

We've asked Rebecca Vilkomerson, a veteran JVP activist now living with her family in Israel, to give us regular updates about anti-occupation activism in Israel. Rebecca is also on staff with the Israeli environmental and social justice NGO Bustan, which works with Bedouin and Jewish communities in the Negev. Listen to what Rebecca has to say, from a place where "leftists aren't allowed."

Several weeks ago, while on a solidarity visit with Ta'ayush in the South Hebron hills region of the West Bank, we were stopped by a makeshift Israeli Army roadblock and told that we could not pass into a closed military zone. Having all traveled that road many times before with no problem, and watching settlers whiz by us, we asked to see the military order. Before producing it, the soldier said, "I am very happy for any Jew to visit the Land of Israel, but leftists aren't allowed."

This provoked a great deal of incredulous laughter among us, but we never did get through that day. And for me, it was one of the gentler reminders of the level of repression faced by Israeli activists specifically, the focus is on the Israeli side of the movement.

There is a kind of conventional wisdom among anti-occupation activists, especially in the United States, that in Israel there is a wider and more honest range of viewpoints regarding the occupation. This perspective is part of the strategy to sell Israel as the "only democracy in the Middle East" to the rest of the world. To a certain extent it is true. Activist NGOs receive coverage in the press and ideas are discussed on the Op-Ed pages here that are not yet acceptable in the U.S. For example, the word "apartheid" which is still anathema in the United States, has become common enough to be unremarkable when found on a front page here in Israel.

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