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Penny Johnson *

On 29 October, Bethlehem University marked the anniversary of one full year of military-ordered closure: the university had been closed following the death by army gunfire of a student, Ishaq Abu Surur, on 28 October 1987. Since that time, its campus and classrooms have been shut down by a succession of military orders, with the exception of 1 February, when the university managed to open for a day of classes between military orders. The closure anniversary serves to underline the growing sense of urgency among West Bank faculty, students, and parents as the situation in universities and schools poses new problems and concerns: from whether young children are losing their ability to read to how university faculty can go on functioning in a state of continued preparedness for an opening of universities that is continually postponed.

Another Collective Closure

On 1 October the military authorities announced that all universities, colleges, and schools in the West Bank would continue to be closed by military order until 15 November. Previously, a blanket order issued through the press in early September had closed all universities and colleges

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“until further notice.” West Bank private schools had already delayed their plans to open for the new academic year until 2 October, and UNWRA and governmental schools had planned to open on a staggered schedule in early October. The order did not include schools in Gaza and Jerusalem, nor, as it was later clarified, kindergartens, which are the only educational facilities that remain open in the West Bank.

In a briefing paper entitled “Against the Closure of Palestinian Universities: The Case of Birzeit University,” issued shortly after the 1 October order, the university detailed the immediate effects of its ten months of closure, citing loss of an entire academic year, restrictions on research, difficulties in meeting international cooperation agreements due to loss of facilities and laboratories, loss of several million dollars of revenue, and the human and academic costs to Birzeit’s 2,650 students. It also remarked on the possible long-term effects of closure:

At present, education is forbidden in the West Bank, whether to first grade pupils or to seniors in the university. Hence, it is not simply those students currently enrolled in universities but those after them as well who are being effected. Children who are not learning to read at the critical age today will obviously face difficulties pursuing a university education in the future, whatever remedial measures are taken. The infrastructure of Palestinian education—a key achievement of Palestinians under occupation—is seriously undermined.

The concern over the long-range implications of closure was echoed in lead editorials in both *al-Fajr* and *al-Quds* on 3 October. Answering “Who is to benefit from the policy of making people illiterate?”, *al-Fajr* (Arabic) wrote: “Closing schools means ending any possibility for human dialogue and human intellect.” *Al-Quds*, in a follow-up editorial the next day, also condemned Arab universities for rejecting Palestinian applicants from the occupied territories.

Statement number 28 issued by the clandestine Unified National Command of the Uprising (PLO) termed Israel’s policy toward Palestinian education a “policy of enforced ignorance.” Deliberate “de-education” of Palestinians is of course difficult to prove conclusively; there are, however, clear indicators that Israeli policy toward education has moved far beyond a concern for maintaining “security and public order,” the well-worn phrase used to justify closures of educational facilities. One such indicator is the continued closure of elementary schools, which pose no real security problem; another is the harassment of home teaching and alternative education, which also have no direct bearing on security matters.

Israeli Policy: The Banning of the Popular Committees and Alternative Education

On 18 August the Israeli Ministry of Defense issued a military order outlawing the “popular committees” established by Palestinians in cities, camps, and villages during the course of the uprising. The ministry statement proclaimed that “any person remaining a member of the popular committees and any person assisting them faces imprisonment and prosecution.” The order did not offer a clear definition of a popular committee but the implications were sweeping. Popular and neighborhood committees are engaged in a wide range of activities: from political mobilization and guarding communities to home gardening and neighborhood education. The question remained whether community services like education would be considered illegal activities.

The question was answered largely in the affirmative. Defense Minister Yitzhaq Rabin stated clearly that the “double aim” of the popular committees was, on the one hand, encouraging “violent activity,” but on the other, “undermining the Israeli government apparatus and establishing an alternative apparatus in its place” (*Jerusalem Post*, 19 August 1988). The committees, he stated, were responsible for the “institutionalization of the uprising.”

