

The Other Israel

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COUNTDOWN

Until the last moment it was far from certain if and when the ninth round of the Washington peace talks would open. For the Palestinians, resuming the talks while the four hundred deportees remain in their Lebanese tent camp was a difficult decision; the personal intervention of PLO leader Yasser Arafat was needed to convince the reluctant Haidar Abd-el-Shafi, chief Palestinian negotiator, to take the plane to Washington.

The resumed talks opened in a mood of marked optimism. The Israeli negotiators presented a set of new proposals which, at first glance, seemed promising. Some good-will gestures were made in the Occupied Territories, the most conspicuous being the return of thirty Palestinians deported before the Intifada; they were received at the Jordan River bridges by thousands of jubilant Palestinians, in scenes fleetingly reminiscent of the euphoria following the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991. In Jerusalem, the cabinet doves - headed by Foreign Minister Peres - made a series of public statements going far beyond the official government policy, seemingly with the tacit consent of Prime Minister Rabin.

Both the press and the politicians discussed in detail the idea of forming, in the near future, a Palestinian police force. Police Minister Shachal traveled to Nablus, where he discussed the idea with local PLO supporters. For their part, Israeli settlers in the Occupied Territories received with great alarm the idea of armed Palestinians challenging the settlers' present monopoly on weapons. In turn, the settlers' angry statements and threats increased the general feeling that an agreement, including fundamental changes in the status-quo, was indeed imminent.

The optimistic mood did not last much more than a week. Rabin silenced the doves by a few angry remarks at the cabinet meeting, and reasserted the official policy. (Peres had to retract his earlier call for direct negotiations with the PLO.) And at Washington, the new Israeli proposals turned out, on close examination, to contain not much more than "old merchandise in new wrapping" - as the Palestinians put it. Thus, the Israeli negotiators agreed to let the elected Palestinian council have some legislative power - an idea which they hitherto

opposed. But the concession was effectively annulled by the stipulation that Israel would have veto power over each and every piece of Palestinian legislation.

The fundamental negotiations impasse remained the same: the Palestinians wanted some assurance about the definite solution which would follow after five years of "autonomy"; the Israeli negotiators refused to make any reference to that definite solution, not even to promise that it would be based on the principle of "territory in return for peace" - even though that was the Israeli Labour Party's main slogan for decades.

No progress was achieved either at the parallel Israeli-Syrian talks. The Syrians continued to demand - as a condition for discussing the details of future peaceful relations with Israel - to know the extent of the intended Israeli territorial withdrawal from the Golan Heights; the Israeli negotiators were just as adamant in refusing to talk in detail about withdrawal, until the Syrians first specify the peaceful relations.

The Middle East negotiations process, which started at Madrid and continued in Washington, was designed with the implicit idea that the U.S. would involve itself at the highest level and intervene to break through deadlocks. However, what energy the Clinton Administration had for solving regional conflicts was mainly directed to the Bosnian Crisis (where its performance was far from brilliant).

The Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab talks were left in charge of low-ranking State Department officials. Only at the very end of the ninth round did the Americans make a belated effort to negotiate a common Israeli-Palestinian statement. But the American draft, prepared in consultation with the Israeli delegation, was regarded by the Palestinians as biased; and the delegations returned from another failed round of talks, to find an ever more grim and threatening situation in the Occupied Territories.

For Rabin, the gestures made at the beginning of May - such as the return of the thirty Palestinian deportees - did not signify a fundamental change of the army's behaviour in the Occupied Territories, but mere tactical concessions which he grudgingly had to make, as the price for re-starting the talks.

Rabin was told by his military advisers that such concessions had the effect of weakening the military government's authority and diminishing its deterrent power. (The military governors were especially alarmed about the fact that thousands of Palestinians had gathered to welcome the returned deportees, waving Palestinian flags and singing national songs under the soldiers' eyes.) Rabin authorised military commanders on the ground to take all actions necessary to "restore order, reduce acts of violence, and fight terrorism".

The results were recorded by a special Amnesty International team, despatched to the Middle East:

The month of May already registered the highest monthly death toll since the end of 1992, with up to 24 people shot dead by Israeli forces. Amnesty International believes that many of these killings are absolutely unjustifiable, and that some may amount to extra-judicial executions. Amnesty International is also concerned that the use of massive firepower by Israeli forces, against dwellings in which Palestinians suspected of serious crimes are alleged to be hiding, may amount to collective punishment (Amnesty International Special Report, 27.5.93).

At the same time, the Palestinian population was feeling, more and more heavily, the crushing burden of the closure imposed on the Occupied Territories at the end of March. After nearly three decades of forced economic integration – with Israel inhibiting economic growth in the Territories and channeling their inhabitants into the role of cheap labor in the Israeli economy – the Rabin government attempted to reverse the trend virtually overnight, cutting 120,000 Palestinian workers off from their jobs with no previous warning.

The closure decision was originally taken as a tactical step, in order to prevent knife-wielding Palestinians from reaching the main Israeli population centers – as they did, to devastating effect, during March. As the closure continued, other justifications and reasonings were added, making continuation of the closure into a virtual panacea. As with the deportations, Rabin got a wide political support for this act: the right-wing opposition mostly supported it, as it regularly supports any measure of collective punishment against the Palestinians. (An exception were some of the settlers in the Occupied Territories, who feared that – with the Palestinians bottled up in the Territories – Palestinian anger and frustration would be directed at the settlers.)

On the "left", the closure initially got the full support of the Meretz ministers. But under pressure from the Meretz rank-and-file, some of whom participated in protest actions against the closure, the party's ministers became increasingly more vocal in demanding measures to help the distressed Palestinian workers – from paying them unemployment benefits to starting large-scale public works projects in the Occupied Territories. Very little came of these proposals – due especially to the opposition of Finance Minister Shohat, who fought nail and tooth against any proposal involving a new budgetary expense.

Shohat's idea (which, in turn, was vetoed by Rabin) was to end the closure – out of concern, not for the Palestinians, but for the Israeli economy. In particular two branches were hit severely by the loss of their cheap labor pool – the farmers and building contractors, both of whom were putting pressure on the government, some of their demonstrations running into violence.

The government partially mollified them by allowing a restricted number of Palestinian workers to come back, and authorizing the introduction of cheap labor from elsewhere. (Thailand seems, at the moment, the most popular source; during a recent visit to China, Foreign Minister Peres explored the possibility of importing workers from there as well.) Another measure tried, though with only partial success, was to toughen the laws concerning unemployment benefits – in an effort to force young unemployed Israelis to take the hard jobs vacated by the Palestinians.

