

# The Montclarion

1/4/02

A Publication of Hills Newspapers, Inc.  
Member, California Newspaper Publishers Association

## Battles both faraway and closer to home

**T**HERE WAS AN eerie sight downtown in the rain on Wednesday last. A single file of about 50 women, a smattering of men amongst them but mostly women, all dressed in black, marching, marching, marching around the Civic Center in the rain. A drum beat, b-dum, b-dum, b-dum, led the otherwise silent walk. In the mist, in the gray, somber rain, the scene had the feel of an old black and white movie, one of those deep-thinking, esoteric Japanese films where the fog is a metaphor and the people all symbols.

These women, too, were both real and symbols at the same time. They brandished signs, neat black placards with white lettering: "Not in our name," and "We refuse to be enemies." It was the first outing in Oakland of the Bay Area Women In Black.

If you don't know about Bay Area Women In Black, they are a group of Jewish, and not so Jewish, feminists and allies who march silently against what they call "the immoral occupation of Palestinian lands." In other words, they are Jewish women against Israel's current policies and for the establishment of "a just peace and the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian state." Or so says their literature.

The Women In Black movement began in 1988, one month after the first Palestinian *intifada* uprising broke out. A small group of Israeli women carried out a simple form of protest. Once a week, at the same hour and same location, they donned black clothing and raised black signs that read "Stop the Occupation." A brave thing to do in the middle of Israel. They have continued for 14 years.

Eventually, the movement



GARY TURCHIN  
There There

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spread to 180-plus groups around the world, including the Bay Area chapter. The BAWIB plan to gather once a month at Civic Center in Oakland to continue their work. They also gather weekly in Berkeley, every Friday from noon to 1 p.m. at Bancroft and Telegraph. For info, contact BayAreaWomenInBlack@earthlink.net.



I stopped to speak to a few of the women to find out why they were out on such a miserable day, so miserable even the plaza was empty.

"We're helping people who are not able or willing to look at the issue to know more about it," said North Oakland's Susan Freundlich, as we huddled under semi-cover of the Wells Fargo building. "Our country claims to support democracy, but look what's happening there, it's anything but democracy!"

"Isn't it a bit of a hopeless task?" I asked, rain dripping off the borders of my hat and onto my notepad.

"We don't think it's hopeless at all," said Francis Reid, a lifelong Montclarion and the only

non-Jew amongst the core members. "If the will of the people of Israel and Palestine could decide this issue, there wouldn't be a war, or occupation."

"How long are you going to do this for?" I asked.

"Once a month till the occupation ends," Reid said. I felt like making one of those "not shaving till Cal wins the Rose Bowl jokes," but I knew this wasn't a joking matter.

"There's enough there for everybody, land and rights," said Rockridge's Deborah Hoffman about the Middle East. "A lot of people over there understand that."

With that, the three of them rejoined the line and marched off into the wet, cold day. I stood and watched for a few minutes, pondering both the futility and hope they represented.

It's a crazy world, and I don't know who's crazier, the men who make wars based on old books written in metaphors, or the women who march silently, 10,000 miles away in total obscurity against them.

The line trudged toward the State building, and I peeled off toward my car, sopping wet. I found myself muttering to no one in particular, "Not in my name either."