are a mining company who have left a trail of indigenous peoples' rights violations, contaminated water and pollution across north America, and are currently using NAFTA laws to file for \$50 million compensation because of actions taken by the State of California who had the audacity to protect it's environmental and indigenous communities from the impact of their open cast mining.

www.miningwatch.ca

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Trail Of Destruction

The Tsunami may have been unavoidable, but the scale of the loss was worsened by economic policies which place short term financial gain over long term sustainability (Surely not? Ed.). Not sending out warnings fast enough so the tourist industry could get another precious half-hour of business - with dire consequences - is one thing, but another is the stripping away of the natural protective barrier which has stood up to these natural events in the past. Since the sixties the vast majority of mangrove swamps which line the coasts around the Indian Ocean have been systematically destroyed and replaced by shrimp farms and tourist resorts, taking away the main natural protection from the ravages of the sea. We know from the recent disaster that areas with dense mangroves in southern India suffered far less casualties and damage than coastlines which have none.

As another example we can contrast a tidal surge caused by a cyclone in Bangladesh in 1960 - with no loss of human life - back in the days before the mangroves were replaced by shrimp farms. When a similar wave struck in 1991 thousands were killed. Mangroves act as a barrier because their roots systems bind the sea floor together, the flexible branches and tangled aerial roots absorb much of the sea's impact and the tall stems act like a wall protecting inland areas.

It's rather ironic that the vegetation was removed for economic reasons - ie so a quick buck

could be made with shrimp farms, five-star hotels, golf courses and the like - seeing as the cost of the massive destruction caused by the tsunami outweighs the profit from these industries several times over (Capitalist in short-term, unsustainable money making shocker? Again?!). The fact that mangroves are one of the world's most threatened habitats - and help prevent climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide in the water - or that populations have been forcibly removed during this process doesn't come into the equation.

Shrimp farming has been called a 'rape-and-run' industry by the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation. The life cycle of the farms are short - 2-5 years - after which ponds are abandoned leaving behind toxic waste, destroyed habitat and displaced communities. Then it moves onto another bit of pristine coastline. The World Bank are the people kind enough to stump up the cash for this enterprise.

The WB's sentiment was summed up nicely when an Indian TV newsreader asked an honest question of his correspondent reporting from the scene of destruction in Tamil Nadu in south of India: "Any idea about how much is the loss to business? Can you find that out because that would be more important for our business leaders?"

* Read Devinder Sharma's article at www.indiatogether.org/2005/jan/dsh-tsunami.htm

SchNEWS in brief

Brighton's premier **pirate** station **Radio 4A** on the airwaves this weekend 101.4 FM across Brighton www.radio4a.org.uk for info and streams. ** Demonstrate against plans to **build an incinerator in Newhaven** next Thursday (20th) Hove Town Hall 4pm. ** Talk on how **aggregate dredging** destroys the sea environment next Thursday (20th) at The Cowley Club, 12 London Rd 6pm ** **Resist the G8** South-East Assembly next Saturday (22nd) Room 3D, University of London Union, Malet Street 2-6pm uluantiauthoritarians@yahoo.co.uk ** There's a Tsunami benefit next Thursday (20th) with money raised going to grassroots community groups working with people to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Music includes **Asian Dub Foundation** soundsystem, Indian dohl drumming, Samba, a Bollywood Brass band (!), Transglobal Underground's Mantu DJing, a klezmer band etc It's at Bar Lorca, 261 Brixton

Road SW9 £7/£5 Concs advance tickets www.stargreen.com ** **Block the Builders** Training Weekend 22-23rd for all those who want to prepare for nonviolent direct action against the construction of facilities to build new nuclear weapons at AWE Aldermaston 07969 739812 www.blockthebuilders.org.uk ** Next Saturday (22nd) **The Future of Food**: An afternoon to Discuss Organic, Local & Tasty Food on a Tasty Planet! Speakers include Vandana Shiva, Jerry Mander, Director of the International Forum on Globalisation and Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy at City University. Tickets are pricey - details 0208 809 2391 peterlang@resurgence.org ** Demonstration outside Downing Street next Thursday (20th) No to illegal internment - **Release the Belmarsh detainees** 6-8pm 020 7586 5892 www.stoppoliticalterror.com

Positive SchNEWS

When the eight year old first wrote she said when she grew up she wanted to become an engineer so she could make an atomic bomb to kill all the Jews. The Israeli kids were angry, they wanted another pen pal, not this one who was a 'terrorist' who wanted to kill them. One of the workers then asked the Israeli kids why they reckoned she felt like that, and in another letter the girl said that her life was hard but she didn't mean she wanted her pen pals to be killed.

Windows for Communication is a joint Israeli-Palestinian project based in Tel Aviv and the West Bank which aims to get young people on both sides to talk to each other. The kids work together to produce a magazine in Arabic and Hebrew that seeks to breakdown stereotypes. Israeli and Palestinian children also create artwork together which is displayed in exhibitions in schools, youth clubs and other places, and some of them meet up in summer camp in and outside the region, where deeper friendships develop. For most, this is the only means of communication youngsters will get with each from either side of the divide. 020-7503 5247 www.win-peace.org

...and finally...

While Bush plans to splash \$50 million on his President inauguration ceremony, the people who didn't actually vote for the Iraqi child killing environmental destroying lunatic are getting together to voice their opposition - by doing nothing. "There's no rally to attend. No marching to do. No left or right wing agenda to rant about. On "Not One Damn Dime Day" you take action by doing nothing. You open your mouth by keeping your wallet closed."

After the last two fiasco elections, which were about as democratic as Guantanamo Bay, the huge amount of opposition to the Fourth Reich have been mostly side stepped by the world's media. This is all about to change. On January 20th Inauguration Day, the people of America have called for a General Strike and a 24 shut down of the US economy with a day of non-participation in America's corporate hell. They are asking people not to go to work, buy petrol, food, pay bills or basically anything that puts money into the war machine.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers those in Gaza houses should throw stones... Honest!