

FORTY YEARS OF OCCUPATION

June, 2007 will mark forty years of occupation of Palestinian land by Israel. We, Colorado Jews, are asking our fellow Jews to consider compassionately, and in the spirit of traditional Jewish values, the implications of that occupation for Israel.

Almost three thousand years ago, the two Jewish states of Israel and Judah flourished in an area which is approximately the site of Israel and the West bank today. In 722 B.C, Israel fell to the Assyrians, followed by the demise of Judah in 587 B.C., conquered by the Babylonians.

Today, after forty years of occupation, Israel appears determined to resurrect and recreate its glory days of three millennia ago. To what end? There is certainly no religious rationale. Israeli Jews are among the most secular people in the Middle East, along with the Palestinians. Modern day Israel has little to do with Judaism.

Judaism is not a matter of real estate.

This state of Israel represents a nationalism indistinguishable from two hundred other nationalisms on the planet--including Israel's abominable apartheid policies towards Palestinians on the West Bank.

Israel has illegally expropriated Palestinian land and aquifers, destroyed Palestinian homes and olive groves, and is in the process of destroying the Palestinian people and their culture. Israel's colonization of the West Bank has been called illegal by the World Court. It violates article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention: "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." It is in default on UN Security Council Resolution 242, which calls for "the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East" to be achieved by the application of the following: "Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict [1967]..."

How is it possible that sixty-five years after Auschwitz, Jews are oppressing another people?

The occupation comes with a significant cost to Israel: A report by the Adva Centre in Tel Aviv says, "The second intifada has hurt Israel deeply, resulting in a cessation of economic growth, in a lowering of the standard of living, in the debilitating of its social services, in the dilution of its safety net, and an increase in the extent and depth of poverty... As unemployment has risen and poverty widened, many social benefits have been sharply reduced, including a cut of almost a third in income support for the poor and single mothers. The most tangible outcome has been the mushrooming of soup kitchens and of 'hand-out' societies, previously unknown in Israel except in the Orthodox Jewish communities." Israel spent billions building settlements, the report says. "This is money that was diverted from the internal social agenda," the author, Shlomo Swirski, writes. By 2003, 20% of Israelis were living below the poverty line.

More important than the above, however, is the corrosive and corrupting effect on Israeli society and Jewish values by a brutal occupation.

We appeal to our fellow Jews to think long and hard about support for Israel's present policies towards Palestinians. Something more than a visceral, tribal response is necessary. *This is a *crie de coeur**. We ask you to join us. Our position--a just and equitable peace with the Palestinians--is the single best step Israel can take for its own security and peace in accord with traditional Jewish values of social justice.

Mark Cohen, Barbara Cohen, Irving Greenbaum, Judy Goldstock, SK Levin, Dennie Linn, Sheila Linn, Leslie Lomas, Rob Prince, Phil Shane, Evan Weissmann

Colorado Progressive Jewish News, now in its fourth year The newsletter's goal is to give voice to the issues concerning progressive Jews in Colorado, both on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other issues and to provide a forum for Jewish (and other) writers and peace activists, which is slowly taking shape. The newsletter can be seen on line at <http://cpjnews.com>. Direct communication to robertjprince@gmail.com