

Direct Action in Israel

Impressions from a Roving EF!er



Wherever you go there are some things that never change. When I arrived in Israel the elections were at fever pitch, politicians were up on charges of corruption and greed and the Israeli army was still fighting in South Lebanon. But on the positive side, Israeli environmental group Green Action had organised a three day Earth First!-style gathering in the Jerusalem forest.

The gathering took place between the 8th and 10th of April '99 and was the first event of its kind in Israel, and they pulled it off with true style. Based in Tel-Aviv, Green Action is a grassroots collective of people who are more or less constantly highlighting, or taking action against environmental damage in Israel. Talking to a few members I learned that Green Action has been going for a number of years, but that over the last couple of years direct action has been more and more on the agenda. One member said: "this has been a natural progression for us to tackling a situation where our words fall on deaf ears."

The gathering was significant in that a large part of the forest is being threatened by a massive road scheme. Road 16 is going to be 100 metres wide, connecting the existing Tel-Aviv-Jerusalem road to West Jerusalem. And as if that were not enough, the forest is also threatened by the now-confirmed West Jerusalem Bypass, encroachment from developing towns and an expanding oil refinery. A lot of damage for a delicate forest which is home to rare flora and creatures such as hyenas, jackals, porcupines, gazelles and various birds of prey.

The gathering was a good sign that people are not into sitting back and letting their garden be destroyed. By the Saturday, when things had really got going, nearly 200 people had got together on top of this beautiful valley in amongst pines, olives trees and bushes growing over old stone wall ruins.

The various workshops were excellent with a lot of information and knowledge being shared. Things were a bit difficult for me to understand, being as they were all in Hebrew, but translators were there to help. There were talks about globalisation, the 'green consumer trap', the animal rights movement in Israel (which has been going for some years now), as well as practical workshops on recycling, permaculture and climbing. There were also walks around the endangered area to see the rare flora and fauna. On top of that, an Israeli living on protest sites in England discussed direct action in the form of eco-protest sites and why the time is right to follow this direction in Israel as well.

Having been involved with protests in England, it was great to see the same spirit of resistance in these people. Sitting around the fire pit for the communal

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meals, you could feel a real unity between everyone—Tel-Aviv punks chatting to Jerusalem professors. There was a lot of entertainment over the three days, supplied by the ‘Caravan Crew’, a group of characters from all over the

world who had just walked from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea to bring about peace in the Middle East, doing their own style of magic and healing along the way. Them being there made the whole event like a Rainbow Gathering as well as an Earth First! one.

The weekend was a real success and managed to include a vast variety of people from all spectrums of society. One man said: “We hope this gathering will be a step towards more anti-road actions and protesting in Israel. Who knows, we might see the first protest site in the ‘Holy Land’ before the end of the millennium.”

Road 80

Travelling south from Jerusalem you come to the Judea desert. This mountainous region contains many water springs surrounded by incredible wildlife. The area is home to leopards, desert foxes, ibex and hyrax. I managed to trek through some of the nature trails in this area, and saw first hand how beautiful the waterfalls and green valleys are amongst this great desert.

Like the Jerusalem forest, this area has its own problem—Road 80. This proposed road scheme will destroy the upper part of two amazing rivers. The interesting point to the Road 80 proposal is the fact that this road is purely politically motivated, being part of the peace agreement with the Palestinians. In addition, the road would be used for arms movements in the event of a war with Syria. Blatantly a new road is not needed in an area with hardly any through traffic. Such is the fucked-up world of politics...

There is a strong campaign against Road 80 as it is symptomatic of all the environmental damage happening in Israel. The opposition comes from reli-

gious and archaeological groups as well as ecologists, since the proposed area is around where the Dead Sea scrolls were found. The campaign has gone as far as the occupation of land opposite the front drive of Arik Sharon’s estate. As well as being the man behind Road 80, Sharon was also responsible for the war in Lebanon in ‘82. If you’re looking for a true bastard in the Middle East, he takes the first prize. The occupation was a good show of resistance considering there were only a few people there. It lasted less than 2 weeks, but it was during the run-up to the elections in which Sharon is publicly involved, so I imagine it got right on his nerves—ha ha!

