

The Other Israel

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NOW, IF EVER!

On the days following the deportation of 415 Palestinians – a step proclaimed to be “a decisive blow upon Fundamentalist Terrorism” – Israeli Prime Minister Rabin enjoyed an unprecedented 91% popularity rate in the hastily conducted opinion polls. The nationalist opposition strongly supported this step, as did the docile “doves” inside the Rabin cabinet.

A month later, Rabin and his government faced a more bleak prospect. The radical Muslim Hamas movement was far from broken by the deportation of its activists; in fact, it had gained enormous prestige among the Palestinian population, and its armed wing continued to launch daring attacks, such as assassinating an agent of the Shabak (Israeli security service) in the heart of Jerusalem. The PLO leadership – very much at the request of its representatives in the Occupied Territories – suspended Palestinian participation in the Washington peace talks, until the deportees’ return.

International pressure upon the Rabin government mounted: U.N. Secretary General Boutros Ghali’s call for the imposition of sanctions on Israel gathered momentum, as the United States appeared hesitant about vetoing such a measure.

With the specter of sanctions becoming increasingly real, criticism became more widespread among the Israeli public. Influential commentators and editorial writers called upon the government to reverse its decision and bring back the deportees. Many of Rabin’s ministers would have preferred to do so – but they spoke their mind only in anonymous interviews.

The ministers hoped that the Supreme Court would absolve them of responsibility, by ruling the deportations to be illegal and ordering Rabin to bring the deportees back. But the judges, too, avoided responsibility. Long weeks of deliberation between “liberal” and “conservative” judges produced a unanimous compromise verdict: by means of complicated juridical sophistry, the judges ruled that deportations without a prior appeal were illegal to start with – but that once they were carried out, the government was under no obligation to return the deportees.

Internationally, the verdict had the sole effect of

arousing doubts as to the Israeli Supreme Court’s impartiality and independence, and of increasing the pressure for sanctions upon Israel.

The United States found itself facing a dilemma. It would have been uncomfortable for Washington to veto the quite mild sanctions which were proposed against Israel, immediately after the outgoing President Bush provoked a military confrontation with Iraq over Saddam Hussein’s alleged “non-compliance with U.N. resolutions”. On the other hand, the newly-installed President Clinton had no intention of opening his term by imposing sanctions on Israel. Furthermore, American diplomats were becoming alarmed by the increasingly independent and assertive role played by the new Egyptian U.N. Secretary-General. Quashing the sanctions initiative seemed an appropriate way to clip Ghali’s wings; but to justify such a step the Americans needed to get at least some concessions out of Rabin.

The week-long telephone negotiations with Warren Christopher, the new U.S. Secretary of State, were conducted by Rabin personally; all other members of the Israeli cabinet, including Foreign Minister Peres, were kept totally in the dark, until the moment Rabin asked them to ratify a finished agreement. Under its terms, the Israeli government undertook to bring back immediately one hundred of the deportees, and to shorten the others’ period of exile from two years to one.

The Americans, for their part, made a promise to prevent further moves by the U.N., as well as exerting their influence upon the European community, which after the deportations suspended talks on economic cooperation with Israel. Moreover, the Americans undertook to demand no further Israeli concessions concerning the deportees, even should the agreement be rejected by the Arab side.

The right-wing opposition in Israel sharply criticised Rabin for “having given in to pressure”;* but in fact, Rabin had good reasons to feel relieved. However mild, sanctions against Israel would have been a grave diplomatic precedent. Without totally losing face, Rabin succeeded in averting them; his predecessors sometimes paid a higher price. (In 1957, Ben-Gurion withdrew Israeli forces from Sinai and the Gaza Strip, after President Eisenhower threatened

to support U.N. sanctions on Israel.)

The precedent which was created, instead, is one of an Israeli-American agreement legitimising very partial Israeli compliance with U.N. resolutions. In a direct television broadcast from the Knesset, Israelis could see a triumphant Rabin pointing out that *returning one hundred deportees legitimises the continued deportation of the remaining three hundred, and thus the principle of deportation.*

The same assessment was made on the Palestinian side. The hundred "reprieved" deportees refused to abandon their fellow exiles. Members of the negotiating team persisted in their refusal to return to the Washington talks before the resolution of the deportee crisis.

Palestinian public opinion in the Occupied Territories became increasingly disenchanted with the peace process – not only because of the deportations, but also because of the new repressive measures introduced by the Israeli army, such as the bombarding with anti-tank rockets of houses where the presence of "wanted" Palestinians is suspected. Since the Rabin government took over, a 20% increase was marked in the number of Palestinians shot to death by the army – many of them children. With no improvement in these conditions in sight, Palestinian negotiators found it hard to explain to their constituency a return to the talks.

For its part, the Clinton Administration remained faithful to its agreement with Rabin. Washington's total control over the U.N. was convincingly reasserted, as the Security Council ratified the Rabin-Clinton agreement and dropped the deportees issue from its agenda.

However, when Secretary of State Christopher set out for a Middle East shuttle tour, he found the issue still very dominant on the Arab agenda and a major stumbling block for the American plan to resume the Middle East peace talks. Without an Israeli renunciation of further deportations, as well as a significant reduction of violent measures in the Occupied Territories, the return of the Palestinians to the talks seemed out of the question. In their meeting with Christopher the Palestinians raised also the problem of the totally inadequate scope of "Palestinian Autonomy" as envisaged by the Rabin government. Already prior to the deportations, the Israeli proposals, assigning a mere 6% of the Occupied Territories to Palestinian control, caused great discontent among the Palestinians.

With the deportees still in Lebanon and with no

hope for a significant step by Israel at the negotiating table, there was little to motivate the Palestinians to come to the Washington talks. But the Palestinians' ability to press their demands depended, of course, to a great degree on the solidarity – or lack of it – shown by the other Arab participants and in particular by the Syrians.

Over the past months, Rabin and his associates repeatedly spread rumours about an impending deal between Israel and Syria, regardless of developments on the Palestinian issue. While it is difficult to assess how much there was behind these rumours, one thing was obvious: they alarmed Israeli settlers on the Golan Heights, the area Israel seized from Syria in 1967, who held angry demonstrations outside Rabin's office. For his part, however, Syrian President Assad maintained a deliberately vague position on whether or not Syria would carry on talks with Israel in the absence of the Palestinians.

During his Middle East tour, Secretary Christopher introduced a new concept: the U.S. was to be, from now on, "a full partner" in the negotiations rather than a mere "honest broker" as its role was hitherto defined. For some Israelis, this seemed to betoken the threat of American pressure upon the Rabin government. But such pressure failed to materialise during Christopher's visit to Jerusalem. Meeting with the Palestinian negotiators, Christopher received their six-point document, and gave the impression of being sympathetic to the demands contained in it. The next day, however, after visiting Rabin's office at the other side of Jerusalem, Christopher contended himself with acting as a postman and delivering to the Palestinians Rabin's negative response.

Rabin also did not encounter any overt American pressure on his visit to Washington, two weeks later. In fact, President Clinton went out of his way to express warmth and respect for his guest, in an apparent effort to lay to rest the ghost of the Shamir-Bush confrontations.

