

Palestinians Are Harassed in Los Angeles

Below we reprint an article from the *International Herald Tribune*, February 11, 1987, because it illustrates the increasingly overt role of the **Reagan** Administration in the iron fist policy to silence the Palestinian people. The current campaign reached a peak on January 26th, with the arrest of eight Palestinians and one Kenyan in Los Angeles, California, under the **McCarran-Walter Act**. This act, a remnant of the McCarthy era, provides for deportation of non-citizens who are alleged to be members or supporters of an organization that writes, prints or distributes material teaching «doctrines of world communism.» The full dimension of these arrests was revealed a week later with the leakage of a document of the Immigration and Naturalization Service entitled «Alien Terrorists and Undesirables: A Contingency Plan.» The contingencies include the creation of a network of detention camps for suspected 'terrorists' from among US residents who originate from Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Syria.

by Anthony Lewis

Boston-She is a 22-year-old woman, a student in San Diego, California. Born in Ramallah, in the West Bank, she came to the United States at the age of 3 and is an American citizen. On the telephone she sounds like California. I shall call her Evelyn Bitar, which is not her real name.

«I was studying alone in the school library on the night of Jan. 28. At about 8:30 a large man... came up and shoved a paper in front of me. It said 'subpoena' and had my name on it. He flashed what looked like a badge and said, 'Evelyn, we want you to come with us.' He had a gun in a holster at his waist. He took my left arm and handcuffed me to his right arm. Another man - he also showed a gun - came over and grabbed me roughly by the right arm. They took me out to a dark burgundy car, cuffed my hands in front of me and shoved me into the back seat.»

That was the beginning of a nightmare of 12 hours for Evelyn Bitar. I take her words from an affidavit that she drafted afterward, and from a telephone conversation with her.

What happened to her is related to her Palestinian origin. Two days before her experience, eight Palestinians (and one's Kenyan wife) had been arrested in the Los Angeles area by agents of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. She was a friend of one of them. But let us continue with her story.

«We drove for some time when they made me face backwards. In a residen-

tial area we drove into a garage and I was taken into the house, into a big bare room with a cement floor. There was a big metal desk. The room also had a metal pole set in the cement floor. It had a hook at the top, sort of like a tetherball pole. I was thrown into a grey metal chair, still handcuffed. The room was dimly lit, but with a bright fluorescent light coming at my face.

«They threw a picture down on the desk. It was a picture of me, my husband and X (the friend who had been arrested). They slapped it and said, 'Who is this man, identify him.'

«I refused and said what they were doing to me was illegal. One said, 'Honey, we are the law.' They kept throwing pictures on the desk. They were all picture from San Diego, some from the old Arabic club...

«It was after midnight by now. They uncuffed my right hand, then cuffed my left hand to hook on the top of the metal pole. My left arm was stretched up to reach it. Then they left the house and left me hanging there like that for over three hours. They came back around 3:30 with a third man. I asked if I could use the bathroom. I was desperate to go. They would not let me.

«They told me that my husband was in custody, that they had just picked him up. (That was false.) They said we could work out a deal, I could be a witness for the prosecution of X. If I would do that, they would let my husband go.

«When I still didn't respond, they said, 'At your rally you said, "Long Live Palestine." We'll show you what we think of your Palestine'.

«They took out a small Palestinian flag, about 3 by 5 inches [about 75 by 125 millimeters], and burned it.

«Then they took me out, back into the car. They stopped about two miles [about three kilometers] from my house. They said, 'Listen, Babe, when you least expect us, expect us. We'll always be around.' I looked at my watch. It was 8:30 A.M.»

Could that have happened in America? Readers will no doubt find it hard to believe, as I did. So did Evelyn Bitar. She was too frightened to talk, at first. But now she is ready to testify, using her real name, if her lawyers ask her to.

The eight Palestinians arrested in Los Angeles were taken at gunpoint in their homes at 7 A.M., then shackled in arm and leg irons. Each was shown photographs and offered advantages if he would testify against someone. There was no evidence that they had done or contemplated any act of violence. The charges had to do with reading or distributing Palestinian literature.

But that is another story of unconstitutional outrage. For the moment, it is enough to think about what happened to Evelyn Bitar. Is that America?

Realism requires us to recognize that it can happen. It has happened. But it is not too late to find out how; to punish the federal agents who behaved like totalitarian thugs. «When we speak out,» Mrs. Bitar said, «that's our only protection.» She still believes in America.

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