

revenge. The collective punishment of the village was immediate, brutal and sustained. Soldiers entered the village almost daily, making arrests and beating people, breaking into homes, smashing furniture and windows. «However, as the curfew continued,» say the villagers, «the morale in the village strengthened.» Due to the effective alternative local control and organization in the village, the people were able to cope with the situation. Food supplies were divided equitably; wood was used as fuel for cooking; meat, fresh fruits and vegetables were foresworn and people ate only what was necessary for survival.

The problem, however, was the shortage of water and overflowing sewage since no trucks were allowed in to supply the village with water or to empty the sewers. Furthermore, the Union of Health Work Committees was not allowed to operate their clinic and the two schools in the village, one for boys and one for girls, remained closed. In addition, none of the 400 Awarta residents with jobs in Israel were allowed to go to work for the duration. Even now, more than three months after the war, only 10% of these 400 workers have received permission from the Israeli «civil administration» to go back to their work in Israel.

The villagers report extensive damage as a result of the curfew, with serious implications for the future because of the prohibition on working the land or tending livestock. For example, they were unable to prune their trees and 400 sheep died because the owners could not feed or water them.

When the curfew was finally lifted in

the beginning of April, the soldiers left the village only to come back every few days to harass and humiliate the villagers. On April 5th, two days after the curfew was lifted, a massive arrest campaign was carried out in the early morning during which 40 people were arrested. At the time of this writing, in early June, only 10 of them have been released. At the end of April, soldiers again entered the village and set up camp on the roof of a house opposite the girls' school. The next day, a van with West Bank licence plates drove into the village. The men inside, Israeli Shin Bet agents, were dressed in traditional Palestinian clothes. The van came to a halt near a house which is used as a hide-out by «wanted» *shabab*. The moment the men jumped out of the van, the soldiers on the roof top started shooting in the direction of the hide-out. As the girls' school was in their line of fire, six girls were injured, one of them seriously. The men from the van succeeded in arresting one «wanted» youth. The rest managed to escape into the mountains.

The night I was there, on May 8th, the soldiers raided the village another time and arrested two youths. At approximately 1:30 am, Umm Ahmad entered my room and told me to get up as «the soldiers are in the village.» At first, I thought that a huge thunderstorm had broken out but then I realized that the air was filled with the deafening noise of sound grenades. The soldiers were only 20 meters away and we were all waiting in anxious anticipation. What if the soldiers came to our house? One of Umm Ahmad's sons is «wanted» by the

occupation authorities and even though they know that he is not staying at home, the soldiers might just raid the house to harass his family. Umm Ahmad's family has a history of resisting the occupation: one son is currently in prison, still awaiting trial after spending more than a year and a half behind bars, while another son has already served time in prison at the beginning of the intifada. We could see the soldiers entering a neighbour's house and coming out with two young men. The next day we learned that they were arrested and taken to an army camp near the village. While arresting the two youths, soldiers had thrown a sound grenade into the house, which burnt the upholstery of an arm chair. In addition, furniture was destroyed and a radio-cassette player smashed to pieces. Umm Ahmad's family was lucky that night, the soldiers never came...

Before we left the village, I was taken to the road which is used by the settlers of Tel Hayyim. The settlement was founded in 1985, and the road leading to it crosses Awarta's fields. Much land belonging to the villagers was declared «State Land» at that time and confiscated in order to build this settlement. Currently, Awarta is threatened with the expropriation of an additional 1,900 dunums, on top of the 4,000 dunums of olive orchards confiscated in the past. On both sides of the settlers' road, hundreds of olive trees were uprooted on the pretext that stones were thrown from this area. It was a sad thing to see....

When I returned to Awarta, on June 1st, I was invited to watch a military march by the strike forces of the intifada in the village. More than 250 masked *shabab*, commemorating the anniversary of the martyrdom of Mohamad Khawaja, were marching through the village. Mohamad Khawaja was a member of the PFLP, killed by Israeli torturers during interrogation in Ramallah prison on June 1, 1976. Awarta was covered with his picture, Palestinian flags and graffiti commemorating this great Palestinian fighter.

The village of Awarta has already given its share of blood and tears to the Palestinian popular uprising. However, my visit convinced me that the people of Awarta are continuing their struggle and resistance against the Israeli occupation and its policy of repression and destruction.

The intifada is for all Palestinians.