In the background of the visit was the issue of U.S. financial aid to Israel, fixed at three billion Dollars a year over the past two decades, but now threatened by the growing unpopularity of foreign aid in general. Senior Senators, known to be staunch allies of the Israeli government, warned that such cuts are virtually inevitable; it turned out, however, that the axe will only fall with the 1994 U.S. budget – giving Rabin some respite on that front.

Rabin's hosts did make polite requests for "some new ideas" to draw the Palestinians back to the

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negotiations table; but on the White House lawn Rabin expressed no more than a general willingness to "take risks for the sake of peace".

Actually, Rabin had quite a bit of good luck in his first round with the Clinton Administration. The much-publicised arrest of radical Muslims, charged by the FBI with planting the car-bomb at New York's World Trade Center, came at an appropriate moment to bolster Rabin's depiction of Israel as "The Western World's Bulwark against Islamic Fundamentalism", and helped him recoup some of the propaganda damage caused by the deportations. However, Rabin had to cut short his successful American tour because of a dangerous escalation on the home front.

** Likud KM Benny Begin, son of the late Menachem Begin and a contender for the party's leadership, in retrospect also criticised the original deportation decision: 'Either deporting four hundred Palestinians was wrong, or bringing back a hundred of them is wrong or, most probably, both. Actually, the Likud never engaged in mass deportations, and we had our reasons.'*

Following the Palestinians' disillusionment with Secretary of State Christopher's tour, Israel found itself faced with a mounting wave of attacks of different kinds: from knife attacks against random Israeli civilians in the streets of Israeli cities, to well-planned ambushes of Israeli military patrols in the Occupied Territories, carried out by organised squads armed with weapons stolen from the Israeli army itself*.

Some of the attacks were carried out by Islamic groups opposed to the peace process; others, by mainstream groups seeking to strengthen the Palestinian negotiating position; still others – by (usually young) individuals belonging to no organization, whose personal feelings of anger and frustration reached the boiling point in the extremely tense atmosphere. None of the attacks was, in itself, unprecedented; but there had never been so many of them in such a short span of time.

The Israeli media and politicians made no distinction between different kinds of attacks; dead soldiers and civilians were lumped together as "Victims of Murderous Terrorism". Israeli newspapers magnified the attacks, with sensational headlines and giant colour photographs of bleeding corpses covering the front pages, day after day. Extensive biographies were published of the fifteen Israelis killed during March. Their family members were interviewed at length; some – though by no means all – expressed a strong desire for revenge. The far greater death toll exacted from Palestinians in the same period was relegated to terse accounts in the back pages.

Israelis had a growing feeling of insecurity and helplessness; a knife-wielding Palestinian could appear anywhere, at any time. It did not help to point out – as several commentators did – that the chance of any Israeli to become the victim of a traffic accident was still much higher; and public confidence was not restored by Police Commissioner Turner's call for citizens to arm themselves and carry weapons at all times, nor by Rabin's own advice for Israeli

youths to become proficient in hand-to-hand combat. Some Israelis responded to the attacks by assaulting random Arab bypassers, or throwing stones at Arab cars – though such outbreaks were on a far smaller scale than the Bat-Yam riots of May 1992 (see TOI-52, p.3,4).

Part of the public anger was directed at the government, for its inability to protect the citizens. In fact, the anger was directed against all politicians, irrespective of party and political view – who all seemed distant, uncaring and unable to solve the problem. Proposals for punitive measures gained popularity, in particular the call for imposing the death penalty upon "Arab Murderers"***; but equal popularity, often among the same people, was recorded for proposals to withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip, the poorest and most ungovernable part of the Occupied Territories. (Israeli settlers in the Gaza Strip, who suffered several casualties from the Palestinian attacks, bitterly complained of a lack of sympathy from the inhabitants of Israel's main population centers.)

Proposals to withdraw from Gaza came not only from prominent members of the Labor Party, but also from Moshe Arens, former Defence Minister in the Likud government. For their part, the ministers of Meretz came out with a proposal to hand Gaza over to the Palestinians in an organised way, and invite the PLO to establish its headquarters there.

Initially, the Palestinians regarded such proposals, with great suspicion, as being one more "divide and rule" tactic – since the West Bank was not included; but when the proposal became more and more widely discussed in Israel, Palestinian leaders took the position of "willingness to accept administration of any area evacuated by Israel" though continuing to demand withdrawal from all Occupied Territories.

For the time being, such discussions remain academic. Prime Minister Rabin, far from endorsing the idea of early withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, instructed military commanders there to reconquer "hot spots" where the army had tacitly thinned out its presence in the past two years***.

The army's efforts to establish observation posts on the roofs of Palestinian houses in the town of Khan Yuneis resulted in a week of pitched battles with the local population, leaving hundreds of inhabitants wounded and eight (including two children) dead.

** Ephraim Sneh, former military governor and at present a senior Labor Knesset Member, characterised attacks of the latter kind as 'classical guerrilla warfare'.*

*** In 1966, international pressure forced Israel to pardon Mahmud Hijazi, an armed Palestinian infiltrator whom a military court had sentenced to death. Since then, the military establishment and security services are strongly opposed to Israeli courts passing out death sentences.*

**** General Matan Vilna'i, in charge of the Gaza Strip, was the main proponent of pulling out military patrols and observation posts from the Intifada strongholds, in order to reduce the number of confrontations with the population; this policy contributed to reducing Palestinian civilian casualties in 1991 and early 1992. The policy was opposed by other generals, such as Dany Yatom in the West Bank, who claimed that this policy was 'a show of weakness' and that it created 'refuges for terrorists'.*

After two police officers were shot to death in their patrol car, near the town of Hadera in the heart of Israel, Rabin took the step of imposing a total closure on the Occupied Territories, forbidding the Palestinians to cross into Israel. At the same time, huge military reinforcements poured into the Territories, conducting massive house-to-house searches.

Rabin was well aware that all these could only be strictly temporary measures. True, the closure did limit the access of knife-wielding Palestinians to the Israeli population; but keeping 120,000 Palestinian workers away from their jobs in Israel was undermining the Occupied Territories' already-weakened economy, and building up tremendous new tensions – especially in the Gaza Strip. Military commanders warned that, unless the closure is soon removed, an explosion of popular violence may break out.

Moreover, Israeli farmers and building contractors were hard-hit by the closure. The harvest rotted in the fields, with losses reaching tens of millions of Dollars within days. And even though 150,000 Israelis are currently unemployed, practically none of them is willing to replace the Arab farm hands, for salaries far below both the minimum salary and the Israeli unemployment benefits.

Yitzhak Rabin is still in serious trouble. Though he enjoys a parliamentary majority, his public support is fast eroding, with newly-elected Likud leader, the energetic Binyamin Netanyahu, breathing down his neck.

