

# The forgotten people

**A**in Hilweh has become the Stalingrad of the Palestinian people. A dreary collection of concrete and tin buildings, this refugee camp on the outskirts of the southern Lebanese city of Sidon has been under intermittent siege since 1982.

So, indeed, have the other wretched camps — like Shatilla, Sabra, and Bourj-al-Branejh — that are the last toehold of the Palestinians in Lebanon.

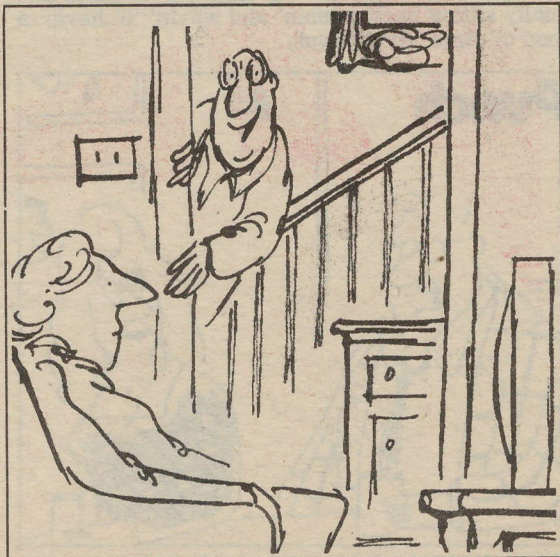
In 1982, when Israel invaded Lebanon, a few hundred Palestinian fighters held off the better part of 20,000 Israeli troops for a week, battling from tunnels and bunkers that had been dug to protect the camp's residents from frequent Israeli air raids. For the Palestinians, each shattered building, every alley became a little Thermopylae.

Once PLO fighters were evicted from Beirut and Sidon, Israel's Christian fascist allies began to massacre Palestinian civilians. The world was horrified by the butchery of women, children and old men at Shatilla and Sabra. But it failed to see the less dramatic, but no less bloody and persistent killings that followed. Deprived of the protection of their fighting men, homeless Palestinian women and children were hunted down and murdered by the Christian Maronites or left to starve.

Now, four years later, the same shattered Palestinian camps are once again beleaguered. This time by the Shi'ite Amal militia acting for its patron, Syria. Over the past six weeks, more than 2,000 Palestinians have been killed or wounded in their besieged camps. In Ain Hilweh — and all the other camps — terrified Palestinian civilians huddle in tunnels without medical aid, water or food as battles rage above them.

The agony of these Palestinian non-combatants goes on without relent. Attention has always focused on the PLO fighters — or "terrorists" as

## Punch



"Hark! Do I hear herald angels singing or is it just a TV Christmas special?"

**ERIC  
MARGOLIS**



Israelis call them — but almost everyone has forgotten the 500,000 Palestinian civilians trapped in the slaughterhouse of Lebanon.

Christian Lebanese fascists have been trying to drive them out — who knows to where? — by murder and terror attacks. The Shi'ite Amal is trying to crush the fighting arm of the PLO. Most Lebanese seem united in a desire to prevent re-establishment of a Palestinian mini-state in southern Lebanon. When the PLO ran southern Lebanon it alienated local Lebanese and acted like a magnet for Israeli bombing attacks.

Syria, Amal's patron, is also determined to seize control of the Palestinian national movement. Both Syria and its ally, Libya, want to overthrow — and likely kill PLO leader Yasser Arafat, a man they view as too inclined to make peace with Israel.

The Israelis, in turn, have been trying to kill Arafat for years. His death, they believe, would demolish the cause of Palestinian statehood. Jordan is now working with the U.S. and Israel to try and create some sort of anti-PLO Palestinian movement on the occupied West Bank and Gaza. A campaign which will prove to be a dismal failure. Palestinians overwhelmingly support Arafat and the PLO. They just as strongly reject King Hussein and the breakaway PLO factions supported by Syria.

While a few thousand Palestinian soldiers battle furiously to defend their women and children in Lebanon, Palestinians on the Israeli occupied West Bank and Gaza have been rioting these past two weeks. Four have so far been shot dead by Israeli soldiers and scores wounded. The West Bank and Gaza are seething with bitter anti-Israeli hatred and outrage over the agony of the camps in Lebanon. It seems all the world's guns are turned against the Palestinians.

Judging from the slaughter in Lebanon, the Palestinians' Arab "brothers" seem, ironically, to be foes even more deadly than the Israelis. The stateless Palestinians are like sand in the eye of the Mideast. Everyone wants to remove them. But, of course, you can't just get rid of 3.5 million people — unless you're a Pol Pot.

How curious — perhaps hypocritical is a better word — that the U.S. and Canada loudly agonize over black South Africans while turning their backs to the far worse outrages in Lebanon. Just this week, Canada's UN Ambassador Stephen Lewis told a B'nai B'rith convention that black violence in South Africa was justified, that blacks there had been "driven to extremes."

But the brave, outspoken Lewis had not a word to say about the slaughter in Lebanon. Nor, in spite of their striking resemblance to Soweto, about riots on the West Bank and Gaza. And not a word about Palestinians being "driven to extremes."