

# Searingly human story of Palestine

By Mark A. Bruzonaky

AFTER two years of court battles and personal promotion by the writer-director, Arthur Allan Seidelman, *Children of Rage* opens in the U.S. this month.

*Children of Rage* is such an explosively controversial film about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that the first attempt to distribute it to movie theatres in 1975 provoked great controversy, including bomb threats.

Although completely fictional, Seidelman's creation is perhaps the best cinematic attempt to explain to a U.S. audience the hatred and injustice that has fuelled four Mid-east wars since World War II.

Seidelman has told a complex story in searingly human terms. "In a way," he notes, "time has caught up with the film."

*Children of Rage* was originally financially backed by a midwestern U.S. Jew well-known for his support of Israel.

Still the American Jewish community has waged a campaign against the film and against Seidelman. But with the somewhat altered atmosphere in the U.S. today, and with at least somewhat more understanding of the plight of the Palestinians, what was not possible in 1975 has now become possible.

## Research

In short, *Children of Rage* is a shocking, absorbing, and gripping portrayal of Mid-east reality. For those viewers aware of the complex history of the Arab-Israeli tragedy, *Children of Rage* is a powerful presentation of the human dimensions of what daily transpires on both sides of the nationalist-cultural barrier.

"I had to tell the story from the Palestinian side," Seidelman admits. "I had to unplug ears and eyes." This is a realisation he came to while spending three years re-searching, writing and directing.

While Kissinger's shuttle was taking the world into the political capitals for government posturing, Seidelman, was shuttling between refugee camps in Lebanon and

Tormented by the antagonistic causes for which both he and Leyla's brother Omar now struggle, David tries to convince his family and friends of the desperate need to attempt understanding of the Palestinians.

In the process, the spectrum of attitudes held in Israel towards the Palestinians and the PLO is profoundly revealed.

## Hated

"We came to this land in peace. We wanted to join them. All they want to do is destroy us..." — "This country was theirs before we came here..." — "I know the way their minds work. They want all or nothing, so they get nothing..."

With David's request to cross the border turned down, he and Leyla arrange to be smuggled out of the country to a camp in southern Lebanon. Though serving as a doctor he is always distrusted and usually openly hated.

Omar, after escaping the hospital, loathes the friendship developing between his sister and David. Emotions explode in a scene where Omar screams out: "You'll never have my friendship" — a statement which reverberates in the viewers' mind as: "Israel will never be accepted by the Palestinians..." David's response: "Well, will you at least take mine?"

The prevalent hatred of all Israelis competes with the PLO camp leader's attempt to at least tolerate the contradictions and accept David's help. But: "We've learned not to trust, not to believe," he shouts to David in desperation.

In the midst of these interpersonal sub-dramas a retaliatory Israeli commando raid unfolds.

David is shot dead by one of the extremists. Omar falls to Israeli helicopter fire. The camp goes up in flames.

Leyla is alone, shattered by what outsiders often casually refer to as the "Arab-Israeli conflict." She becomes the lasting image of the human grief resulting to the actual participants.

Seidelman sees his creation as an attempt to get to the roots of the human conflicts, to try to uncover the motivations and passions that turn people into fanatics.

avenge his brother's death and join the Fedayeen — much to his family's torment.

"You have come here to die," he is quickly instructed. "Do not doubt that victory will come, if not in this generation then in the next."

## Terror

Within the PLO a debate rages over the use of terror — "honour versus terror" as one struggling opponent defines the moral terrain.

Omar is finally readied for a mission — bomb as a student, he goes with a book is being held.

Injured in the blast, Omar is unconscious in a hospital where Dr. Shalmon suspects his involvement and seeks out Leyla, Omar's sister. David had tried to befriend Leyla months earlier when she came to the hospital to identify her dead commando brother — this time he does.

Israeli settlements looking for the effects on people's lives.

The result is a visual and emotional journey for viewers into "the dilemma of individuals strapped to the powderkeg of national loyalties while struggling to speak to each other with words of peace."

"Virtually every thought, political speech, and viewpoint expressed," says the writer, "was from a conversation I had had with an Israeli or an Arab."

Summarising the story-line has little of the intensity of watching and feeling the plot unwind.

A mine explodes and soldiers chase terrorists. With a flashback technique these border scenes are interspersed with those of kids playing in Jerusalem — the next generation's soldiers and terrorists?

Rushed to a hospital, a Fedayeen commando is recognised by Dr. David Shalmon as a friend from school days. The dying commando's brother, Omar, decides to