Rabin's elections victory, in June 1992, was mainly based on three public promises: to reach an agreement with the Palestinians "within nine months"; to ensure the security of daily life in Israel; and to reduce unemployment rates. So far, Rabin proved a dismal failure on all three counts. The nine months deadline is fast approaching; the mutual violence between Israelis and Palestinians has reached new peaks; and there is no sign of the peaceful atmosphere that should have – according to Labor Party elections propaganda – attracted foreign investors to create new jobs. The closure of the Occupied Territories gave Rabin no more than a short breathing spell, solving none of the real problems.

At the time of writing, it is not yet sure whether the Palestinians will attend the peace talks in Washington, scheduled for April 20. In unofficial negotiations carried out through the mediation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the American and Israeli governments offered the Palestinians some concessions. The most significant of these seems to be acceptance of the official participation in the talks of East Jerusalemite Feisal Hussein – which infringes the harsh "ground rules" imposed upon the Palestinians at the Madrid Conference, and implies some Israeli recognition of Palestinian claims regarding annexed East Jerusalem (though that interpretation is hotly denied by Israeli the government).

It seems equally clear, however, that the concessions offered do not include bringing back the deportees. In a way, that may be a less bitter pill for the Palestinians to swallow now than it would have been

in January or February. Reportedly, Palestinians feel that – though the world failed to impose sanctions or punish Israel for the deportations – a painful retribution was visited upon Israel by the Palestinians themselves.

Whatever the outcome of the present diplomatic moves, one thing is clear: the time is over for slow, plodding negotiations. To prevent a total collapse of the process, bold and decisive steps are needed. Israel must demonstrate to the Palestinians, in clearly visible acts, that the occupation is indeed on its way out.

Now, if ever, it should be possible for Israeli peace seekers to convince the others that an end to the occupation is serving their interests as well.

The editor

■ On April 4, Kav Le'oved (Workers' Hotline) held a press conference in Jerusalem, calling upon the government to lift the closure of the Occupied Territories, and stop encouraging employers to fire Palestinian workers. It also demanded that the government compensate the Palestinians for the lost work days – such compensation to be financed from the huge sums accumulated in the treasury, which had been deducted over the years from the workers' salaries, and from which they hitherto derived little benefit.

Full statement available from: *Kav Le'oved*, POB 2319, Tel-Aviv; fax: 972-3-5173081

■ On April 7, a group of young Meretz members visited the town of Dir-El-Balah in the Gaza Strip, where the army had conducted extensive searches on the previous day. They visited four houses, where they saw the broken furniture left after the soldiers' visit, and talked with inhabitants who were beaten up. The information was passed on to KM Haim Oron, who wrote a letter of protest to Prime Minister/Defence Minister Rabin.

Legalisation without jubilation

For the past six years, peace activists struggled to abolish the law prohibiting meetings with the PLO. But when the Knesset formally lifted the prohibition, at a late night hour on January 20, there was no spontaneous outburst of triumph.

Certainly, it was a relief that the Labor hawks did not, after all, torpedo the bill, as they had threatened to do; nor was there a last moment surprise from the ultra-Orthodox Shas Party – the coalition partner least enthusiastic regarding this change of law. But for the Israelis and Palestinians who had waited and struggled so long to reach this moment, the conditions under which it was finally realised made it rather tasteless. The same news broadcasts covering the Knesset vote (39 to 20) also brought fresh reports from the tent camp in South Lebanon, where 415 Palestinian deportees continued to languish. Moreover, the dovish Knesset Members who expressed jubilation at the legalisation of dialogue with the PLO were

mostly the same who, a bare month earlier, had supported the deportations.

The PLO leadership turned out to be less than enthusiastic to hold public meetings with them. Two Meretz KMs, Benny Temkin and Ran Cohen, went to Cairo but did not succeed in organising a large-scale dialogue meeting – as had been previously scheduled between Meretz and the PLO – to follow upon the abolition of the notorious law. Arafat adviser Nabil Sha'ath curtly announced that such a meeting would have to wait until the resolution of the deportee issue.

Peace Sailor Abie Nathan – who more than anybody else made this struggle his own – was more successful. Nathan was present at the Knesset vote, seated in the gallery together with other peace activists imprisoned or prosecuted for meeting with the PLO. Immediately after the vote, he left for Ben Gurion Airport, and within twelve hours was already holding a joint press conference with PLO leader Yasse Arafat at Tunis.

Nathan returned to Israel two days later, bearing an urgent call for an Arafat-Rabin summit to resolve the deadlock in the peace process. But Rabin – who had taken care not to be present during the Knesset vote – made clear that the legal change implied no change in government policies towards the PLO. Following Abie Nathan's visit, Arafat made his call for *a meeting of the brave, to forge a brave peace* directly to the Israeli public. For the first time, the Israeli television conducted an interview with the PLO leader, via a direct telephone link established between its Jerusalem studio and the PLO headquarters.

The television's Arab affairs correspondent Ehud Ya'ari proposed a follow up: to go with a crew to Tunis. However, Prime Minister Rabin officially advised the Israeli Broadcasting Authority that such a move would be "harmful to state interests". The IBA board, still dominated by appointees of the Shamir government, was glad to oblige the Prime Minister by vetoing the Ya'ari project.

Rabin also personally intervened to dissuade Labor doves from using the new legal possibilities. Thus, KM Ephraim Sneh announced that – though he had met with PLO members in the past – he would not do so again without the Prime Minister's approval (*Yediot Aharonot* 22.1.93), and KM Yoram Las – a physician by profession – was induced to decline an invitation by Dr Fathi Arafat, head of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, to discuss the deteriorating health situation in the Occupied Territories. (Dr. Arafat happens to be Yasser Arafat's brother.)

One Labor Knesset Member whom the Prime Minister failed to domesticate was KM Ya'el Dayan. Already at the time of the deportations, Dayan made a name for herself as Labor's foremost dissident. To Rabin's manifest displeasure, Ya'el Dayan now accepted an invitation to meet Yasser Arafat in Tunis.

Dayan's visit turned into a major media event. She was photographed handing Arafat a copy of her book on the life of her late father Moshe Dayan; the photograph immediately appeared on the front pages of the Israeli papers. For a week, the media covered

extensively Dayan's talks with Arafat, the sharp attacks upon her by the right wing and the Labor hawks, and her equally sharp replies.

Politically, Ya'el Dayan played a delicate balancing game. In Tunis, she clearly spoke as a loyal – though critical – supporter of the Rabin government; she made great efforts to convince Arafat and his advisers that – in spite of the deportations – Rabin is sincerely committed to peace. On her return to Israel, Dayan was equally vehement in proclaiming Arafat's readiness to make peace with Israel; under heavy attack from the hawks in the Labor parliamentary caucus, Ya'el Dayan defiantly replied: *Arafat is the very symbol of peace and moderation.*

Subsequently, she embarked on a speaking tour throughout the country, including in areas known to be right-wing strongholds. Amira Segev of *Hadashot* gave the following account: "I followed Ya'el Dayan to two consecutive appearances, at Petach Tikva and Bat Yam, and the scenario repeated itself almost precisely. She gets up on the podium, to the sound of boing and shouting. Her first sentences are drowned out by the heckling. Without raising her voice, and without showing the least emotion, she answers all questions, even the most provocative. She tells of the threatening letters she received, and gives amusing anecdotes – such as that she knew Arafat's wife before he knew her, since they had already met in Ramallah. A few people curse and go out of the hall; the heckling dwindles away, and at the end she receives prolonged applause" (*Hadashot*, 26.2.93).