A soldier stationed in the Gaza Strip told *Ha'olam Hazeh* about dozens of refugee children scrambling and fighting each other, to get a single orange which had fallen out of his pocket. Still, Israeli military and civil officials repeatedly deny that the Palestinian population's situation has reached the level of starvation. They are probably right, in the sense that – even with unemployment reaching the 50% mark, and in certain areas passing it – nearly all Palestinians are still able to give themselves and their children at least one meal of some kind each day, though this becomes increasingly difficult. Reports from the Occupied Territories tell of people using up all of their accumulated savings and taking up any available work – even at a half or quarter of their previous (already meager) salaries; of people with a small plot of land reverting to subsistence farming, while those

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who possess no land become increasingly dependent on charity.

The Gaza Strip, which always had the most fragile economy in the Occupied Territories, suffers most acutely. Half of its workforce is normally working in Israel, and most of the others – in commerce, services and agriculture – are dependent upon the money brought into the Gazan economy by the workers.

A special problem of a different kind appeared in East Jerusalem, which was cut off by the closure from its hinterland. When declaring the closure to be effective along Israel's border with the Occupied Territories, the Rabin government adhered to the official fiction that East Jerusalem is a part of Israel, having been unilaterally annexed in 1967.

The line demarked by the victorious Israel after the Six Day War was quite arbitrary, dividing Palestinian villages, towns and neighborhoods. In the intervening 26 years, the Palestinian inhabitants, in their daily life, usually ignored it – but with the closure, it has suddenly become an impassable barrier, separating the outlying towns from their commercial, cultural and political center, and denying to the East Jerusalemite merchants most of their customers.

Inhabitants of the entire West Bank were deprived of access to the East Jerusalem hospitals – the best among Palestinian ones – and to the Muslim and Christian holy places. The West Bank was practically cut in two, since the main road connecting its northern and southern parts passes through Jerusalem. This the Palestinians regard as a foretaste of Rabin's "autonomy", from which East Jerusalem is to be excluded. In this way, the closure had the unintended effect of placing the thorny problem of Jerusalem at the top of the agenda, contrary to Rabin's intention.

In informal exchanges – open and secret – between the two sides, an issue not included in the official agenda at Washington is seriously considered: the idea of an early withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. In Israeli political circles, this step is gaining increasing support, as a possible way out of the deadlock. Having previously rejected the idea out of hand, Prime Minister Rabin is now reportedly willing to consider it, though with numerous conditions and restrictions.

For their part, the Palestinians are attracted by the idea of freeing at least a small part of the homeland from Israeli occupation, but wary of the possibility that by so doing they would implicitly legitimize the continuation of Israeli rule in the West Bank. In a recent interview to Israeli journalists (*Ha'aretz*, 11.6.'93), PLO leader Yasser Arafat made a counter-suggestion: the Palestinians would be willing, as a first step, to take over administration of the Gaza Strip, provided that at least one West Bank town – for example Jericho – be handed over at the same time. Arafat's proviso seems, however, unacceptable to Rabin – and there the matter rests, at least for the time being.

As this issue goes into print, the delegations are preparing to start the tenth round of the Washington

negotiations. Once again, the newspapers are full of cautiously optimistic predictions – though among both Israelis and Palestinians, the mood is more sceptical than ever. In the Occupied Territories, the tensions are building up, and the prestige of the Palestinian negotiators – and of the Palestinian leadership as a whole – goes steadily down. In the Gaza Strip, armed supporters of Arafat's own Fatah faction decided to team up with armed members of the radical Islamic Hamas movement, for the purpose of indiscriminately killing any Israelis they encounter. Unless the Washington talks bring up a concrete result in the near future, their example may become widely followed.

The editor

No to starvation!

Of the Israeli mass media, it was *Hadashot* which did the most to let citizens know about the Palestinians' hardships due to the closure. The paper devoted five pages to the diary of Mahmud Jaber Ganani, an inhabitant of Shati Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip – describing in simple and unemotional words the grim reality of life under closure. Following the publication, dozens of readers wrote to *Hadashot*, enclosing donations and asking the editor to pass them on to the Gaza refugees. Rivka Zehavi of Netanya, who gave 400 Shekels, wrote: "We are not a rich family, but we have all the necessities of daily life. I can't sleep when I think of people whose one sack of flour is finished and they can't buy a new one. What the government did to them is terrible" (*Hadashot*, 28.5.93).

Meanwhile, actors Sinai Peter and Yigal Ezraty started to hold public readings of the Ganani Diary.

Several Israeli organizations began to send regular truckloads of food into the Occupied Territories. *Hadash* trucks, loaded with food mostly donated by Arab villagers in the north of Israel and accompanied by *Hadash* Knesset Members, were several times stopped by soldiers at the entrance to the Gaza Strip. The army demanded that the food be handed over to its own "civilian liaison officers", who would take care of its distribution – to which the *Hadash* leaders flatly refused. Thereupon, the trucks were turned back – later to arrive at their goal in the refugee camps, using side-tracks.

The army was a bit more tolerant towards two other groups involved in sending weekly food trucks to Gaza: the Mapam-affiliated Kibbutz Giv'at Haviva, and a group of some twenty Be'er She'ba activists, who united on this issue. The trucks organised by these groups were permitted to enter the Occupied Territories and unload their cargo undisturbed.

The newly-founded *Gush Shalom* decided, in consultation with the Gaza trade unions, to send money rather than food (*see separate article*).

The organisers of the relief actions do not always have an easy job. Yaela Granot of Giv'at Haviva told *Hadashot*: "It is very sad that, out of hundreds of Kibbutzim in Israel, only ten agreed thus far to give

donations. I sometimes hear people say such things as *why should we feed our enemies?* which makes me very angry. But I don't take "No" for an answer, I write and telephone to all the Kibbutzim again and again, and in the end they give in and make a donation" (*Hadashot*, 4.6.93).

■ *Closure and hunger will not bring peace!* was the main slogan of a vigil held on April 16 outside the Prime Minister's residence. Though only some ten people participated, it got into the television evening news, due to them being all well-known public figures, among them Uri Avnery and Matti Peled (ICIPP), Dr. Binyamin Cohen, Prof. Saul Vogel and the poet Yevy (Yona Ben Yehuda) – who initiated the action.

■ On April 21, twenty Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations held a press conference at the roadblock separating East Jerusalem from the rest of the Occupied Territories. While they were reading out a joint statement, condemning the closure and detailing its disastrous effects, a military officer arrived with a document declaring the area around the roadblock "a closed military zone" and ordering them to leave. One of the many lawyers present remarked that the press conference was taking place in the territory annexed to Israel, where the police – rather than the army – had jurisdiction. The officer came back half an hour later, after having been reassured by his superiors – but by then the press conference was over.

■ On April 23, the Haifa Coordinating Committee of Peace Groups organised a demonstration against the closure in the center of Haifa, after which many of the participants went with a truck of food to refugee camps in the West Bank Jenin area.