This institutionalization included, in the army’s view, alternative education, as two army raids against educational centers holding classes in September illustrate. On 1 September, the College of Science and Technology in Abu Dis was raided and three teachers and twelve students were detained. On 5 September, soldiers invaded the premises of the Society of the Friends of al-Najah University in Nablus. According to the *Jerusalem Post* of 6 September, the society was ordered closed “after classes were held on its premises.” The head of the society, Sa’id Kan’an, was held for questioning and told by the military authorities that the society, which had been providing classes for high school students, was closed indefinitely for violating a military order. At the time, *Jerusalem Post* reporter Joel Greenburg commented: “Measures against the makeshift classes are apparently aimed at preventing creation of alternative educational frameworks to those approved by the military government.”

The banning of the popular committees has hampered the holding of informal neighborhood classes, whether through anticipated or real harassment. Neighborhood teaching had previously dwindled during the summer when schools were partially open, and remained at a low level as teachers and parents hoped schools would open in October. With these hopes

dashed, some individual or neighborhood committees are resuming classes, despite military threats. In early October, neighbors on one Ramallah street—consisting only of six households—had decided to resume teaching their children. That afternoon, an officer of the civil administration, with other soldiers, descended on the neighborhood and intimidated families. Classes were not held.

The same week, soldiers entered the premises of the Friends Boys School in Ramallah, a private school associated with the American Quakers, and ordered the principal and teachers to stop distributing homework, which had been prepared for a program of individual study in the home.

Al-Haq: Israel's War Against Education

Al-Haq/Law in the Service of Man, the West Bank affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists, issued a briefing paper in early November entitled "Israel's War against Education: A Penalty for the Future," that argued that "the closure by the military authorities of schools and universities for a prolonged period of time is blatantly illegal and constitutes an illegitimate exercise of power by the Israeli military."

The human rights organization pointed out that "the prolonged closure of *all* educational institutions appears to be without international precedent." The paper affirms that this closure violated both local law (Jordanian Educational Law no. 16) and international law, which has codified the 'right to education,' as articulated in the Fourth Geneva Convention, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26).

Al-Haq also observed that the use of schools as temporary military outposts—as well as the destruction of school property—are a violation of The Hague Regulations (1907). The army has continued to use schools as military outposts during the last three months: recent cases include the taking over of a girl's school in Bethlehem for a week in early November and the taking over of the boy's school in Bayt Sahur on 18 October.

Al-Haq concludes that the "security rationale put forth by the government to justify school closing is neither supported by the facts or the law. The Israeli government's actions force the conclusion that it is education itself that is targeted."

International Interventions

The Council of Higher Education, the Palestinian coordinating body for universities in the occupied territories, telexed the UN secretary-general on

the occasion of the opening of the General Assembly in September and urged "united action in the international community on behalf of Palestinian education," pointing out that by "cutting off higher education to the population of the occupied territories, the authorities have cut off a basic service, like electricity or water, and for the same punitive purpose."

The council also sent similar communications to UNESCO and other international bodies. In communication with the council and individual universities, UNESCO has stated its concern and described its interventions with the Israeli authorities. Another appeal to UNESCO came in an 11 October statement issued in Vienna by UNWRA commissioner-general Giorgio Giacomelli. The commissioner noted that UNWRA is responsible for 130,000 students in the West Bank and Gaza and expressed the "critical importance" of UNWRA's resuming its education program. "Security considerations," the statement affirmed, "have been invoked to justify the closure of educational institutions, but a major consequence is that a generation of Palestinians—of whom the refugees are such a large share—are unable to exercise their basic right to education."

Despite the positive role of UNESCO, international interventions cannot be said to have been either particularly effective or on a large enough scale, although non-governmental organizations concerned with human rights and the Palestine problem did begin to give the issue more attention in this period.

Jerusalem and Gaza: Open and Shut Schools

On 6 October, government preparatory and secondary schools opened in East Jerusalem: private schools had already opened in mid-September. Near the location of schools, police and Border Police patrolled the streets in massive numbers. Police waving Uzi submachine guns directed traffic, occasionally shutting main streets. The presence of police and soldiers has remained heavy throughout October and November: police searches of school satchels and harassment of students have become part of the routine of going to and from school.