■ As this issue goes into print, Knesset Member Abd-El-Wahab Darawshe has set out for Tunis, with the avowed intention of working for a cease-fire between Israel and the PLO, in order to halt the bloodshed on both sides and create a better climate for negotiations.

■ On March 2, emotions run high in the town of Holon, a Tel-Aviv suburb; on the previous day, a Holon inhabitant had been stabbed to death by a Palestinian worker from Gaza. Right-wingers tried to capitalise on the situation, holding a rally and demanding "tough measures", such as the death penalty, against the Palestinians. On the other side of the street, some twenty local peace activists held a counter-demonstration, thereby defying the decision of their respective organizations (the local branches of *Peace Now*, and *Meretz Youth*) which felt apprehensive about taking to the street in such an atmosphere. Many bypassers, however, expressed sympathy with their slogans: *Get out of Gaza!* and *We don't want terrorism – we want to get out of the Territories!*

■ On March 19, two groups of demonstrators, about a hundred each, appeared outside Prime Minister Rabin's home in north Tel-Aviv. The groups, each in its own way, wanted to counter the violent settler demonstration held there on the previous day. *Peace Now's* main slogan was: *Rabin, make peace now!* The others were Labor Party members carrying signs such as: *Rabin, we are behind you all the way!* Both were not very happy to be seen together.

Outside Rabin's window

by Uri Avnery

It is cold. Bitterly cold. It is many years since I have spent a winter night in a tent. In fact, the last time was in 1948, when I was a young combat soldier on the Negev Front. Who would have imagined then that, nearly fifty years later, the conflict would still be going on?

Jerusalem in mid-winter is a cold place. I brought three blankets from home, and a fourth one I took from the pile in the tent. I am fully clothed. And still the cold is seeping in. From time to time I wake up and listen to the shrieking wind outside, and to the heavy trucks passing on the road which separates our tent from the Prime Minister's office. At this hour, the Palestinian deportees must also be lying in their tents, and in Lebanon the mountains are higher and the temperatures - lower.

Our protest camp has three tents. One is reserved for women. Tonight, three are sleeping there: my wife Rachel, Jerusalem peace activist Roni Ben-Efrat, and a Californian in a brown nun's habit. She constitutes a one-woman order, totally dedicated to interfaith reconciliation and making Jerusalem the capital of all religions.

In the second tent, six men are sleeping - four Arabs and two Jews. The rest of us - mayors, peace activists, Sheikhs - sleep in the bigger tent, where during the day we hold meetings and receive solidarity delegations. The tents are located on a bare hill overlooking the Prime Minister's office. They were erected by real experts, Beduins from the Negev, and already withstood gale-force winds.

What is the use of it all? Who cares? In the Israel of 1993, is there still room for protest actions of this kind? Certainly, none of us had the illusion that a person like Rabin would be greatly influenced by seeing these tents out of his window. And yet, I believe that this tent camp, which we maintained for 45 consecutive days, was extremely important.

I first proposed the idea at a public meeting held by Peace Now in Tel-Aviv. I heard many speakers, all condemning the deportation of 415 Palestinians as illegal and immoral, but none making any concrete proposals for action. I got up and proposed that we set up a protest tent encampment outside Rabin's office, and stay there day and night - in order to remind him of that other tent encampment which he had brought into being in the Lebanese no-man's-land. Some people at the meeting welcomed the proposal, but Peace Now did not adopt it. In fact, after their one demonstration in December, Peace Now took no further part in the struggle against the deportations.

More radical people, at whose meeting I also proposed the idea, felt doubtful about their ability to undertake such an ambitious project. The tent idea was finally accepted at a meeting between Jewish peace activists and the Committee of Arab Mayors; two days later, the first tent was erected.

The place quickly became a refuge for everybody who felt angry or depressed about the deportations. Every day, particularly in the evenings, individuals and groups came by, from all over the country and all over the world; Some remained for an hour, others - for a night or a whole week. There were whole classes from the Arab schools meeting with Meretz youths, American clergymen rubbing shoulders with Australian Jews, and strange people such as the woman who walked barefoot in the snow and said she came from God (the Arabs were very patient with her). Hasidim, from the ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods of Jerusalem, came to argue fine theological points with the Muslim Sheikhs. The Jerusalem Women in Black took turns, bringing us hot soup every evening...

One morning, a boy passed by on his bicycle and was just curious when he saw the tents. He came in and spent several hours with us. On the following day, he came back with two friends, and they worked with us putting back the placards and banners always blown by the wind.

It must be said that the participation of Arabs was much more massive than that of Jews. For the Jewish Israeli participants, it was primarily an act of decency, a determination to show the country - and the whole world - that we don't accept what the government did in our name.

The Arabs were responding to a far more personal threat; the fear of deportations, of a repetition of 1948, has never disappeared in a community where practically everyone has relatives living in a refugee camp somewhere. Moreover, the deportations were perpetrated by exactly those Jewish leaders in whom the Arabs had placed some hope. In the elections, the Labor Party and Meretz gained at least five Knesset seats from Arab votes. Before he came out in support of the deportations, Yossi Sarid enjoyed much credibility among the Arabs; but when we organised the torchlight march against the deportations, I heard thousands of Arab participants cry out in unison: *From Shamir to Sarid, they are all racists!*

Our tent camp was a symbol of hope: an indication that, even after this shameful betrayal, Jewish and Arab peace seekers were still working and struggling together: a place where, under the black flag of protest, Jews and Arabs sat together in bare tents. We wanted to tell everybody - the Jewish public, the Arab public, the whole world - that there is a protest action going on in Israel, a small but tenacious protest.

For forty-five days, the tent camp was a focus of action. The deportees' wives - all of them devout Muslims - came in their hundreds, and conducted a joint demonstration with Jewish activists. (This action was also joined by four women Knesset Members: Dayan, Hazan, Ma'or and Gozanski). The children of the deportees sat for hours on mats in front of the big tent, and drew paintings for their fathers.

More than a hundred Gazan lawyers, who attended the Supreme Court proceedings nearby, came to express their protest at the shocking verdict which legitimised continuation of the deportations. The

members of the Palestinian negotiating team also came, more than once, to express their protest.

One of the most significant features of the tent action was the active participation of the Israeli Islamic Movement – the first such participation in a joint Jewish-Arab action. For the first time, contacts were established between (mostly secularist) Jewish peace activists and this movement, which is gaining greater and greater influence among the Muslims in Israel. For me personally, too, this was a quite unique opportunity. I have a decades-long experience of contacts with Palestinians, both inside and outside the country: talking and sometimes debating with them, explaining the Israeli reality and hearing their views – but this was my first real contact with the leadership of the Islamic Movement in Israel, a quite surprising experience.

