

Fractured Forty

In normal times, around 120,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza work in Israel doing the most menial and poorly-paid jobs. The great majority of them have gone on strike since December, hitting the construction industry and citrus fruit production badly; restaurant workers have walked out of their jobs, often leaving employers to cope with chores which they've not had to handle in years. Taking everything into account, including the economic losses caused by army reservists doing an extended period of duty, Israeli analysts have calculated that by this spring, the total cost of the uprising would be around \$1 billion.

The majority of Israeli Jews support the military repression of the Palestinian protest. The far Right in Israel, which favours open annexation of the 1967 occupied territories and the 'transfer' of Palestinians to neighbouring states, stands to win increased representation in the next Knesset. The elections could well result in the establishment of a coalition government of the Right in which the main far right group, Tehiya, has a powerful position.

Some Israeli Jews have reacted to the uprising in a different way. Many groups and individuals have condemned the situation: one statement was signed by 600 leading academics. In January, for the first time, speakers at a protest rally called by 'Peace Now' criticised the Labour Party, whose leader Peres, had advised them to keep quiet. Two soldiers, one of whom is a reservist, have served 28-day prison sentences for refusing to take part in repressing the Palestinians, and hundreds more are committed to follow their example if need be.

With the uprising still continuing, it will be hard for Israelis to celebrate the 40th anniversary of their state this month without remembering the Palestinian people who paid and have paid ever since for its establishment. •

John Gee