Action!

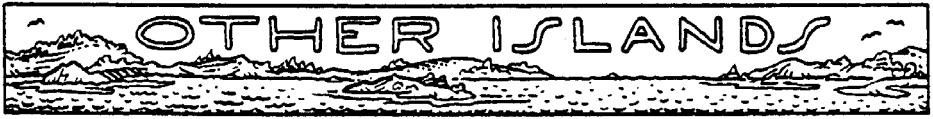
Over the next year all who are concerned have really got their work cut out, with many road schemes and major developments planned. For example, the Cross-Israel Highway—a monstrous road connecting the north to the south of the country. Financed and built by Africa-Israel co. and Canadian Highways, this will rampage through woodlands, deserts and even villages. Considering Israel is a small country, this will have a massive impact. It’s ironic that for so many years the religious and political leaders of this country have fought to preserve their ‘Holy Land’ at any cost, and now by their own deeds they are destroying it.

In the last year Israel has witnessed the occupation of cranes in protest against shoreline development, land and cave occupations on the route of the Cross-Israel Highway, and more... The times are calling for people to stand up and be counted. Hopefully we’ll be hearing about a lot more action in Israel over the next few months.

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Part of the area to be destroyed by Road 80



Anarchy in Israel

The anarchist movement in Israel is older than the state of Israel itself. There is a very strong historical tradition of Jewish and Yiddish anarchism both in Europe and in Palestine—for example, the early communist movement in Palestine was inspired by Jewish anarchists like Gustav Landauer and Rudolph Rocker who worked with the Yiddish-speaking sweatshop labourers of London's East End. Some of the early communards in Palestine resisted the demand for a Jewish state and sought cooperation with the Arabs.

For about 30 years from 1967 the old guard of Israeli anarchists published a newspaper in Yiddish and Hebrew. Some more counter-culture oriented groups emerged in the '60s and '70s. There was an anarchist group in Israel in '67 during the Yom Kippur War called 'Black Front' who were similar to the Yippies in America—the politics of pot and youth rebellion. They had a paper called 'Freaky' which was one of the only voices against the war at the time—they were very isolated from the rest of Israeli political culture.

A 'third wave' of Israeli anarchism emerged in the 1980s, inspired by the punk movement, which had little connection to earlier Israeli anarchists. At the time of the Palestinian Intifada in '87/'88, there was a big explosion of radical left activity in Israel. There was a pacifist group of anarcho-punks called Pacifist Youth—some of these went on to found the Israeli Anarchist Federation around the time of the Gulf War in '90/'91. The Israeli Anarchist Federation (IAF) held demonstrations against police brutality, against McDonalds and for animal rights, vegetarianism and environmental campaigns, among other things. It put on benefits and concerts and produced political zines and papers. The IAF was more or less the first organised group trying to put across anarchist ideas in Israel—they were often initiating campaigns that other left-wing groups weren't doing.

One anecdote illustrates the sort of political climate the IAF was functioning in—when they did a demonstration outside the first McDonalds to be opened in Israel, most people thought it was because McDonalds isn't kosher! The Federation got quite a lot of media attention, including the front pages of several newspapers, mainly due however, to their novelty value for the media. Unfortunately they also got quite a lot of attention from the police, suffering harassment and intimidation by the secret police, who also attempted to infiltrate the organisation.

A lot of the issues that concern anarchists elsewhere in the world are more immediate and real for Israelis—for example all Israelis have to join the army at the age of 18 for 3 years. Punks and anarchists in Israel have tried to encourage teenagers to refuse military service, but it's hard to avoid it. It has been suggested that being frank about anarchist or anti-militarist views might give them the excuse they need not to draft you, but basically the only valid excuse, for a man at least, is to be declared mentally ill—you have to pretend to be crazy or else go to prison. One Israeli anarchist said:

"Anywhere else you can make a zine against the army and it probably won't have much effect. Here you'll have mainstream politicians talking about wanting to lynch us, that we should be interrogated by the police, that we should be put on trial, that we should be put away because we're a menace to society."