At five in the morning, on our first night in the tent, we woke up to the cry “Allahu Akhbar! “Allahu Akhbar!” (“God is Great!”). Outside the tent, our Muslim friends were holding their morning prayer. Hearing it suddenly, in the midst of sleep, aroused for a moment our deepest prejudices, the image of barbaric and murderous Islam, of knife-wielding fanatics who utter these same words. On following mornings, when we woke up by the same sound, we discovered that the cadence of Muslim prayer has its own unique beauty.

When you spend whole days with people, sharing inspiring and depressing experiences, talking, eating and sleeping together, you get to know them not as “Jews”, “Arabs” or “Muslims”, but as individuals, some of whom you like and others you don’t.

I must admit that I had a negative preconceived notion of the Islamic Movement and its leaders. They turned out to possess a sense of humor, and to be full of curiosity about our views and way of life – a curiosity which was amply reciprocated. Our 45 days in the tent camp constituted a continuous seminar about Jews and Arabs, state and religion, the Bible and the Koran. For hours on end we debated: Jews with Arabs, Jews with Jews, Arabs with Arabs, secularists with religious, Communists with ultra-Orthodox.

There was never a dull moment. I had brought several books with me, but never found time to read a page, and hardly even to glance at the newspaper headlines (most of them seemed trivial and insipid, compared with the reality in the tent).

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One of the questions which naturally interested us was the difference between the Islamic Movement in Israel and the Hamas in the Territories – two movements based on the same sacred texts, yet the one works within the Israeli political system while the other is violently opposed to the existence of the state of Israel.

The Sheikhs explained there indeed exists a concept

of Palestine as an Islamic patrimony, of which no part may be given into the hands of non-Muslims – but the Islamic Movement gives precedence to the sacrosanctity of human life; therefore, for the sake of peace it is permissible to make concessions. It was not the first time we discovered startling similarities between Judaism and Islam. Exactly the same debate, with much the same argumentation, exists among Rabbis: according to some, not an inch of the sacred Land of Israel can be given up, while others hold that in order to save life, exactly that should be done.

The dominant personality among the Muslims in the tent was Sheikh Ra’ed Salah, Mayor of Umm-El-Fahm – a young, tall, soft-spoken man with a permanent smile on his face, who gave us all a personal example of keeping the tent clean and picking up refuse. We had many debates with him about aspects of the Muslim religion which we find repugnant, such as the stoning of adulterers or the cutting off of the hands of thieves. The Sheikh tried to explain that these are rare exceptions, that executing adulterers requires four independent witnesses who saw them in the act, and that a thief’s hand will not be amputated in case he was needy or hungry. Still, we could not accept such laws, on any terms.

Sheikh Ra’ed, who went on pilgrimage to Mecca in the middle of our tent period, is far from enthusiastic about the Saudi regime, which actually enforces these laws: “In all my visits I never saw a Saudi working; they let foreign workers, many of them Palestinians, do all the work.”

A week after we established our tent camp, a group of extreme-right activists, with the banner “the tent of the Victims of Terrorism”, set up their tent on the other side of the main road. They carefully copied our actions: after each press conference we held, they held theirs; a few days after our torchlight march, they had theirs, even following the same route.

One day, some of them came to demonstrate in front of our tent. From among a group of settlers, armed with the guns with which the army provides them, an old man shouted at me: “Killing is all the Muslims want! They murdered my son, they will murder you as well, and all of us!” How could I reason with this man? He is a genuine victim of the conflict. How could I explain to him that I could feel no apprehension at sleeping, night after night, among devout Muslims?

We did have very real apprehensions about this other tent camp, some thirty metres away from us. Evening after evening we heard them chanting *Death to the Arabs! Death to the Arabs!* Every evening, when we went to sleep, we were aware that one match could turn our highly inflammable lodgings into a death-trap.

Actually, one of our most steady participants, Amir Abramson, would have been entitled, had he wanted to, for a place in the “Victims of Terrorism” tent. Abramson became crippled for life and confined to a wheelchair in 1990, when the bus he was traveling on was attacked by a member of the Hamas Movement. He spent many painful months in hospital, but never

became vindictive. (If anything, it made him more devoted to the cause of peace.)

In the event, there were no serious incidents, thanks especially to the quite exemplary behaviour of the police – which intervened immediately whenever the rightists approached the tent or attempted to tear our placards. It would have been quite embarrassing for the government to have a violent incident directly under the Prime Minister's window, and the police must have been given strict instructions, which they carried out without hesitation; even the "Border Guards", members of a unit notorious for its behaviour in the Occupied Territories, were always polite to the Muslim activists in our tent. Once, Rachel succeeded in getting into a real conversation with three policemen: a Kurdish Jew, an immigrant from Russia, and a Beduin. For some time, they became part of the tent's ongoing seminar...

Our most difficult day was during the visit of Secretary of State Cristopher. The settlers were out in force, and also occupied the unpaved road leading up to our camp. When I went off in my car, I was surrounded by dozens of them. Before the police could arrive, they started kicking, shouting curses and waving their fists. I increased speed, before more of them could completely block my way, and was out of there in a moment. It could have ended differently.

The settlers scheduled a mass demonstration for that evening. At noon, a senior police officer came and asked us to evacuate the tents for two hours in the evening; he promised to detail sixty policemen to guard them in our absence. We held a discussion. I was in favor of accepting the police request (in any case, I had a lecture in Tel-Aviv fixed for that time, so I knew I could not be personally present on the crucial hour). This seemed to be the prevailing view on the camp. But when I came back in the night, I found that Sheikh Abdullah had after all decided to stay in the tent, accompanied by a group of youths – a special act of courage by this gentle young religious leader.

After forty-five consecutive days, we had to take the painful decision to pull down our tents. An enormous logistical effort is needed to maintain such an ongoing presence, and after the Christopher visit it became clear that we could not keep it up – as we had hoped – until the moment when all the deportees come back. We had no choice but turn to other kinds of action, easier to mobilise.

It was sad to see the big tent – our home for the past month and a half – lying on the ground, nothing more than a big piece of cloth. "How hard it is to build, and how easy – to destroy" said Muhammad Zeidan, Mayor of Kufr Manda.

We stood sadly in a circle, while several young men competently folded the tent into a sort of long sausage. Then, all of us undertook the last task – picking up the heavy stones, which had anchored the tent, and returning them to the surrounding fields.

We shook hands, exchanged telephone numbers, made arrangements for continued struggle. It was difficult to part from each other. I saw Amir Abramson saying goodbye to Jabarin, the actor

turned preacher, who had pushed Abramson's wheelchair during the big torchlight procession and became his personal friend.

We had decided to end the action by a joint Muslim-Jewish prayer. The Muslims had set up their prayer mats and kneeled for prayer. Then, they invited us Jews to join them. Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom read a prayer for peace, and spoke of the death of Abraham and of his burial by his two sons: Yitzchak, ancestor of the Jews, and Ishma'el, ancestor of the Arabs. Rashi, the great Jewish sage of the 11th century, wrote: *Abraham died a happy man, knowing that his two sons had become reconciled to each other.*



■ On February 6, the traditional Jewish Tree Holiday *Tu Bish'vat*, some five hundred Jewish and Arab youths gathered on a hill near the Arab town of Tira, where they planted 415 saplings – one for each of the deportees. Afterwards they marched to the Tira amphitheater, where representatives of different youth groups spoke. Lior Kay spoke on behalf of the Meretz Youth, wearing a T-shirt bearing the crossed flags symbol (*see our front page*) in full color, with the slogan: *Two States, Two Peoples, One Future!*. After Kay got off the podium, he was detained by local police, who are instructed to regard any depiction of the Palestinian flag as constituting "identification with a terrorist organization". They released him after a few hours, but without the T-shirt. In order to get it back, Kay had to involve ACRI (Israeli Civil Rights Association).