■ For three consecutive weeks, dozens participated in a weekly vigil against the closure in Tel-Aviv's Dizengoff Center, organised by the Anarchist Youths. On May 13, after a violent confrontation with right-wingers, the police dispersed them and forbade continuation of the vigil. Thereupon the Meretz Youth started to picket the Defence Ministry – with the conspicuous slogan *The closure feeds the knives.*

■ The TOI-staff got involved in a little action of its own. It is best explained by Beate Zilversmidt's "letter to the editor" which was published in several Israeli newspapers.

Always, when the situation is bad we speak through the telephone with our friend from the West Bank.

A., who is 27, and until the closure was one of those hard working, underpaid and unprotected Arab workers – continues to have an open mind, and wants to hear how we are, what we think about the situation, etc. But last week he was really in a bad mood: no work, no money, no more high hopes for peace, only a closure without an end. Then he said: 'Perhaps I should use the time to go back to school, and learn some English; there is a possibility in Hebron but it costs a lot of money.'

We were very happy with the spark of light and offered to collect for him the 400 Shekels (\$ 150).

A week later he phoned to thank us. 'I bought for it seven sacks of flour and gave it to seven families in my village, after writing on each: from a couple of Israelis who are for peace.' And about his plans to learn English: 'Perhaps later, when the closure is over. When whole families have nothing to eat, it is not the time to spend money on my own behalf.'

On May 19, we met A. face to face. We participated in a Gush Shalom protest in Jerusalem during the so-called "United Jerusalem Day". At the spot where the army stops the Palestinians, we stood with signs: *Free passage for all – or an international border!*

A. who was present on the other side of the road block, could not join us; we had to cross over to him. He was bashful, afraid to draw the soldiers' attention. The envelope with some more money he put hastily under his clothes. He told that a number of friends had wanted to join him, but that he didn't want to frighten us by waiting for us with ten Palestinians ...

Hotline on the barricades

For over a year Kav La'Oved (Workers' Hotline) has been publicizing the fact that Palestinian workers from the Occupied Territories employed in Israel pay from their salaries a significant percentage for social security but receive almost nothing in return. A government decision from 1970 denies them such benefits as unemployment payments, child allocations, old-age pensions, etc. Extensive research was conducted and KMs, ministers, as well as international labor organizations were informed.

The problem was first taken up by Kav La'Oved after the closure of the Territories during the Gulf War – leaving hundreds of thousands of Palestinians without income. It became acute again this year with the renewed closure of the Occupied Territories pushing the already poor over the line of hunger. The injustice of denying Palestinian workers unemployment benefits became a real media issue and the figures compiled by Kav La'Oved were again and again quoted by politicians and journalists.

In May a representative of Kav La'Oved was invited to the Knesset Labor and Welfare Committee to present Kav La'Oved's findings; as a result, the committee members announced that they would not support the proposed Equalization Levy Law, which would legitimize the current unjust situation.

On May 6, Kav La'Oved held a panel discussion in East Jerusalem, mainly directed at the press, diplomatic community and civil rights groups. Participants included Prof. Frances Radai from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a specialist in labor law, and Dov Peleg, director of the social security department in the Histadrut Trade Union Federation, and a specialist in pension plans and management of pension funds. The debate was chaired by Hagai Forschner, the economic reporter of the daily newspaper *Davar*.

While differing in their analysis and proposals for solutions, both Radai and Peleg agreed that the existing situation discriminates against Palestinian workers and leaves them with no sources of support in old age or during periods of forced unemployment, such as the ongoing closure, when tens of thousands of workers are prevented from reaching their jobs in Israel. Prof. Radai stressed that using the funds collected from Palestinian workers under the title of "social security" for other purposes did not answer the problem, since these are individual deductions and must be used for individual rights and benefits. "The money should be allocated for the purpose for which it was collected, to the people who have it as a vested right from their labor," Radai stated.

Publications about the social insurance and a full transcript of the panel debate (\$2) available from: Kav La'Oved, POB 2319 Tel Aviv 61022.

Gush Shalom – a new start

by Adam Keller

The deportation of 415 Palestinians, last December – by a government hitherto considered a "peace coalition" – confronted Israeli peace activists with the urgent need of regrouping. Many of the institutions the peace movement had been relying on for years had become inadequate overnight: The Meretz leaders – former evangelists of human rights, had become government ministers, who voted for – and vehemently defended – the deportations. And despite the widespread anger among the Meretz grassroots activists, these ministers remained in control of the party.

For its part, the Peace Now movement did hold one demonstration against the deportations (*TOI 54/55*, p. 8,9) but afterwards fell silent on the subject. Drawing its support from much the same circles as the parties now in power, with whom it maintained long-standing political ties, the Peace Now leadership seems in agony whenever there is a call from the grassroots activists to sharply oppose government policies. What was lacking was a non-partisan body which could speak out quickly and with a clear voice; a body which would feel no constraint in opposing the infringement of human rights by this government, whose policies unfortunately continue to be based on the logic of being an occupation power.

The role of carrying on the independent struggle for peace – and justice – fell to the nucleus of activists who established the Jewish-Arab Campaign Against Deportation. JACAD was relatively successful in mobilizing some of the frustrated Meretz voters, and carried out several successful actions: a much-publicized petition, signed by thousands; a six-week long protest tent camp overlooking the Prime Minister's office; and a torchlight procession in Jerusalem with the participation of hundreds of Jewish – and thousands of Arab – Israelis (*TOI-56,6*).

By mid-March, however, JACAD found itself in an impasse. The Rabin government succeeded in acquiescing the Clinton administration – as well as the Security Council – with much less than "bringing the deportees back immediately", as JACAD demanded (in accordance with Security Council Resolution 799).

Among activists it was generally felt that JACAD had outlived its possibilities and that the momentum should be used for a more general anti-occupation approach, especially since it became increasingly clear that general conditions under occupation were deteriorating by the day. A major issue to be dealt with was the closure imposed upon the Occupied Territories.

Despite the extreme hardships which being cut off from working in Israel brought to the Palestinians, many "peace seeking" government loyalists came out in favor of the closure, on the grounds that it was "recreating the pre-'67 border" and bringing closer "the separation between the two peoples, which alone could bring peace."

The intense debate on the closure revealed a deeper division, between Israelis who – while all of them agree that the occupation must end – have great differences with regard to what should follow: some wanting Israel to disengage from its Arab environment, withdraw in itself and cultivate a Western identity – while others see military withdrawal from the Occupied Territories as a mere prelude to Israel's integration into the Middle East.

