

Israeli GIs Resist War

Fifth Estate Collective

1984

Resistance to two years of aggressive war and occupation in Lebanon is growing in the Israeli armed forces. 2,500 reserve officers have formed a group called Yesh Gvul ("There is a Limit/Border"), and have requested not to be sent to Lebanon. Already 130 of their organization have served prison terms for their refusal to serve there.

Although there has been mass opposition to the war against Lebanon by groups like Peace Now, Yesh Gvul represents the first instance of mass mutiny within the military, the cornerstone of Israel's expansionist policies. All citizens of the Zionist state are expected to serve active duty time in the military and on active reserve until age 56.

As with other Israeli anti-war groups, the composition of Yesh Gvul is almost exclusively educated Ashkenazim (Jews of European extraction) and from the larger cities and kibbutzim. Movements such as this are thought to even further widen the split between the socially dominant, but numerically lesser Ashkenazim and the more numerous North African and Eastern Jews, the Sephardim, who tend to back the reactionary war policies of the Likud bloc and resent the social position of the Europeans.

Soldiers who join Yesh Gvul sign a petition to the government requesting not to be sent to the war zone, and which reads in part: "A people's problem (the Palestinians) cannot be solved militarily. We were not conscripted in the Israeli Defense Forces for this purpose...Bring the soldiers home!"

Almost all liberal and anti-war groups have shunned the refusers, even Peace Now which brought out 100,000 protesters against the war at the height of hostilities. The fear on the left was that Yesh Gvul's "extremist" position would offend the centrist electorate whose votes were needed to bring the Labor Party to power in the July elections. This opportunist betrayal of those taking the most militant stand against an unjust war neglects Israeli history in which every war but the current one was initiated by the socialists.

Still, support for the resisters has been far from insignificant. 20,000 people attended a pop festival held to benefit the group with many of Israel's top artists performing. Yesh Gvul has also sponsored demonstrations, workshops for the military, circulated petitions and recently held an evening of protest poetry in Tel Aviv. All events have been well attended.

It would be easy to portray Israeli society monolithically rather than made up of the diverse ethnic, social and political forces that are threatening to burst asunder its 35-year consensus. It appears that a growing number of citizens see Israel's role of U.S. client state for the suppression of Arab radicalism, armament supplier to the world's reactionary regimes, and its militant expansionism as leading nowhere other than to endless wars and a transformation domestically to a police state.

Much of the information in the foregoing was taken from the June 9, 1984 issue of *The Nation*, in an article entitled "The Limits of Conscience," but unfortunately it did not contain an address for Yesh Gvul. Anyone who is in contact with them or other Israeli anti-war groups, we would appreciate learning how to reach them directly.

Full support for all military resisters around the world! Disband all armies! For mass mutinies to end all wars! Soldiers, refuse to fire on your brothers!

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