■ At noon on February 12, the weekly vigils of the **Women in Black** and **Yesh Gvul** were augmented by about a hundred anti-deportation activists, carrying placards with the slogan: *Return all deportees now!* They lined a central road in Tel-Aviv, standing for an hour in spite of heavy rain. A second anti-deportation vigil, also with some hundred participants, took place on February 22, the eve of Secretary of State Christopher's visit to Israel. The demonstrators picketed the U.S. Embassy in Hayarkon Street, at Tel-Aviv's hotel district. Besides banners demanding the return of the deportees, there was a call for resumption of the United States' dialogue with the PLO.

■ On March 25, marking the Muslim Holiday of Id-El-Fitr, 200 children of deportees from all over the Occupied Territories traveled to the Israeli-Lebanese border crossing at Rosh Hanikra, an action organised to continue the protest started with the Jerusalem tent camp. At the same time, the deportees themselves left their camp and marched toward the Israeli army's positions.

The deportees' children were stopped by the Israeli police a hundred metres before the border. They held a short rally, addressed by Sheikh Ra'ed Salah and Uri Avnery, after which each child wrote his or her father's name on a balloon which was freed into the sky. Afterwards, a carton tent was flown into the air as well, tied to ten large balloons. At first, the wind blew it westwards, over the Mediterranean; but a sudden

gust blew it, to the children's loud cheering, eastwards – probably in the right direction for the deportees not to miss these *greetings from home*.

■ At noon on March 4, the hall of East Jerusalem's Hakawaty Theatre was packed. Among the audience were represented many smaller and bigger groups from the Israeli peace movement, involved in one way or another in the campaign against the deportations. The Palestinian participants came from a wide range of political organizations, professional associations and trade unions. There were also seven members of the Palestinian negotiating team to the deadlocked Washington Peace Talks. The speeches, by Israelis and Palestinians, expressed determination to continue opposing the occupation and working together for peace, despite – or precisely because of – the mounting tension and escalation between the two peoples. In the same spirit, a joint statement was signed on the spot by 57 individual and 28 organizational signatories; it got considerable attention from the Israeli and Arab media.

Full text and list of signatories available from:

The Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue
POB 20373, Tel-Aviv 61204.

■ On the weekend of March 26-27, some ninety members of Peace Now Youth gathered at Kibbutz Givat Haviva, for a seminar on "The Arabs of Israel and of the Occupied Territories". About a quarter of the youths were themselves Arab Israelis, mostly from the village of Jat where a Peace Now Youth branch is operating for the past half year.

Youths from the West Bank town of Tul-Karm were also due to arrive, but on the previous day a curfew was imposed on their town, following the shooting to death of an Israeli soldier at the town center.

One Palestinian speaker, Sami Kilani of the peace talks negotiating team, did succeed in arriving at Givat Haviva and giving a lecture, followed by a lively discussion on the Washington Peace Talks – and Palestinian conditions for attending them. On their way home, the youths stopped at the Arab town of Um-El-Fahm, where Hadash KM Hashem Mahamid – the town's former mayor – acted as their guide.

Contact:

Peace now Youth, c/o Lior Kay, POB 6733, Tel-Aviv

■ During the dramatic week between March 27 and April 2, several vigils took place in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem. Some were organised by Peace Now, others – by smaller groups, all seeking to present an answer of peace to the escalating bloodshed. The *Women in Black*, joined this week by men and women from other organizations, introduced a new slogan: *The answer to despair: stop the occupation!*

■ On April 3, some 1500 people participated in a Peace Now rally and torchlight march in Jerusalem, held under the slogan: *Only peace can defeat terrorism!* and calling upon the government to undertake a *courageous peace initiative*. The event was characterised by differences between the various elements involved in Peace Now demonstrations. On the one hand, Knesset Members Ran Cohen and

Ya'el Dayan spoke from the podium and called upon the participants to support the Rabin government as "the only government capable of making peace". On the other hand, activists of the anti-deportation campaign were waving signs reading: *Rabin – make peace or resign!* The last two words aroused many heated debates, which lasted throughout the march.

■ On April 5, members of the Meretz Youth stood for five hours at crossroads in different parts of Israel, holding signs calling for an Israeli peace initiative and for speedy withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

■ The Americans for Peace Now (APN) organization gained considerable prestige and influence since the last U.S. presidential elections, especially owing to having several APN members and supporters appointed to senior positions in the Clinton Administration. The final seal of approval was APN's admission to membership in the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations – a step achieved in spite of considerable opposition by the more right-wing American Jewish organizations. Much of that debate centered on the person of APN President Gail Pressberg, and on her past association with more radical organizations (among them our own sister organization, the America-Israel Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace).

Gail Pressberg's opponents predicted that admitting the APN to the Conference of Presidents, with Pressberg at its head, would destroy the *Anti-PLO, Anti-Palestinian State Concensus* in the organised Jewish community. It is up to Gail Pressberg and her friends of the APN – now that they gained entrance to the inner sanctum – to prove the correctness of that prediction.

Army embarrassment

Since the deportation of the 415 in December, the military authorities failed to publish a complete list of all deportees. Lists provided at the request of the International Red Cross and of Israeli and international Human Rights organizations turned out to be incomplete and full of errors.

At last, the Jerusalem-based B'tzelem decided to send its own field worker Bassam Id (*see TOI-54/55, p.6*) to the deportees' camp in the Lebanese no-man's-land. Id, himself a Palestinian refugee and a Jordanian citizen, first went to Jordan, from where he intended to go overland to Lebanon – but was stopped at the Syrian border. A second attempt, via Cyprus, was successful. With the help of a Lebanese Member of Parliament, Id got to the deportees' camp, where he stayed for several days. He conducted interviews with all the deportees, collecting information on the circumstances of each one's detention and deportation, as well as on their previous history. On his return, he also carried letters from many deportees to their families.

When news of Id's expedition was published in Israel, the B'tzelem Jerusalem offices were flooded with threatening telephone calls, and death threats

were sprayed on the door at the home of the organization's General Manager, Yizhar Be'er. On television, Knesset Member Moshe Peled of the Tzomet Party accused B'tzelem of being financed by the PLO. In response, peace activist Benny Gefen of Moshav Ben-Ami wrote to KM Peled: *Since you seem interested in B'tzelem's source of funding, here is some information: over the past five years, I have been donating to B'tzelem half of the monthly allowance which the Ministry of Defence gave me after my son was killed in action!*

On February 7, B'tzelem published a report, showing that the number of Palestinians killed by the army rose by 20% during the first six months of the Rabin Government, as compared with the last six months of Shamir. There was also a corresponding rise in the number of Palestinian minors killed. Moreover, B'tzelem – which investigated in detail the circumstances of each case – claimed that in about two-thirds of the cases the soldiers shot without being in life danger.