The new situation clearly required a change of focus. After a series of meetings in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem a quite ambitious project emerged: to found a new movement, which would oppose the occupation in all its manifestations, which would be independent of the Rabin government and its constituent parties, and which would seek to become "a significant voice which could not be ignored". A major task indeed for a band of activists meeting in cafés and private homes for lack of fixed premises.

The new movement – given the name **Gush Shalom** (Peace Bloc) – started its career with few assets apart from the activists' determination and a small fund of ready cash (among others, a sum originally intended for the legal defence of peace activists prosecuted for meeting PLO representatives – a purpose made redundant with the legalization of such meetings).

Collection of signatures began on **The 1993 Peace Manifesto**, setting out the new movement's principles. Earlier than intended, rumors of the new initiative had reached the press. *Hadashot* published in its weekend edition of April 23 a garbled account, together with unflattering comments by Meretz minister Yossi Sarid. Five days later, on April 28, **Gush Shalom** formally presented itself and its manifesto at a Tel-Aviv press conference. The press conference was well-attended, and extensively covered by the printed and electronic media, and it signaled the beginning of a debate on the "letters to the editor" columns.

Gush Shalom undertook a series of small-scale

actions. During April and May, dozens of its supporters in Jerusalem held weekly vigils on early morning hours at the military roadblock south of Jerusalem – to protest the closure, as *an inhuman measure leading towards Apartheid*, and demand *Free passage for all – or an international border!*

After the government agreed to repatriate 30 Palestinian long-time deportees, a large **Gush Shalom** delegation traveled to the West Bank town of Al-Bireh, where they held a public meeting with the returned deportees and other Palestinian activists. (Former Al-Bireh Mayor Saleh Abd Al Jawad was one of the returned deportees.) The meeting was held in a cordial atmosphere, turning emotional when some of the veteran Israeli activists met with Palestinians whom they still knew from before their deportation.

The Gush Shalom manifesto

The occupation has become an intolerable burden for both peoples.

The Israeli public gave the Rabin Government a mandate to make peace "within six to nine months". Instead of fulfilling this promise, the government continues with the Shamir government's policies, and even aggravates the situation in the Occupied Territories. The support of the dovish Meretz ministers for the Rabin policies, and their voting for the mass deportation of Palestinian activists, have sown confusion and despair among Israeli peace seekers. The Israeli Peace Camp has been severely damaged – at the very time when the chances for peace are better than ever.

A new mobilisation is needed. Peace seekers must be united into a body with a clear message! **Gush Shalom** (The Peace Block) undertakes this task. **Gush Shalom** is a non-party organisation of Jews and Arabs in Israel, which is open to every man and woman willing to work together for:

- An end to violence, oppression and settlement in the Occupied Territories.
- Opening direct negotiations with the PLO.
- Achievement of full peace with the Palestinian people and with the Arab states.
- Full equality between Jews and Arabs in Israel.

Peace requires withdrawal from all territories occupied since the June 1967 War, and recognition of the principle of "Two States for Two Peoples".

ONLY PEACE IS SECURITY

While carrying out such actions, the activists' main energy was directed to organising a major demonstration, scheduled for June 5 – the anniversary of Israeli rule in the Occupied Territories. In order to break through the routine of which the Israeli public – and the journalists – have become sick and tired, it was decided to let the demonstration take place not on a square in Tel-Aviv or Jerusalem, but in the Occupied Territories – where interaction of Israeli demonstrators with the Palestinian population and

with soldiers could turn a demonstration into a significant event.

The plan finally approved, at the end of April, called for private cars to start from different spots around the country, to travel in convoy and converge upon Erez Checkpoint at the Gaza Strip entrance, where a rally would be held – culminating in a symbolic action of marking the future peace border between Israel and Palestine. From there, a truck with food would try to get to the Gaza Strip refugee camps, with their poor population hard-hit by the closure.

Throughout the whole of May, **Gush Shalom's** new one-room office in Tel-Aviv became a hive of activity. An all-volunteer team worked late into the night, sending letters of invitation and telephoning endless lists of potential participants. Other activists traveled throughout the country, meeting with local peace groups in different towns, trying to locate reliable regional coordinators in the outlying areas. Organizing several caravans, to start from different points and arrive simultaneously at the same spot, required quite some logistics.

Liaison was also established with the Gaza Federation of Trade Unions – regarded as an impartial organization, on good terms with all Palestinian political factions. The unions agreed to receive the aid collected, and to organize Palestinian activists to reach Erez Checkpoint from its Palestinian side. In order to collect the aid **Gush Shalom** tables were set up on Israeli streets, near theaters and cinemateques where at certain hours peace-minded Israelis spend their leisure hours.

At the Gaza unionists' request, a change was made in the plans: instead of buying food in Israel and shipping it to Gaza, as other groups had done (*see separate article*); **Gush Shalom** would give the money and let food be bought in the Gaza Strip – where three times more food could be bought for the same amount of money; moreover, buying the food in Gaza would help the local commerce and agriculture, severely damaged by the loss in the workers' purchasing power. (Altogether, the money collected by **Gush Shalom** and delivered to the Gaza unions, approached the sum of 10,000 Shekels).

Also much attention was given to informing the media. Israeli television and radio, with its divisions for Hebrew, Arabic, English and Russian; national newspapers and local ones in the area of Israel near the Gaza Strip – as well Palestinian ones in the Strip itself – were all alerted days in advance of the action, and were again addressed to be informed of last minute details.

In mobilising participants for the action, several obstacles had to be overcome. It turned out that the idea of going in the direction of the Gaza Strip – even without entering – was frightening away a number of people. Some of the approached expressed fear of violent attacks by settlers; others – of embittered, desperate Palestinians who make no distinction between Israelis.

At the last moment **Peace Now** announced its own June 5 action (*see sep. article*). The **Peace Now**

leadership was not willing to schedule its action on a different hour so as to make it possible, for those who wanted, to participate in both the Peace Now vigils and the Gush Shalom caravan (for which the invitations had already been sent out).

Furthermore, the Communist Party – which still enjoys a considerable following among Israel's Arab citizens – regarded Gush Shalom as such a dangerous rival that its leaders took pains to mobilize the party for the Peace Now action. Still, a number of individual Communists did come to Erez Checkpoint to take part in an action whose slogans were much more close to their own party's program.

On the morning of June 5, the cars of the Peace Caravan could be clearly identified, moving southward in long lines on the Israeli highways. Each car sported placards, bearing the slogan *No to the closure! No to starvation! No to occupation!* in Hebrew and Arabic; and each car trailed a long green strip of cloth, symbolizing "The Green Line" (pre-'67 border). Meeting at Yad Mordechai Junction, the different convoys merged and traveled together the last few kilometres. Altogether, there were some 150 private cars, plus two buses chartered for demonstrators who didn't get a ride.

