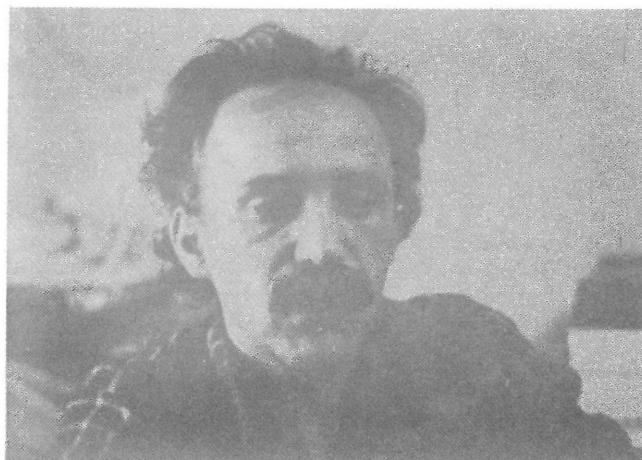


# They Were Trying to Stop Israeli-Palestinian Cooperation

Interview with Michel Warschawsky, director of the Alternative Information Center(AIC), Jerusalem.

*We interviewed Michel Warschawsky at the Vienna NGO meeting in August-September 1989. The AIC had been closed down by the Israeli authorities for six months in February 1987, and the case of the Israeli government vs. Warschawsky and the AIC was still pending. Since then, in November, an Israeli court found Warschawsky guilty of providing typesetting services to the PFLP; he was sentenced to 20 months in prison without parole, in addition to a 10-month suspended sentence and a \$5,000 fine. Today, he is a political prisoner in Israel.*



Can you explain the circumstances surrounding the closure of the Alternative Information Center (AIC), and the subsequent court order barring you from continuing your work in the center?

The center was closed by an administrative order submitted by the General Commissioner of the Israeli Police, claiming that the center was an office for and in support of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. About 20 policemen and secret service officials entered the center and took almost everything which was inside: machines, archives and papers, and arrested everyone working in the center. We denied immediately all the accusations. I personally took responsibility as the director of the center and all other workers in the center were released during the first 48 hours. I was interrogated by the Israeli Shin Bet (secret service) and then taken before a judge. I was held for 10 days and then for an additional five days, and then a charge was submitted accusing me and later the center of rendering printing services to an illegal organization - the PFLP - not by printing directly for the PFLP, but by providing typeset-

ting services and printing facilities to women's organizations as well as student organizations which are allegedly linked to the PFLP in the occupied territories. This was the legal basis for the closure of the center.

What, in your opinion, are the reasons behind the actions of the Israeli authorities against you and the AIC?

There are two reasons. The first is that, as our name indicates, we are an information center that has been working for one and a half years, efficiently providing information to the Israeli media, as well as to the international media, about what is taking place in the occupied territories, in Israeli prisons, etc. We have been providing accurate information from statements of political prisoners, reports from inside the prisons, and reports about torture of Palestinian political prisoners, which were quoted by the Zionist media. As one interrogator told me, «What is the meaning of closing down *Al Mithaq* (a Palestinian newspaper in Israel which was closed down by the Israeli authorities in 1986) if you are doing what they were doing?» I replied that we are Israelis and should be protected by Israeli law, while *Al Mithaq* was not. He then said, «If you are working with the Palestinians, then you will be treated like a Palestinian.»

The second point is that the center, when opened, was the first such one where both Israelis and Palestinians worked together. Some of the Palestinians who worked in the center and with the center had spent many years in prison. Our aim was to give true information about what is happening inside Israeli society and Palestinian society from people reporting from their own communities. We are not a center of ordinary journalists. First and foremost we are activists - Israeli activists in the political movements in Israel, and Palestinian activists in their national struggle; and we never tried to hide this. We wanted to put out true information, not «neutral» information about repression, resistance and struggle. For that reason we needed people from both sides, from the Israeli peace movement as well as the Palestinian nationalist movement. My Shin Bet interrogators used to tell me during the long interrogation sessions that, and I quote, «As long as you act among Israelis, you are protected by Israeli democracy. But if you work with them - the Palestinians - there is no democracy because it is occupation, and you will be treated like they are treated; you cannot claim democracy and law under occupation.» What they were trying to do is stop Israeli-Palestinian cooperation.