This zine, which contained practical suggestions on how to escape military service, got on to the front pages of the newspapers and its authors were asked to appear on TV chat shows etc.—offers they declined. Despite the penalties they face, many young punks and anarchists are now refusing to go into the army.

The IAF organised meetings with Palestinians on the West Bank. The anarchists engaged with the Palestinians they supported; they didn't force their politics on anyone, but nevertheless an anarchist perspective was influential—the idea was completely new to the Palestinians. No-one else had ever expressed an anti-state point of view before—all the leftist and Maoist groups had all been arguing about what sort of 'workers state' they wanted.

Although the IAF has now disbanded, its legacy continues. Avi, a former member of the IAF relates:

"What was interesting is that at some stage, we received a letter from a group of Arabs from a big Arab city inside Israel. They were all members of the Communist Party Youth. And they sent a letter saying that they're completely overwhelmed by the anarchist concept, that they never thought of that before and they wanted to convert as a group to the anarchist movement."

Sources:

Profane Existence 37 (1998); Peter Marshall—*Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London, Fontana, 1993)



The Israeli Embassy Bombing and the Secret State

On the 26th of July 1994 two car bombs exploded in London outside the Israeli Embassy and a Zionist office—19 people were injured. In the subsequent crackdown many Palestinian activists were raided resulting in two, Jawad Botmeh and Samar Alami, being convicted of conspiracy to cause explosions. They were sentenced to 20 years in prison after which they face deportation back to Israel. They were set up.

Both were born into the struggle against the Israeli occupation. Jawad grew up near Bethlehem. Whilst living there beatings, detention without trial, torture, the destruction of homes by Israeli soldiers and other forms of collective punishment were common. One of his cousins was shot dead getting off a bus on the way to university. Another cousin was shot dead during the Intifada. While studying in Britain they were heavily involved in student politics and in the hope that they could help their communities back in the occupied territories they experimented with explosives. They hoped to send back information concerning the improvisation of basic explosives from household products. This was used to link them to the bombings despite their experiments being abject failures rather than military-style operations like the bombings.

Neither Jawad or Samar could be convicted of the bombings themselves, as they had fully corroborated alibis, both being at college at the time. Instead they were jailed with a catch-all conspiracy charge. They say they were embroiled in the conspiracy without their knowledge by the bomber, who police admit has never been caught. A year after their conviction, the ex-MI5 agent David Shayler leaked the information that MI5 had been warned about the bomb well in advance by an 'impeccable source'. It was later revealed that a senior MI5 manager believes that the bombings were carried out by the Israelis themselves to get British forces to crack down on Palestinians living and campaigning in Britain. This is more likely than it sounds. Such secret state tactics are quite common as part of what is known as a 'strategy of tension'. Attacks organised by the state itself are blamed on radicals, creating the political environment conducive to their suppression. The Israeli secret service, MOSSAD, has a long history of activity in Western Europe—including many kidnappings and assassinations. In 1987 its official British offices were closed down after MOSSAD agents killed Naji-El-Ali, a Palestinian cartoonist living in London. All along MI5 has used Public Immunity Certificates (like the ones used in the *Green Anarchist* trial—see DoD no. 7 p. 129) to hide what it knows about the bombings. Despite being given the right to appeal in

May, Samar and Jawad are still fighting for MI5 to release its documents. This, according to the prisoners solicitor, whose previous cases include the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six, is a blatant cover up. You can write to Samar and Jawad at:

Samar Alami, RL 1436, H Wing, HMP Durham, Old Elvet, Durham, DH1 3HU

Jawad Botmeh, EP 3888, HMP Frankland, PO BOX 40, Frankland, Brasside, Durham, DH1 5YD

There will be regular demonstrations outside court during the appeal. To find out more or to get a copy of the pamphlet 'Justice Denied: Unanswered Questions in the case of the Israeli Embassy & Balfour House Bombings' (55 pgs) send £1.50 to:

Freedom and Justice for Samar and Jawad

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