At the Erez Checkpoint, the demonstrators were welcomed by Dr. Haider Abd-el-Shafi, head of the Palestinian negotiating team, who as such was allowed to pass the checkpoint. There was also a considerable force of police. Some five hundred participants quickly piled out of their cars and set up their colourful signs: *Here is the border between Israel and Palestine* (with the two flags); and *Rabin, make peace – or resign!* A large Yesh Gvul (There is a border) sign conspicuously showed the relevance of its name – (next to the border beyond which the group's members refuse military service).

A small space was cleared in the middle of the crowd, and megaphones were brought up. Abd-el-Shafi spoke first, providing the many journalists present with a scoop: "We decided to attend the tenth round of the Washington talks and give the peace process another chance; the demonstration of today increases my conviction to go ahead."

According to a previous decision, the speakers for Gush Shalom were not not so much public personalities as grassroots activists: Hana Knaz of Kibbutz Gan Shmuel and Arabiya Mansur of Tira Village, a Jewish and an Arab woman who had both toiled hard to organize this demonstration. Hana Knaz emphasized that *this is only the beginning. Gush Shalom wants to continue and conduct an effective struggle for peace, wake up all those who in principle agree with us but who are still reluctant to act.* Arabiya Mansur expressed the need for Israelis to accept an independent state of Palestine, just as the Palestinians have come to accept the State of Israel.

The best-laid plans never work perfectly. The plan to mark the future Israeli-Palestinian border by painting the Green Line on the road was rudely interrupted by the police. Then we learned that a

hundred Palestinian activists had arrived from Gaza, but were not allowed to cross to the Israeli side.

The crowd surged spontaneously forward, seeking to cross the checkpoint – only to be pushed back by the police cordon. A group of youngsters started chanting: *Medinat Mishtara!* (Police State!). The impasse lasted some ten minutes. But in hurried negotiations with the police, a compromise was achieved: we would be allowed to cross the barrier, provided that it was done in small groups and not as a mass.

We streamed across Erez Checkpoint; some of the soldiers manning it were (contrary to the police) quite friendly, smiling broadly; it seems that the whole excitement enlivened for them a usually boring duty.

On the other side, Palestinian men and women were waiting with excited faces. After hurried handshaking, we entered the shed where – before the closure – Palestinian workers used to wait for their Israeli employers. There, an improvised second rally took place.

Rasem Biary, head of the Gazan unions, took the megaphone to say: *Welcome to the Gaza Prison!* Thereafter, Israeli and Palestinian speakers alternated, with the audience breaking in, shouting: *Down with the Occupation!* and *Peace Yes – Occupation No!* and *Gazans don't despair – we will end the occupation yet!*

It was this scene – Uri Avnery (ICIPP) making a speech, while enthusiastic Israelis and Palestinians, totally mixed, raise their hands in the V-for-victory gesture – which was broadcast that evening into every house in Israel.

To continue operating, Gush Shalom urgently needs financial help from the friends of peace in Israel and abroad.

Checks (made out to Asher Davidy) can be sent to: Gush Shalom, POB 11112, Tel-Aviv 61110.

■ On June 4, to mark the occupation anniversary, Yesh Gvul and the Woman in Black joined together their weekly vigils, with dozens of activists participating.

■ Peace Now originally considered holding on June 5 a torchlight march in Jerusalem, but abandoned the idea for fear of low participation. Instead, more limited action was taken. In the big cities and at intercity junctions, especially in the north of the country, dozens of activists held signs and raised aloft giant helium balloons bearing the slogan: *There is a mandate for peace!* Thousands of leaflets, calling for acceleration of the peace talks, were distributed on the Tel-Aviv sea shore – and unlike on previous occasions, were well received by the sun-bathers.

■ Near the book fair in Tel-Aviv and in the center of Nazareth Hadash organized vigils to mark the fifth of June, holding signs: *Israel and Palestine – two states for two peoples!* In several Arab towns the Hadash branches held public meetings. In the Galilee town Sakhnin police detained for several hours the main

speaker ... the town's mayor. He was charged with having "supported terrorism", by expressing in his speech support for the Intifada...

The Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence and Palestinians and Israelis for Nonviolence invite participants to join their international conference scheduled for September 7-8, in East Jerusalem, on:
Nonviolent Action in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
Registration: Amos Gvirtz, Kibbutz Sh'fayim, Israel 60990

Dialogue diary

Between April 9 and 16, Peace Now youths participated in a London seminar, together with young Palestinians. Lior Kay gave the following account:

A whole lot of groups and institutions were involved in organising this seminar, such as The Young Leadership Forum, the left-Zionist Habonim-Dror Youth Movement, and the American School in London, which gave its premises. There were twelve Palestinian youths from the Territories, and we of the Peace Now Youth were also twelve. Other participants were Jewish and Palestinian youths living in London.

Many journalists from the British media were waiting for us when we entered the meeting hall. They started to interview us and asked what we thought would be the outcome of this seminar, as if these were the real peace negotiations. Also present were all kinds of British politicians and officials making speeches and welcoming us.

All this bustle was not entirely positive. Many of the youths started to talk to the media instead of each other, and tried to score points. It made them represent not their own positions, but what they thought was the mainstream position back home.

On the first day, documentary films were shown to us. Some of the Israelis started to grumble that the films were too pro-Arab.

In fact, the positions of the participants were not too far from each other. All Israelis were for negotiations with the PLO, and all Palestinians – for peace with Israel. But the Israelis and Palestinians started to provoke each other with statements such as *Zionism is racism*, or *The Intifada is terrorism*, and there was very much shouting. I started to fear that the whole thing would end in a big fiasco, and that the right-wingers in Israel would have a big laugh.

Perhaps the turning point was when the PLO ambassador in London, Afif Safieh, invited us to have dinner at his home, without the media.

He was very nice and talked in a fascinating way about many subjects, but at a certain moment he became a bit fatherly and reprimanded us all – the Israelis and the Palestinians – for our quarrels. He asked us to stop using slogans, start really listening to each other, and focus on concrete issues.

On the following morning, at the seminar, the problems started again, until a boy from Ramallah asked to speak. He spoke very emotionally; he said we were all forgetting why we had come to this seminar;

that we should remember that in the occupation there are no victors, only suffering for the two peoples. He succeeded in moving some of us to tears. I also spoke. I said the same kind of things. It was the only way to break the barrier.

From that moment on things began improving more and more. We decided to make a simulation of the peace negotiations, and divided into working groups about water, economic development etc. It worked out well. We discussed the problems in detail and in good spirit, and reached agreement on most points.

In the end it was difficult even to remember what our shouting match was all about.

Contact: Peace Now Youth, POB 6733, Tel Aviv 61066.

