

P R E S S K I T



REFUSENIKS

By Sonja de Vries

Third World Newsreel

545 Eighth Avenue 10th Floor New York, NY 10018
Tel (212) 947-9277 Fax (212) 594-6417 tw@tw.org www.tw.org

REFUSENIKS (2006)

Sonja de Vries, Producer/Director

FILMOGRAPHY

REFUSENIKS

By Sonja de Vries

2006 • Israel / USA • 56 min. • color • Reel Revolution Films

Refuseniks uses stunning archival footage, still photos and interviews to document the stories of Israeli men and women who refuse to serve in the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

In *Refuseniks*, we meet several Israeli men and women including 18-year-old Shani, an original signer of a letter condemning the occupation written by high school students to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. We're also introduced to Rami Kaplan, an officer who admits to ordering his men to shoot prisoners. Tal Belo, a medic in the army, wonders if his actions in the territories caused a young boy to become a suicide bomber. Tanya Reinhart, an Israeli journalist, contributes a historical perspective.

Refuseniks is a moving portrait of men and women who have been willing to risk imprisonment in defense of their stands against the occupation by refusing to serve. They differ in their spiritual and political beliefs, some are ardent Zionists, and some question and challenge the concept of Zionism, but all of them have come to believe that taking a stand is crucial to their own humanity and to the future of their country.

“Powerful, moving, inspiring. These are genuine heroes. The history, the statistics are sobering to any viewer. This film will contribute to solidarity between U.S. and Israeli soldiers of conscience.”

-- Howard Zinn, historian, author, social activist

“At once troubling and uplifting, *Refuseniks* exposes a growing chasm between young and idealistic citizen-soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces and what the occupation compelled them to do. In their own words, it reveals how convictions drove them to refuse and the consequences they faced. Sonja de Vries has created a beautiful, honest, and unforgettable film, required viewing for any one who refuses to accept easy answers about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

-- Joel Krieger, Norma Wilentz Hess Professor of Political Science Wellesley College Wellesley, MA, and Editor in Chief, Oxford Companion to Politics of the World

“*Refuseniks* is a powerful testament to the courage and integrity of the young people who make up the refuser movement. Their stories provide unique insight into the occupation that is devastating both the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples, and their actions offer us hope for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.”

-- Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman, Board of Directors Member, Jewish Voice for Peace

“As a Jew who has been very critical of Israel's military policies, I found it very heartening and inspiring to meet so many Israelis in *Refuseniks* who went into the army, had their eyes opened and have found the courage to take the personal risk of refusing to serve. This is an important story that needs to be heard.

-- Debra Chasnoff, documentary filmmaker, Advisory Board Member, Jewish Voice for Peace

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OUT: The Making of a Revolutionary

By Sonja de Vries and Rhonda Collins

2000 • USA • 60 min. • color • Third World Newsreel

The recipient of audience awards in France and Germany, *OUT: The Making of a Revolutionary* (2000) is the story of Laura Whitehorn, an out lesbian who was convicted of the 1983 US Capitol bombing, and of "conspiring to influence, change, and protest policies and practices of the United States government through violent and illegal means." One of six defendants in the Resistance Conspiracy Case, Whitehorn spent 14 years in prison for her radical leftist political stance. *OUT* is the story of her life and times: five tumultuous decades of struggle for freedom and justice. Whether you agree or disagree with radical left politics, this is a documentary that will challenge you to think about what you might be willing to risk for your own beliefs.

"The film skillfully interpolates historical footage of a 'whites only' world with the life story of an exceptionally engaging woman who was not only a revolutionary who acted on her principles, but also a lesbian." -- Bay Area Reporter

"Seeing *OUT* is worthwhile not only for progressive politicians, but for anyone who can appreciate the story of a classic American type: the conscientious rebel." -- San Francisco Express

Gay Cuba

By Sonja de Vries

1995 • USA / Cuba • 57 min. • b&w/color • Frameline Distribution

The 1959 revolution that gave Cuba its independence ushered in a new era of equality, blind to race and to gender -- but not to sexual orientation. Military necessity and contemporary Stalinist ideology served only to reinforce long-held stereotypes detrimental to the integration of homosexuals into Cuba's perpetually reforming social structure.

Gay Cuba documents the promising changes that are beginning to take hold. In contrast with the history of random arrests of bar patrons and the forced quarantine of HIV positive citizens, the interviews which form the core of the film show that the changes in party policy and the opening of channels for the discussion and celebration of differences in sexual identity have allowed gay Cubans today to lead much more open lives. In fact, the liberal views expressed in street interviews and the contrast drawn to the repression practiced in other parts of Latin America attest to the ability of the on-going revolutionary efforts to make a very real and very positive change. *Gay Cuba* casts a colorful and hopeful light on efforts to reform and to humanize a society often maligned for its calcified rigidity.

Gay Cuba has received critical acclaim and standing ovations from audiences internationally since its release. It is also the recipient of several awards.

"Fascinating! This documentary is essential in understanding and valuing the process of maturation that [Cuban] society has passed through. A clean, honest portrayal."