Although schools in Jerusalem and Gaza are open, very few are functioning completely regularly and without interruption. A very partial list of school closures compiled from the Arabic press includes: Girls School in Nusayrat camp, Gaza (one week, beginning 24 September); Nazimiyah School, Bayt Hanina (thirty days, beginning 31 October); Dar al-Aytam School, Jerusalem (two weeks, beginning 21 October); Rashidiyyah School, Jerusalem (closed 17 October and again on 25 October); School D

and 'Amaria School, Gaza (30 October, for ten days); Lutheran School, Bayt Hanina (closed 12 November). All schools in Gaza and East Jerusalem were closed for a period of time at the convening of the Palestine National Council on 15 November.

In the closure of Rashidiyyah School on 25 October, the issue was student observance of the strike hours set by the Unified National Command. In an article entitled "The Politics of Truancy," the *Jerusalem Post* of 26 October reported: "Education inspectors came to the Rashidiyyah school . . . in order to discipline offending pupils in the morning. Fifty-eight teenagers who had repeatedly left school early were told that they were suspended for two days." When students began to make a commotion in protest, the school was closed.

The Islamic University of Gaza has remained closed since December 1987, although the administration has not received separate closure orders for a number of months. On 21 September, according to a briefing paper prepared by the Women's Committee for Social Work, the university was raided by soldiers and some office machines were seized. The authorities were also quick to notify a university representative that members of the university's Founders Council were forbidden to travel to Kuwait for a 16 September meeting of the council.

Administrative Detentions

The Islamic University has also suffered a number of administrative detentions of its faculty and staff. Currently under administrative detention are Drs. 'Abd al-'Aziz Rantisi and 'Atif 'Adwan. A lecturer at the university, 'Abdullah Abu Samhadanna, was served a deportation order on 17 August.

Near midnight on 9 October, soldiers arrived at the home of Dr. Samir Hazbun, chairman of Birzeit University's Department of Economics, and detained him. He is currently under a six-month administrative detention order in Ansar 3 (Ketzioth) prison, in the Negev desert. Faculty currently under administrative detention from al-Najah University include Dr. Muhammad Abu Rub (Economics Department), Sami Kilani (Physics Department), and Dr. 'Abd Sattar Qassim (Political Science Department). Dr. Qassim's administrative detention order was renewed for another six months in this period.

The Case of Taysir 'Aruri and Freedom of Expression

On 17 August, the Israeli authorities served deportation orders against twenty-five Palestinian residents of the occupied territories. Among them

are two members of the Birzeit University community: Taysir 'Aruri, a lecturer in the Department of Physics, and 'Abd al-Hamid Baba, a fourth-year chemistry student. The day after, a military order was issued banning popular committees, and in several statements military spokesmen affirmed that the deportation orders had been issued against activists in these committees.

In the case of Taysir 'Aruri, a forty-two-year-old academic and the father of three, another rationale also emerged. From his prison cell, 'Aruri wrote that he believed he had been targeted for his signature on a June 1988 "Peace Treaty" between Israeli and Palestinian artists, writers, and intellectuals. The treaty, which Israeli writer Yoram Kaniuk described as an "historic moment," called for a two-state solution and mutual recognition.

On 27 August, about one hundred Israeli academics and other individuals gathered outside the university's board of trustees building to protest the deportation of 'Aruri and other Palestinians and to demand the reopening of the universities. The group attempted to visit the university campus, but was stopped by an army checkpoint. Upon their return to Ramallah, the protesters stood with banners outside the board of trustees building and four were briefly detained.