■ Other Israeli visitors to Afif Safieh's London home were the young Labor Knesset Member Yossi Katz and his wife. According to *Ha'aretz*, which reported on the meeting (May 5), Katz and Safieh talked for three hours about the peace process and Israeli-Palestinian relations. The paper added that the two men spoke English, while their wives conversed in French.

■ Another Labor KM, Prof. Yoram Las – a physician and medical researcher by profession – was invited, already at the end of 1992, to meet with Dr. Fathi Arafat, head of the Palestinian Red Crescent and the brother of Yasser Arafat.

In January, Las announced he would not accept the invitation without the approval of prime Minister Rabin (*TOI-56*, p.5). On May 15, however, he did meet with Fathi Arafat in Cairo, discussing Israeli-Palestinian cooperation in the field of health. Dr. Arafat told of his efforts to raise funds for improved medical services in the Occupied Territories. For his part, KM Las offered to help in establishing a medical school in the Territories, where medical personnel could be trained.

■ On May 20, Labor KM Immanuel Zusmann called upon Prime Minister Rabin to include the PLO in the peace talks, on condition that the PLO would stop terrorist acts against Israel – a remarkable position for a man known as one of the outspoken Labor hawks.

■ On April 27-28, Israelis and Palestinians convened in Athens, under auspices of the Greek government and the U.N., to discuss the difficult issue of Jerusalem. The Palestinians included East Jerusalemites Hana Sinyora and Sari Nusseibeh, as well as Sami Musalem of Yasser Arafat's bureau. In the meeting they proposed that Jerusalem, while not physically divided, would be the capital of both Israel and Palestine. The Israelis present – Jerusalem Meretz City Councillor Moshe Amirav and Labor KM Yael Dayan – did not rule out a future "change in the municipal status of Jerusalem, to take account of Palestinian national aspirations"; this, however, must wait for a later stage of the negotiations. In the meantime, the Israelis advised the East Jerusalem Palestinians to participate in elections to the Jerusalem city council, in order "to make their weight felt"; the Palestinians rejected this advice, as

it would amount to recognising the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem.

Israelis and Palestinians did agree on two points: that Jerusalem should never be physically divided by walls or barbed wire; and that the city should not be internationalised. The latter idea was raised by the U.N. representatives at the conference, and encountered the unanimous opposition of all participants from the Middle East.

■ On May 16 and 17, the Socialist International Middle East Committee (SIMEC) convened at Bonn. The European organisers succeeded in bringing together official representatives of the Israeli Labor Party and a high-ranking PLO delegation. Latif Dori of Mapam, a veteran Israeli participant in SIMEC meetings, told TOI of the tortuous route travelled until this was achieved: "When the Socialist International formed SIMEC, the Israeli Laborites refused to have any Palestinians in this committee, on grounds that there does not exist a Palestinian Socialist Party; later, they agreed to have Palestinians from the Occupied Territories participating, but only in a personal capacity; now, they already agree to sit at the SIMEC table together with an official PLO delegation, of which the Palestinians from the Occupied Territories—as well as those from the Palestinian diaspora—are an official part".

SIMEC intends to push the process further: the committee's next meeting is scheduled to take place on September, at Tunis—the country hosting the PLO headquarters, whose government already agreed to grant visas to the Israeli participants. The meeting after that is due to take place in Jerusalem on December—at which time the Israeli government might find itself under pressure to reciprocate the Tunisian gesture and grant entry visas to the PLO members participating in SIMEC.

■ On May 2 the traditional annual convention, held by the French Jewish Community on the occasion of the Israeli Independence Day, took place in Paris. The organisers sought to make in this year's conference a contribution to the ongoing peace process, by inviting a wide range of Israeli and Palestinian speakers, as well as several Arab ambassadors and prominent Arab-French figures. Among the speakers invited were both the PLO London representative Afif Safieh and former Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy. This caused a scene, when Levy demanded that Safieh be expelled from the conference. When the organisers gave in to this demand, many of the dovish Israelis present threatened to leave together with Safieh. In the end, only Levy and Safieh left the conference (separately).

Yehuda Lankri, Israeli Ambassador to France—originally appointed by Levy—expressed regret that he could not meet with Safieh, being constrained by his government's policy.

■ On May 17, the theatre critics of the main Israeli newspapers arrived in Vienna; as part of the Israeli-Austrian cultural exchanges, they were to visit the city's theatres. However, they had another kind of show ready for them as well: PLO leader Yasser

Arafat and his senior advisers, also guests of the Austrian government, were staying three floors higher in the same hotel. A meeting was arranged, whose contents were extensively reported later in the Israeli press.

True to their calling, the critics described the division of dramatic roles among the Palestinians:

Emotional appeals are a conspicuous part of Arafat's style. Throughout the evening he resorts to rhetorics and answers questions with questions of his own. He tells us that we Israelis are corrupting Judaism because we have become conquerors. 'Never in history were Jews conquerors!' he cries out.

One of my colleagues retorts: 'We were always the victims!'.

Arafat is angry. He throws in our face the fact that, for a long time by now, we are no longer the victims. He talks of Palestinian children shot to death.

Basam Abu-Sharif, his political advisor who sits behind him, lays a hand on Arafat's shoulder and calms him down.

It is the role of Abu-Sharif and Yasser Abd-Rabo to intervene when Arafat becomes too emotional and says something too sharp. Arafat is the emotional one, who uses rhetorical, flowery language; Abd-Rabo and Abu-Sharif have the role of being calm, always rational (Shosh Weitz in Yediot Aharonot, 19.5.93).

■ Another kind of Israeli delegation to meet with Arafat came from the Druse Initiative Committee (DIC). Members of a distinct religious community, Druse are the only Arab citizens of Israel to be conscripted and sent to the Occupied Territories—which leads many Palestinian to regard all Druse as traitors. The DIC delegation told Arafat of their organization's activity in opposing Druse conscription. Arafat told them that he regards the Druse soldiers as victims of the occupation, rather than villains. His guests gave him a necklace of wooden beads, made as a gift to Arafat by a young Druse, imprisoned for refusing to serve in the Israeli army.

Generals for peace

At the International Conference of Retired Generals and Admirals in London (April 28-30) Dr. Matti Peled (member of the Israeli Army General Staff during the 1967 Six-Day-War) and M.K. Shiyyab—years-long commander of the Jordanian Air Force—may have been the only participants who met before in battle. However, to those hearing their respective presentations, nothing might have seemed easier than letting the two of them solve the whole Middle East crisis in one afternoon.

The following is Matti Peled's report:

Since 1981, a group of retired NATO generals have been working together as a forum of opinion and a pressure group—emphasizing their opposition to policies of nuclear deterrence and strategies based on the use of nuclear weapons. The generals included some who had held the highest ranks in their countries' armed forces and in NATO.