--Tomás Alea Gutierrez, Director, Strawberries And Chocolate

"Excellent...deserves to be seen everywhere. Humor, courage, and humanity to stunning effect."

-- David Gothard, Associate Producer, My Beautiful Laundrette

Note: Both *OUT: The Making of a Revolutionary* and *Gay Cuba* have aired on public television in the United States.

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FILMMAKER'S BIOGRAPHY

Sonja de Vries is a woman of strong passions and deep convictions. Committed from her youth to social justice and revolutionary change, she has used her filmmaking to present perspectives about controversial issues that are rarely found in mainstream media.

While living and working in Havana, Cuba, as a journalist, de Vries developed a number of personal relationships that led to her first film, *Gay Cuba* (1995). A US/Cuba co-production, the film addresses the sensitive issue of homosexuality in post-revolution Cuba, and includes interviews with a number of people with whom De Vries remains in contact.

OUT: The Making of a Revolutionary (2000) was also born in large part from de Vries's personal experience. In her twenties, she began visiting and making connections with political prisoners in the United States, through which she became familiar with the case of Laura Whitehorn, convicted in 1983 of bombing the US Capitol Building. De Vries resonated with Whitehorn's commitment to social justice work, her leftist political stance, and her willingness to speak out about her beliefs, making their collaboration on *OUT* a natural fit.

De Vries's latest offering is as rigorously compelling as her first two films. A thought-provoking piece, *Refuseniks* (2005) presents questions raised by Israelis themselves about Israel's strategy of occupying Palestinian lands in the name of security. Like her other films, this too is a product of de Vries's personal experience. Not only does her own heritage include Jewish ancestry, but she also has family members who are Israeli and Palestinian. De Vries's desire to seek out too-often-unheard voices led to her work with Israelis who refuse to serve in the occupied territories or, in some cases, in the military at all.

Sure to be as controversial as her earlier works, *Refuseniks* is unflinching in its honesty, much the same way as de Vries herself is unflinching in her commitment to make films that matter. To that end, she is currently at work on several new projects, including two short films, one about the Palestinian youth theater group Al-Rowwad, and the other about police brutality in her hometown of Louisville, Kentucky.

After spending her childhood in Amsterdam, where she was raised on harrowing stories of her own family's resistance to the Nazi occupation of Holland during World War II, de Vries lived in the Northeast and in San Francisco, where she co-founded the Serpent Source Foundation for Women Artists. After living again in Holland for several years, she moved back to Kentucky to be near her family and to raise her children in a less hectic setting.

Though the filmmaking community in Louisville is markedly smaller than in other places where she has lived, de Vries is active in it and in the social justice community. As a board member with the Kentucky Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, de Vries organized the Reel Revolution Film Series, now in its second year as a fund- and awareness-raising project of the Alliance.

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REFUSENIKS (2006)

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FORMATS

SHOOTING FORMATS.

Digital Video	NTSC	PAL	SECAM
MiniDV	✓		

PREVIEW FORMATS.

DVD Video	NTSC	PAL	SECAM
REGION 1	✓		
Digital Video	NTSC	PAL	SECAM
MiniDV	✓		
DVCAM	✓		
Analog Video	NTSC	PAL	SECAM
VHS	✓		

EXHIBITION FORMATS.

DVD Video	NTSC	PAL	SECAM
REGION 1	✓		
Digital Video	NTSC	PAL	SECAM
MiniDV	✓		
DVCAM	✓		
Analog Video	NTSC	PAL	SECAM
VHS	✓		

EXHIBITION INFO.

Exact Runtime	00 hr : 56 min : 20 sec
Print Details	Color + B/W, Stereo
Film Sound	Dolby Digital
Aspect Ratios	1.33 (4x3 VIDEO)

FOREIGN VERSIONS.

Refuseniks contains dialogue in English and in Hebrew with English voiceovers. Spanish subtitled version is available. Transcripts available in English and Spanish.

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CREDITS

Produced and Directed by
Sonja de Vries

Editor

Airin Hutchings

Videographers

Claudia Levin
Airin Hutchings
Daniel Silva
Sonja de Vries

Production Assistant

Brad Allan

Research

Terry Mickler
Sonja de Vries

Photos by

Naomi Wallace
Sharon Wallace
Jewish Voice for Peace
Jews against the Occupation

Translation and Transcription

Ofer Schor

Transcription

Beth Harrison Prado

Translation

Meir Vanunu

Spanish Translation

Pedro Vargas

Voice Over Talent

David Mickler
Shadwick Wilde
Michael Aldridge
Jessica Goerge
Lorena Wallace
Luca Wallace
Cody Abney

Archival Material

Library of Congress
National Archives
Mai Masri

Special Thanks

Gary Sussman
Ariel Shatil
Gem Alon
Judith Kolokoff
Yigal Bronner

Abu Hassan
Lotahn Raz
Penny Rossenwasser
Sonia de Vries
Naomi Wallace
Sharon Wallace
Carla Wallace
Henry Wallace
Beth Harrison Prado
Sheila Sutton
Wickie Stamps
Pam McMichael
Travis Wilde
Carolyn Spears
Allie Spears
Leoni Santander
Hendrika de Vries Merle
Shannon Morris
Shadwick Wilde
Devlin de Vries
Terry Mickler
Lawson Gray Hunley
Jeanette McDermott
Bill W
H.P.