This protest was joined by others focused solely on the case of 'Aruri, including interventions by the Physicians for Human Rights (on the basis of 'Aruri's poor health), the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, the American Physical Society, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, as well as numerous individual academics in the U.S. and Europe. Fifty-eight French physicists, for example, joined by a number of other academics, signed a petition demanding the immediate freeing of Taysir 'Aruri, as well as the annulment of the deportation order against Birzeit student 'Abd al-Hamid Baba. Columnist Nat Hentoff, writing in the *Village Voice* under the heading "Israel as Her Own Worst Enemy," urged readers to protest the deportation of 'Aruri.

Amnesty International (AI), which usually does not intervene in cases of deportation, took the step of issuing an "Urgent Action" appeal in the 'Aruri case. AI stated that it "believes that Taysir 'Aruri has not used or advocated violence and that he is in prison pending deportation for the non-violent exercise of his right to freedom of expression." No formal charges are brought in deportation cases, since deportation is an administrative procedure, but the accusations levelled against 'Aruri in a series of military hearings bore out Amnesty's point of view: he was accused of membership in the Palestine Communist party, a non-violent organization, and a series of non-violent actions, including several related to his activities

as a faculty member, such as participating in a Birzeit University international conference in March 1988 and speaking at an on-campus memorial service for another faculty member, Ghassan Harb.

Recent Reports

A recent monograph by Antony Sullivan, "Palestinian Universities Under Occupation," (Cairo Papers in Social Science, vol. 11, monograph 2, Summer 1988) provides a thoughtful examination of the academic standards and programs of universities in the occupied territories, and in so doing, offers a reminder of what students in the occupied territories have lost during the last year of closure.

Sullivan employs various indicators, including his own survey of library holdings and his attendance of classes, performance of graduates in graduate schools in the U.S., and standard technical measures employed by the North Central Associations of Colleges and Schools (Chicago, Illinois). While not inflating the academic quality of Palestinian universities—which he quotes some Palestinian educators as saying is often "lower than at many American liberal arts colleges"—he shows that "Palestinian higher education, despite its defects, is a remarkably serious and successful enterprise."

Another recent report on the occupied territories, *The Price of Insurgency: Civil Rights in the Occupied Territories*, prepared by advocate Carmel Shalev for Meron Benvenisti's West Bank Data Base Project (October 1988) is noteworthy for its omission of all mention of the closure of universities and schools in its catalogue of rights violations, despite a chapter on collective punishments.

Waiting for Godot: Academic Plans and Research

During these three months, Hebron, Birzeit, Bethlehem, and al-Najah universities attempted to hold sessions of off-campus classes to allow seniors close to graduation to complete their university studies. While some were successful, the effort to organize and prepare classes without adequate facilities and resources was far out of proportion to the results achieved, and did not offer an adequate model for larger academic planning outside campus.

Another side of academic life—research, and particularly experimental scientific research—has been partially in limbo. The Physics Department at Birzeit University, for example, reports the following experiments halted since 9 January: properties of thin metallic films, microwave optics, laser

spectroscopy, and the university's only theoretical research project in nuclear physics.

While the universities' operations are seriously hampered, the authorities persist in demanding full taxes from these institutions, which are also suffering from new restrictions on the transfer of funds from abroad. In October, the civil administration announced a monthly limit of JD200 for checks cashed abroad, including monies held in Amman banks, a move which immediately affected salary checks at universities.

Prospects

On 20 November, Israel Radio announced that the officials of the civil administration had decided to reopen West Bank schools on 1 December. "Universities," in the terse sentence employed by the *Jerusalem Post* the next day, "were to remain closed."

General Dan Shomron had previously told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Security Committee on 4 October that schools in the West Bank would open after the meeting of the Palestine National Council in mid-November. It is unclear, however, if certain conditions will be imposed on the schools, such as staying open on strike days or other measures that would contradict the directives of the United National Command of the Uprising. Government and UNWRA schools have already announced their re-openings after 9 December, presumably to avoid the first anniversary of the uprising.

The universities, then, remain in suspended animation. On Israel Radio on 4 November, Geula Cohen of the right-wing Tehiya Party said that the permanent closure of Palestinian universities and press was one of the measures her party would demand in a Likud-led new government.