After 1984, there were held—in addition to the Western generals' annual meetings—regular joint

meetings with comparable senior officers of the Warsaw Pact countries. These joint meetings provided friendly and open minded exchanges, directed at ways in which East-West relationships could best be developed and made secure. The joint statements following each meeting evolved consensus proposals which were submitted to the participants' heads of state.

After 1989, further meetings were temporarily suspended to take account of the changes taking place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The main conclusion of this stock-taking was to enlarge the scope of interest of the group; to include other geographical areas and establish an international consultative association with consultative groups formed in each country. Such a group was formed in Israel in 1991.

The 1993 international conference in London was the first one to include participants from other than NATO or former WP countries. Among the participants were eighteen senior officers of the armed forces of fourteen countries in Asia, Africa, Eastern and Western Europe, the Middle East and North America.

The two main purposes of the conference were:

- To identify the priority threats to global security, taking account of the different geopolitical perspectives of security—with the participants representing the viewpoints of their respective regions.
- To consider how armed forces should adapt their roles and doctrines to meet the new challenges to security—challenges which have economic, ethnic, humanitarian and environmental dimensions as well as purely political-military ones.

The conference's conclusions were set down in detailed statements.

It was strongly advocated that disputes be resolved in accordance to, and compliance with, the provisions of the United Nations Charter—and that the UN's credibility be safeguarded.

Also in the post-cold war era nuclear and conventional disarmament should be given top priority, as should the conversion of military resources and their application in noncombatant emergency situations.

At the same time, security considerations must assure that peoples' aspirations are met. Key elements of such an integrated security thinking are economic wellbeing, social justice, cultural (including religious) freedom and environmental harmony—all as important, if not more so, than political-military considerations.

Full text of the resolutions to be obtained from:
Generals for Peace and Disarmament
 Center for International Peacebuilding
 9 West St., Chipping Norton, Oxon OX7 5LH, U.K.

Soldiers' distress

■ In the past year, Israeli public opinion became increasingly concerned with a hitherto taboo subject: the death of soldiers for reasons other than enemy action. This issue reached the headlines after Israeli soldiers in South Lebanon mistakenly opened fire on each other, and four were killed. In the same period several other soldiers were killed while playing

"Russian Roulette", a practice which has apparently become widespread in many units. There is also increased attention to cases of soldiers committing suicide, with journalists inquiring—which before they did not—into the circumstances of such cases and their connection to conditions in the unit.

A personal campaign against the military authorities was undertaken by Shula Malt, whose soldier son Amir was killed as a result of a vicious "initiation rite", to which new soldiers in his unit were submitted by their fellows. After finding out that the practice had existed for years and that the unit's commanding officer had done nothing to stop it, Malt took the unprecedented step of changing at night the tombstone on her son's grave: The standard words *killed on duty* were replaced by *led as a lamb to the slaughter*.

In early May, Malt played an active role in forming an association of bereaved parents, whose soldier sons had been killed "by mistake". At the founding conference, attended by dozens, the parents accused senior officers of incompetence and criminal negligence; some called for the resignation of the Army Chief-of-Staff, three-star general Ehud Barak. Several speakers accused the military authorities of whitewashing and shifting all responsibility upon lower-ranking commanders, who are the only ones punished.

Public figures, from all sides of the political spectrum, had been invited, but the only one who came was Uri Avnery (ICIPP). Avnery, who served in a commando unit during the 1948 war—and got severely wounded—pointed out the corrosive effects of continuing occupation: prolonged duty as an oppressive police force is corrupting the army, destroying discipline and breeding contempt for life—a contempt manifested not only in the ongoing killing of Palestinians, including children, but also in suicides and fatal "games", using loaded weapons.

■ On April 14, a petition signed by 300 highschool pupils was presented at the Defence Ministry in Tel-Aviv. The signatories declared their refusal, upon their imminent conscription, to serve in the Occupied Territories, concluding: *Mr. Rabin, you have no mandate to turn us into murderers!*

Chad Lentzner, who himself already served a prison term for his refusal, told that getting these signatures had been far more easy than expected. "The rumor about us spread fast, and when I went to a rock band performance, guys were crowding around me and asking if I have the petition with me." In August, Lentzner will be in Germany and Britain, and would like to meet with interested groups. Contact: POB 26480, Tel-Aviv 61263; phone: 972-3-5565804.

■ On May 30, Private Rafi Regev was courtmartialled for having been 68 days absent without leave from his unit, which is stationed in the Occupied Territories. Asked for his reasons, he told the judges simply: *I am afraid to go there*. He got two months' imprisonment.

■ On June 10, a group of women whose husbands serve in a reserve paratrooper unit wrote a letter to Prime Minister/Defence Minister Rabin. They complained that their husbands are called to military

(reserve) service in the Gaza Strip far more often than those in other units. Three soldiers of the unit have been killed in Gaza during the past year. They wrote: "The fact that our husbands are no shirkers, is no reason why our families should have a bigger share of living in anxiety than others."

Conference on torture

As could be seen on the evening television news, the International Conference on Torture, held in Tel-Aviv on June 13-14, brought together a wide range of participants from Israel, the Occupied Territories and abroad.

Ruhama Marton of the Association of Israeli and Palestinian Physicians for Human Rights (AIPPHR), one of the sponsoring organizations, talked about the special responsibility of doctors who collaborate with the Shabak (Security Service) and fail to report on obvious cases which come to their knowledge. Dr. Hernan Reyes of the International Red Cross told that this problem is unfortunately not limited to Israel.

The main debate centered on the effectiveness of trying to erect legal barriers to torture. For the past two years, the Public Committee Against Torture (PACTI) – another sponsoring organization – has been conducting an appeal in the Supreme Court against the notorious Landau Report of 1986, which permits *moderate physical pressure*. A newer initiative is that of nine government supporting KMs – of whom three were present – to present a bill outlawing all forms of torture. Professor Ze'ev Sternhel was of the opinion that such a bill – even if passed – would have little effect as long as inequality is accepted as a norm in Israeli society. Other speakers claimed that a law against torture would in itself help change the public atmosphere and – even if not always enforced – would place the Shabak interrogators in a weak legal position.

The father of Mustafa Akawi, who died under Shabak interrogation half a year ago, spoke about his son, showed the audience the photographs of his school graduation and told about the day when he heard of his death. Mr. Akawi concluded: *Let there be peace! Let no more people suffer like we suffer!*

A brochure with conference proceedings available from: AIPPHR, POB 10235, Tel Aviv 61101, or: PACTI, POB 8588, Jerusalem 91083.

Football politics

In Israel every respectable sports club has its political affiliation. The Betar Jerusalem football club, for its part, is staunchly right-wing; the local Likud branch – as well as extreme right groups – can always look for support among its fans. An unexpected statement of its star player Ronen Harazi made headlines in Ma'ariv (11.4.93).

