

Eyewitness «People Are

Louise is a progressive American who works with a human rights organization. In late February and early March, she visited occupied Palestine. Afterwards she shared her impressions about the uprising with Democratic Palestine.

I took a group of ten American women to Palestine to investigate the situation. It was a fact-finding delegation composed mainly of journalists, although we also had nuns among us. We spent a very intensive week, looking at the situation of the Palestinians during the uprising. We worked with groups in the occupied territories who helped us on our tour. We went to the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the 1948 occupied territories. We met families of martyrs; we were in camps, villages and towns. At various times, they were under siege while we were there. Every member of the delegation was tear-gassed at least once and, I believe, shot at also.

We went to hospitals and viewed the wounded, people who had been shot and people who had been beaten to brutal degrees. We saw people who had been slashed with razors by soldiers, a 14-year-old girl who had boiling water poured on her by soldiers, people hit in the eye by rubber bullets, young children who are crippled for life because they were shot in the spine... We visited Al Ittihad hospital in Nablus, and saw some pretty bad things there. Two hours after we left, the hospital was attacked by Israeli soldiers. Patients and their families were beaten, as were doctors and nurses. Six patients were taken out and beaten and then brought back. We thought the attack might have been a sort of retaliation for them having talked to us, because the last thing the Israelis want is for anybody to communicate to the outside world...

NEW POWER BALANCE

But despite all these atrocities, the spirit of the people was tremendous, absolutely tremendous. Although they lamented their sufferings, they knew that these had to happen and that nothing would stop them from continuing. So, actually, it was a very uplifting experience. I have been there before. This time I saw that people are not afraid. They are not afraid to hoist the Palestinian flag on top of their house or a building, or to carry it with them... One day I was in Ramallah, and people tied 2,000 Palestinian flags to helium balloons; the whole sky was filled with Palestinian flags... You could see Palestinian flags everywhere, on houses, telephone wires, mosques and in the Old City of Jerusalem. People are not afraid to do this anymore. I mean, in the past, it was illegal, so you didn't do it, even though people resisted. Now there is no fear. Areas become liberated for a day or two, or for a week... People are not afraid to throw stones. They are not afraid to confront the soldiers, to hit soldiers. They are just not intimidated anymore. It's so obvious that the Palestinians are now in control of their lives as much as possible, and the soldiers try and try and try to break this, but they just can't do it. There are new strategies

every week by the Palestinians, to force the schools open, to stop buying Israeli products, to force the collaborators to give in.

The issue of the collaborators is a good sign of the change of the power balance. There were collaborators before and everybody hated them, but it went on. Why do the collaborators give up their arms now? Because they can see who is in power, and it's the Palestinians, not the Israelis.

The shops are closed except for three hours a day. In Nablus, they are open from 7 to 10; Ramallah is open from 8 to 11; Jerusalem from 3 to 6, etc. Many foreigners assumed that the closures were imposed by the Israelis. It was news to them when they learned that the Palestinians decided on the closures. This shows you the real change in the power balance.