Music

Amal Murkus
Gene Michael Productions

Sources

Benny Morris
Tanya Reinhart
Jewish Voice for Peace
Palestine Remembered
If Americans Knew
Israeli Campaign Against
Home Demolitions
Gush Shalom
B'Tselem
Rabbi's for Human Rights
Yesh Gevul
New Profile

**In Memory of
Jaime Kibben
brilliant filmmaker and friend**

**Produced through
the facilities of
KY Digital Media**

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PRODUCTION STILLS



Israeli refuseniks (left to right) Shimri Zameret, Adam Maor, Noam Bahat, and Matan Kaminer (*Photo by Sonja de Vries, 2003*)



Refuseniks used a drainage tunnel to slip out from and back into a detention camp in order to meet with filmmaker Sonja de Vries.

(*Photo by Sonja de Vries, 2003*)



Brigade medic commander Tal Belo and son (*Photo by Sonja de Vries, 2003*)



Refusenik Noam Behat

(*Photo by Sonja de Vries, 2003*)



Videographer Claudia Levin with Noam Behat and Adam Maor

(*Photo by Sonja de Vries, 2003*)



Israeli and Palestinian marchers, led by former Knesset member Uri Avnery (in red cap in middle), protest against construction of the Separation Wall

(*Photo by Sonja de Vries, 2003*)

Photos available in digital, .jpg, and hard copy format

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SYNOPSIS

PROGRAMMING DESCRIPTORS

FORM: Documentary

GENRES: Alternative, Educational, Avant-garde, Human Rights, Independent, War/Peace, Culture

NICHES: Jewish, Third World, Women, Youth

3-LINE SYNOPSIS

A moving portrait of Israeli men and women taking a stand for humanity. United in their refusal to participate in the military occupation of the Palestinian people, a high school student, a career military officer, an army medic, and others tell a conflicted and passionate story of how they have come to believe that taking a stand is crucial to their own humanity and to the future of their country.

125-WORD SYNOPSIS

Refuseniks is a moving portrait of Israeli men and women who have been willing to risk imprisonment in defense of their stands against the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by refusing to serve in those regions or refusing to serve in the military at all. A high school student, a career military officer, an army medic, and others tell a conflicted and passionate story of how they have come to believe they must take a stand. They differ in their spiritual and political beliefs, some are ardent Zionists, and some question and challenge the concept of Zionism, but all of them believe that taking a stand is crucial to their own humanity and to the future of their country.

250-WORD SYNOPSIS

Refuseniks uses stunning archival footage, still photos and interviews to document the stories of Israeli men and women who refuse to serve in the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

In *Refuseniks*, we meet several Israeli men and women including 18-year-old Shani, an original signer of a letter condemning the occupation written by high school students to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. We're also introduced to Rami Kaplan, an officer who admits to ordering his men to shoot prisoners. Tal Belo, a medic in the army, wonders if his actions in the territories caused a young boy to become a suicide bomber. Tanya Reinhart, an Israeli journalist, contributes a historical perspective.

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REVIEWERS' COMMENTS

Powerful, moving, inspiring. These are genuine heroes. The history, the statistics are sobering to any viewer. This film will contribute to solidarity between U.S. and Israeli soldiers of conscience.

-- *Howard Zinn, historian, author, social activist*

At once troubling and uplifting, **REFUSENIKS** exposes a growing chasm between young and idealistic citizen-soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces and what the occupation compelled them to do. In their own words, it reveals how convictions drove them to refuse and the consequences they faced. Sonja de Vries has created a beautiful, honest, and unforgettable film, required viewing for any one who refuses to accept easy answers about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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-- *Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman, Board of Directors Member, Jewish Voice for Peace*

As a Jew who has been very critical of Israel's military policies, I found it very heartening and inspiring to meet so many Israelis in **REFUSENIKS** who went into the army, had their eyes opened and have found the courage to take the personal risk of refusing to serve. This is an important story that needs to be heard.

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REFUSENIKS

Produced and Directed by Sonja de Vries, 2006, 56 min.

A moving portrait of Israeli men and women taking a stand for humanity. United in their refusal to participate in the military occupation of the Palestinian people, a high school student, a career military officer, an army medic, and others tell a conflicted and passionate story of how they have come to believe that taking a stand is crucial to their own humanity and to the future of their country.

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PRODUCER / DIRECTOR.

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(502) 228-7123 Private

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PRINCIPAL CREW.

CINEMATOGRAPHER
Claudia Levin

PRODUCTION DESIGNER
Sonja de Vries

SOUND EDITOR
Airin Hutchings

ORIGINAL MUSIC
Amal Murkus, Gene Michael Productions

PICTURE EDITOR
Airin Hutchings

Produced through the facilities of
KY Digital Media

REVIEWERS' COMMENTS.

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