I went with the team to Afula, in the north. On the way we passed Hadera, just after the murder there of two policemen by terrorists. There were a lot of border guards around, and angry citizens demonstrating. I thought to myself: what kind of country do we live in, where you could go to play football and pass such a

scene. How can I just go on playing after this, what is the use? Our life is a death lottery. Every day somebody is killed, and nobody knows who is next.

I feel that my political views are shaking. I always have been right-wing, but gradually I start feeling that we have to make peace in one way or another. Sometimes, when I am alone, I start thinking: perhaps we really should give them back the Territories and finish with all the misery. You can't get peace by magic, you have to face reality and do something.

Buswise

To assess public opinion one does not really need statistics. In Israel at least it is enough to take the bus. Every hour, bus drivers turn on the radio, to let the passengers hear the news. And when the news is over, contributions to the discourse start to flow from all directions. Beate Zilversmidt wrote down the following.

– One thing is clear! If Shamir or Sharon would have cracked down on the Arabs the way Rabin does, there would already be international sanctions. The world would not stop condemning us – encouraged by our own leftists. But now that those Meretz "human rightists" became government ministers they are willing to approve of everything.

– I wonder what Rabin is after. He also promised the Palestinians autonomy – which would of course be a first step in the direction of a Palestinian state.

– Ah, that was only during the elections campaign. He had to say that, with all those doves in his party who want to be seen on television kissing Arafat. But Rabin tamed the doves. He has them in his pocket.

– That is one way to look at it. I think Rabin after all wants to go into history as the peace maker, the Israeli de Gaulle. The tough man who did bring peace.

– Rabin can't do it! He would lose the next elections if he after all sold out to the leftists. He is far too afraid that the right-wing will succeed in mobilizing the street against him.

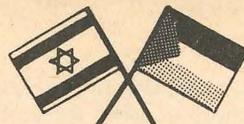
– You might be right, but he knows very well that he also cannot come back to the voters without any improvement of the security. He has to make some deal with the Arabs before the next elections.

– If at all, Rabin will give away the Territories by surprise, when nobody expects it anymore, and before the right-wing can do anything about it.

– Yes, but only when he has to. When those leftists again start making trouble, with the support of the Americans, Rabin will in the end give in. But for the time being Rabin seems to know how to soothe the Americans, and the leftists have become totally silent now that they are in the government!

– Perhaps Rabin succeeded too well with them. Even by deportations he did not get those leftists in the government angry. If they would at least oppose him a bit, he would have an excuse to go in their direction. But they stick to him like limpets.

– Did you see on television those radicals who together with the Palestinians protested the closure at Gaza checkpoint? 'Gush Shalom' or something similar. How dare they help the enemy!



A policy of bridging – not closure

The following ICIPP statement was published as an advertisement in Ha'aretz (9.6.93) and Davar (11.6.93). (The ICIPP's logo with the Israeli and Palestinian flags appeared prominently.) The remark of Shimon Peres, to which the text refers, was made at a closed Labor Party Executive meeting in the end of May, and afterwards leaked to the press.

“We need a policy of bridging, not a policy of closure” – this controversial remark by Mr. Shimon Peres sums up succinctly the difference between a true peace policy and the policy of the government in which Peres holds the portfolio of Foreign Affairs.

Adherents of the closure policy regard the Palestinians as an eternal enemy and any compliance with a Palestinian demand, even the most reasonable – as a defeat or setback for Israel. They claim that it is possible “to fight terrorism as if there are no peace talks going on, and vice versa.”

A bridging policy is based on the understanding that, in negotiating with the Palestinians, Israel must stick to its obligations under the Camp David Accords. This includes “a solution of the Palestinian problem in all its aspects”, based upon “the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people”; evidently, the most essential legitimate right of any people is the right to self-determination. Adherents of a bridging policy understand that Palestinian violence could not be reduced – much less eliminated – by retributions, revenge and bloodshed; that the only way to end violence is through a concrete, positive advance in negotiations with the Palestinians, aimed at achieving an agreed solution.

Adherents of the closure policy glorify the capture of terrorist squads, though they know that it will neither eliminate Palestinian terrorism nor stop the shedding of Israeli blood. The closure policy does not remove the basic frustrations which lead the Palestinians to violence. Instead, it seeks the “achievement” of a minor reduction in the Palestinian acts of violence, at the cost of enormous suffering for an entire population which can't be held responsible for the terrorism; the closure policy results in the indiscriminate killing of Palestinians, unconnected to their individual responsibility for acts of violence.

This year's month of May, after the start of the closure, showed a most severe increase in the shedding of Palestinian blood, including the blood of children and babies. This continuing bloodshed constitutes the most severe blockage on the way to peace. It is the closure policy which caused the failure of the peace negotiations' ninth round.

A similar fate awaits the tenth round of negotiations, unless a substantial change occurs in government policies. The Palestinian negotiators cannot be expected to ignore much longer the mounting anger among the Palestinian population, faced with the Rabin government's narrow-minded policy of oppression.

It is this policy which is responsible for the time wasted in deadlocked negotiations – a year and half since the Madrid Conference, nearly a year of which under Rabin's leadership.

In fact, no real negotiations are going on, and there is no significant progress towards a solution. The cabinet “doves”, including the Meretz ministers, claim to care for peace. During the recent cabinet crisis, we saw how they fight for things they really care for, such as ministerial positions. For peace, they don't struggle with anything like the same determination.

The Meretz ministers claim to be aware of developments which are unknown to the general public, developments which make peace imminent. This is no more than a sop for all those who have placed their hopes in Meretz. In this government, cabinet ministers are kept in the dark as much as the general public. One thing, however, is clear for all to see: there is no possibility of advancing while trampling on the human dignity of the Palestinians and denying them their basic rights.

Towards the tenth round of negotiations – which may well be the last round, unless a real progress is achieved – we call upon the government to abandon the policy of closure and adopt a bridging policy.

- Remove the closure before the talks begin!
- Stop the policy of bloodshed!
- Regard the Palestinians as equal partners!

The legitimate Palestinian aspirations are compatible with the existential interest of the State of Israel.

Time to talk business

■ Over the past year, Israeli industrialists have been busy meeting their Palestinian counterparts. The meetings took place in Israel, East Jerusalem and abroad. In some meetings industrialists from Jordan, and the Jewish and Palestinian diasporas participated as well.

The spring 1993 issue of *Hata'asiya*, quarterly of the Manufacturers' Association in Israel, was devoted entirely to articles by Israelis and Palestinians on the future economic relations.

The industrialists seem to have reached the conclusion that Israeli rule in the Occupied Territories is not going to last and that – whatever will replace it – *the time has come to talk business.*