On February 9, the Knesset Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee heard a testimony on the current security situation by Army Chief-of-Staff Ehud Barak. KM Naomi Hazan of Meretz distributed among the committee members copies of the B'tzelem report. General Barak reacted furiously: *The rise in the number of Palestinians killed exists only inside the sick heads of those who fabricated this nonsense.* He presented the army's own figures, according to which "only 88 Palestinians had been killed by the army in 1992 – not 121, as B'tzelem claims" (*Ha'aretz*, 10.2.93).

Right-wingers, as well as Labor hawks, joined in the attack, accusing B'tzelem of spreading *false and malicious propaganda*. A week later, however, the embarrassed General Barak informed the Knesset that he had been mistaken and that the figures published by B'tzelem were the correct ones. The Chief-of-Staff excused his earlier statements on the grounds that he had been misinformed by his subordinates (*Yediot Aharonot*, 17.2.92).

Contact: B'tzelem, 18 Keren Hayesod, Jerusalem.

Testimonies and images

At the beginning of March, the cinématèques of Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa started showing Ido Sela's documentary film "Eduyot" (Testimonies). The fruit of more than two years' work, the film consists of a series of interviews with Israeli soldiers, about their experiences during the Intifada. Some of the soldiers interviewed spoke of horrific deeds in a dry and matter-of-fact manner. Others were very emotional – like the 23-year old Danny Karmy, who is seen crying bitterly after telling the interviewer about having broken arms and legs of Gazan prisoners. As its maker says, "the film's purpose is not so much to show what the soldiers did, as to what it did to them."

Though Eduyot was made as a television film and as such was already screened by the stations of several European countries, the Israeli Broadcasting Authority

refused to show it. This decision was sharply criticised in the written press, by the journalists who saw Eduyot in the cinématèque and unanimously proclaimed it to be a significant document.

Following the comments, Sela was invited to speak at Gaby Gazit's popular TV talk show, and several excerpts from his film were shown as well. In order to appear "balanced", however, Gazit also invited several reserve officers who accused Sela of treason, for making such a film and showing it to foreigners.

Shortly afterwards, the Film Censorship Board forbade the cinématèques from further showing the film, on the grounds that "it did not receive the proper censorship permits". The cinématèques announced their intention of appealing to the Supreme Court – and Eduyot was soon back on screen.

The "Special Units" of the Israeli army, whose soldiers dress in Arab clothes in order to hunt "wanted" Palestinians, continue to be the center of an ongoing controversy. The Leibovitz affair (*see separate article*) was but one example. Great efforts were made to improve the image of the Special Units (known as the *Mista'arvim* – which is an originally Arab word meaning "would-be-Arabs"). Soldiers of the Mista'arvim were decorated for valour, in much-publicised ceremonies; carefully selected journalists were invited to visit the units' bases and write glowing reports about these young heroes.

Invited on one such visit was Minister of Education and Meretz Leader Shulamit Aloni, formerly a sharp critic of the Special Units – who, following her visit to their base, pronounced herself satisfied that "these soldiers act with self-restraint, and are aware that they are in the service of a democratic society" (*Yediot Aharonot*, 12.2.93).

The refurbished image of the Special Units did not, however, survive untouched for long. A series of interviews with former members appeared in *Ma'ariv's* Friday supplement *Z'man Tel-Aviv*. A three-page interview on February 19 had an introduction reading: *For the first time, two Mista'arvim veterans speak out! About what goes on inside their heads. About the craziness which stays with them also at home. About looking at torn bodies and feeling nothing. About the wanton killing of animals, and about the feeling of having the power over life and death.*

Soon afterwards another affair concerning the Special Units re-opened: the case of soldier Eli Aysha, mistakenly shot to death by his own comrades (*see TOI-53, p.3*). Since Aysha's death, the army has been carrying out an investigation of the case. As these proceedings ended, on February 8, the military prosecution announced that no one is to be prosecuted: neither the two soldiers who actually shot Aysha, nor his commanding officer who ordered him to walk – dressed in Arab clothing and carrying a gun – to the place where other disguised soldiers were waiting in ambush. Denial of promotion was considered a sufficient punishment for that officer's fatal mistake.

The army's decision galvanised into action the

members of the Aysha family. Miri, Eli Aysha's sister, published an open letter to the Army Chief-of-Staff:

Soldiers and officers who stole money from the army got long prison sentences. Is the killing of my brother a lesser offence?

I was able to see the military police's reports, and the transcripts of their investigations. You know these documents. You know that Eli was killed by two, a sergeant and a sub-lieutenant; that the sergeant shot him five times in the back; that he was lying on the ground, severely wounded but still alive; and that the sub-lieutenant fired two bullets to his head, to make sure he was dead. It is unacceptable that the people who did this would go free.

In response, the army came up with a new version of events. On February 25, the army spokesman claimed that, though wounded, Eli Aysha still aimed his gun at the other soldiers, who then shot him in self defence – much the same kind of justification given for the killing of Palestinians! The Aysha family, however, had a few possibilities not usually open to the families of Palestinian victims. For several weeks, Eli Aysha's two sisters and his father were extensively interviewed throughout the media. At the beginning of March, the military authorities announced that the decision not to prosecute the officer would be "re-examined".

The following is excerpted from an interview with Nissim Aysha, conducted by Ada Ushpiz, and published in *Ha'aretz*, on February 26.

I have always been a good Zionist; I fought in three wars as a combat soldier, but I will not let them cover up what was done to my son. Did they raise this child? Did they care for him when he was sick? Did they educate him? ("You should have given him a bit less of a Zionist education", sighs the mother.) They took my son and brought him back in a coffin. Because of a mistake! The least they can do is put those responsible for the mistake on trial.

On June 13-14, an International Conference on Torture is scheduled to take place in Tel-Aviv.

For details: Association of Israeli and Palestinian Physicians for Human Rights, P.O.B. 10235, Tel-Aviv 61101; phone: 972-3-5241828; fax: 972-3-5245343.

■ In July 1922, reserve soldier Offer Yarimy declared his refusal to continue performing military service, due to his opposition to war and militarism, and in particular – to the occupation and oppression of one people by another. He spent a month in prison, and shortly after got a new call-up order, for which he did not show up. Instead, he maintained an extensive correspondence with the military authorities, and met with numerous officers – who all refused to exempt him on grounds of conscience.

On the night of February 20, two plainclothes military policemen arrived at Yerimy's apartment and informed him he had been declared a deserter. (They did behave politely, giving him a few hours to settle personal affairs.) On his arrival at the Tel-Hashomer military lockup, Yarimy started a hunger

strike. Two days later, the prison doctor started feeding him by infusion to the veins.

Meanwhile, the case was taken up by the Israeli branch of WRI (War Resisters International) which alarmed the international protest telegrams network. Also ACRI was approached. After ACRI lawyer Dan Yakir negotiated with the military prosecution, Yarimy underwent an "instant trial" lasting minutes. He received suspended imprisonment and was released from prison – but not from the army. In a new round of correspondence the authorities stated that they consider him a reserve soldier like everybody, liable for call-up orders and for imprisonment in case of non-compliance.

■ WRI has also taken up another case: two highschool boys, who asked the army to exempt them from military service, as they consider themselves to be *pacifists and world citizens, whose allegiance is given to humanity as a whole*. Their repeated correspondence with the military authorities so far remained without success. At the end of the year they are due for conscription.

Contact: WRI, POB 28058, Tel-Aviv 61280

■ During 1992, there were not many Yesh Gvul members imprisoned for refusal to perform military duty in the Occupied Territories. It was not the refusers who changed their behavior but the army: upon refusal, most of the reservists were given other duties, rather than being sent to prison. This new policy of (repressive?) tolerance seems to have been suddenly stopped at the end of February 1993. Within a few weeks, four refusers were imprisoned: Res. Sergeants Yossi Wolfsohn, Jorje Katz and Shlomo Regev, and an officer, Lieutenant Eran Paz. Three of them had refused to serve in Gaza, exactly in the period of rapid escalation. The new tough line against refusers might be due to the growing reluctance of soldiers in general to be deployed in Gaza.

On March 6, dozens of Yesh Gvul supporters shouted greetings to the prisoners from the hill overlooking the Atlit prison.

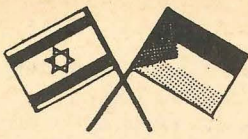
Contact: Yesh Gvul, P.O.B. 6953, Jerusalem 91068; phone: 972-2-434171

REFUSER ON NORTH AMERICA TOUR

Hanoch Livneh, Yesh Gvul spokesperson and military prison recidivist, is presently on a coast to coast speaking tour in North America, lasting till early May.

Details: Friends of Yesh Gvul, 1678 Shattuk Ave, POB 6, Berkeley, CA 94709; phone: (510) 848 9391

■ On January 21, reserve soldiers serving at Rafah in the Gaza Strip sent a petition to the Prime Minister. While on a routine patrol, they had been shot at by Palestinians in ambush and their jeep was hit by eight bullets. Their colonel failed to draw any conclusions from the incident, such as altering patrol routines which are well-known to the Palestinians. "This indifference is endangering our lives", the soldiers concluded. The petition was published on the front pages of Israel's main newspapers. No comment was made by the army.



The professor and the PM

The 90-year old Professor Yeshayahu Leibovitz, prolific in such diverse fields as chemistry, biology, medicine, philosophy and theology, became especially known to the general public for his polemic participation in the public debates of the State of Israel.

Since 1967, Leibovitz became the most sharp-tongued critic of all Israeli governments, regardless of which party was in power. He warned from the very beginning that continued Israeli rule in the Occupied Territories would inevitably corrupt and brutalise Israeli society. At every occasion he publicly called upon soldiers to refuse service in the Occupied Territories. Thus, the January 17 announcement of Leibovitz's nomination for the Israel Prize – the country's highest civil award – immediately caused a controversy.

The granting of the Israel Prize has, in fact, always been influenced by political considerations. In particular, the favorites of the Minister of Education, who appoints the jury, always have a slightly better chance. Immediately upon assuming this ministry, Meretz Leader Shulamit Aloni made a special effort to get Leibovitz included among this year's ten winners of the prize. Leibovitz is the idol of many younger Meretz members; and during the euphoria of the Rabin Government's first months, when peace seemed imminent, there seemed no significance to the differences between Leibovitz's positions and those of the Meretz leadership. However, by the time Aloni's hand-picked jury nominated Leibovitz, the Meretz leadership had disgraced itself by the deportations – for which Leibovitz attacked them pitilessly (TOI-54/55, p.9).

The Leibovitz nomination was furiously attacked by the right. Likud-supporting reserve soldiers even threatened to refuse military service, should the award be granted. (Leibovitz told them to go ahead with his blessing.) Prime Minister Rabin, whose ceremonial role it is to hand the Israel Prize to the winners on Independence Day, was far from pleased – but found that it was not legally possible to overturn the jury's decision.

Many commentators expected Leibovitz to tone down his criticism of the government, at least until the award-giving ceremony in April. Some suggested that he had been bought off. Leibovitz soon disabused them of this notion: invited to speak as the guest of honor at our February 22 ICIPP conference in Tel-Aviv, Leibovitz enumerated the recent cases where soldiers shot Palestinian children to death, and stated: *The Israeli army's 'Special Units' are our Hamas. They are common terrorists.*

Leibovitz's new statement reverberated through the country, repeated on every news broadcast. For the government, the comparison was too much. On January 24, the bulk of the weekly cabinet meeting was devoted to Leibovitz, and the cabinet published a statement strongly condemning him (drafted by Meretz minister Yossi Sarid). Rabin announced that

he would boycott the award-giving ceremony, since "it is inconceivable that I would have to shake hands with that man".

On the evening of that day, an ironic Professor Leibovitz appeared on television announcing his renunciation of the prize. "Far be it from me to cause our esteemed Prime Minister such anguish. It is sufficient to have had the honor of being nominated by the members of the jury."

ICIPP addresses Christopher

On February 18, an ICIPP delegation headed by Major-General (ret.) Matti Peled visited the U.S. Embassy in Tel-Aviv. During an hour-long discussion with embassy officials, the ICIPP members called upon the United States to resume direct contact with the PLO leadership in order to restart the Middle East peace process, derailed by the deportations. Peled said that adherence to "the Madrid formula" has ended in a stalemate at the negotiating table and a fast escalating confrontation in the Occupied Territories, claiming ever new casualties on both sides. "The new administration in Washington should take a fresh look, rather than remain stuck to outworn formulas" he said. Peled added that considerable forces inside the Rabin cabinet itself, and among its political and parliamentary supporters, are in favor of Israel starting direct talks with the PLO; a U.S. move in that direction would encourage these forces, and impart a renewed dynamism to the whole peace process.

At the end of the meeting, the embassy officials promised to deliver to Secretary of State Christopher, then due to arrive in Israel, a letter signed by all members of the ICIPP executive.

The following is the concluding part of the letter.

We believe that direct communication between all parties to the conflict is inevitable in order to enhance realistic chances for peace in the region. What lies at the root of the present frustrating and futile attempts to achieve any progress is the fact that a major party to the conflict, namely the PLO, is banned from the process. Evidently, inviting them to participate openly in the process would entail the need to give their basic point of view at least a fair hearing. Without it, the situation not only remains stagnant but keeps deteriorating, as is so tragically demonstrated by the illegitimate deportation of hundreds of Palestinians, with the lame excuse that such a move would facilitate the peace process.

This unfortunate situation makes it, in our view, imperative that the U.S. establish a working relationship with the PLO in an effort to prevent further deterioration.

Full text from: ICIPP, POB 2542, Holon, Israel.

Matti Peled will be in London from April 28 to May 3, to attend an international meeting of Generals for Peace and Disarmament.

Contact: Center for Int. Peace phone: 0608-642335