

The Other Israel

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P.O.B.2542 Holon, Israel 58125
Phone/fax: (03) 5565804
Editor: Adam Keller
Assistant editor: Beate Zilversmidt

Editorial Board: Uri Avnery, Matti Peled, Yaakov
Arnon, Haim Bar'am, Yael Lotan, Yossi Amitay
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A PAINFUL TRANSITION

Tel-Aviv, December 16, 1993

The ceremony held at September 13 on the White House lawn had all the outer signs of an agreement signed by two equal partners. Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat walked exactly the same distance behind President Clinton, and were accorded exactly the same small courtesies, up to the moment of the famous handshake itself. It was this element of visible equality between former enemies which captured the imagination and aroused the hopes of so many viewers, in and out of the Middle East – and infuriated beyond measure the adherents of “Greater Israel”.

However, this equality was by no means reflected in the documents actually signed at the ceremony. These envisaged a five-year interim period, during which Israel would continue to exercise considerable direct or indirect power over the Palestinians. Moreover, numerous vital details were not decided at all, but left for further negotiations.

The excellent atmosphere when these opened – with Israeli and Palestinian negotiators smiling, shaking hands and even drinking tea together on the Red Sea shore – could not long hide a basic discrepancy between perspectives. Many issues were discussed – the dispositions of the Israeli military forces remaining in the Territories; the status of the Israeli settlements; the number and powers of the Palestinian police; the Palestinian ability to levy taxes and custom duties or to issue a currency. On each of these, the Palestinian negotiators pressed for the maximum of Palestinian independence, while the Israelis faithfully followed Rabin’s favorite negotiating tactic: *give as little and as late as possible, and put your interlocutors under strong pressure.*

The issue on which the process seemed to come to a complete impasse was the Palestinian demand to control the border passes to Jordan and Egypt, and thus gain direct access to the outer world, unsupervised by Israel – which, as the Israeli negotiators correctly remarked, would be a major element of national sovereignty.

The most glaring inequality in the Oslo/Washington agreements concerned the PLO’s pledge to stop all violent acts against Israel – a pledge in no way reciprocated by any Israeli promise to stop IDF

soldiers from killing Palestinians, or to drop any of the numerous other oppressive measures currently used in the Occupied Territories.

On the contrary: Rabin made abundantly clear that, until the last moment before withdrawal, the IDF would *maintain security, law and order by all available means.* To justify this policy Rabin pointed to the continued armed campaign waged by the Islamic Hamas movement, which redoubled its attacks on Israeli soldiers and settlers. However, the IDF’s undercover “Special units” – which at times seemed out of anybody’s control – did not confine their activity to the Hamas alone. The ominous phrase *shot while trying to escape* continued to be used, also to cover the killing of Fatah activists who had laid down their arms.

One by one, the traditional Intifada “hot spots” – Ramallah, Gaza, Hebron – burst out in a renewed explosion of violent confrontations. There were some local negotiations between Israeli military commanders and leading Fatah activists, fresh from long prison terms (where they all learned good Hebrew); but such local agreements could, at best, control the conflagration – not put it out.

An additional destabilizing force were the settlers, scattered throughout the Palestinian territories, often in close vicinity to population centers. Rabin avoided grasping the nettle, telling the settlers they must leave and offering them fair compensation*. Instead, the Prime Minister told them, again and again, that they could stay on in their fortified enclaves, keep their guns and maintain in safety their accustomed way of life – regardless of the fact that 15,000 armed Palestinian policemen are due to arrive within a few months. The settlers failed to feel reassured.

Being especially targeted in Hamas attacks, groups of settlers increasingly resorted to violent retaliation against the Palestinian population as a whole. What started with wild rampaging and large-scale destruction of property rapidly escalated to the ambushing and killing of random Palestinians.

Though the no-longer-forbidden Palestinian flag now flew from every rooftop, and though offices bearing the explicit name “PLO” opened in every town, Palestinians increasingly felt that by the most

important index – that of the daily death toll – nothing had changed.

A very similar feeling spread on the Israeli side, as Hamas scored success after success in its campaign of lethal raids upon Israelis. At funerals on both sides of the national divide, mourners cried out: *Is this peace?* On both sides, sinking support for the accords was indicated in opinion polls and in partial elections: at the Israeli municipal elections, the Likud captured Jerusalem, held by Labor for many decades; and the Palestinian rejectionists won the student union elections at Bir Zeit University, a traditional Fatah stronghold.

Dialogue with Hamas

The well-known Abie Nathan, who served two prison terms for having met with Yasser Arafat at a time when Israelis were forbidden to do so, has now undertaken the role of mediator between Arafat and Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the Hamas leader undergoing life imprisonment in Israel.

On September 22, Nathan visited the Sheikh in prison. Arafat's message which he brought offered the Hamas a chance to participate in the creation of the Palestinian Interim Self-Governing Authority. Sheikh Yassin seemed open to the idea.

Nathan's visit was publicised only on December 14 – the day when Brigadier-General Doron Almog, commander of the Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip, revealed that he himself had met with senior Hamas activists, whose attitude he described as "a mixture of fanaticism and pragmatism". Almog did not exclude the possibility that Hamas would eventually accept the role of "loyal opposition" under Arafat (Ha'aretz, 15.12).

At the time of writing, the peace process seems at its nadir: the bloodshed is escalating; the December 13 deadline for concluding the negotiations was not met, despite a last-moment Rabin-Arafat summit; on the day that Israeli forces were supposed to start leaving Gaza, they were there in greater numbers than ever – and killed three Palestinians. Morale among peace-seekers, Israeli and Palestinian, is low; many of the people who three months ago indulged in unbounded euphoria now conjure the most dark visions for the future.

The basic problem seems to be that Yitzhak Rabin does not yet fully face up to the implications of the process which he himself started. Again and again, he

tries to keep open the option of a solution falling short of a fully independent Palestinian state.

Yet Rabin's formal equality of status with Arafat, at the signing ceremony in Washington, constituted an implicit promise which Rabin made to millions of Palestinian viewers – a promise to treat them accordingly, as equal partners in peace who deserve a chance for independence, for a dignified national existence.

Reneging on this unwritten promise – which goes beyond the text Rabin signed – would lead to a backlash of incalculable proportions. Among other things, it would deprive Rabin of any chance to redeem his explicit promise to his own Israeli voters: the promise to find an end to terrorism and bloodshed, and to lift from the shoulders of Israel's soldiers the no longer bearable burden of maintaining the occupation.

Therefore, Rabin must reach a compromise – a compromise which Arafat, and Arafat's wider constituency can live with – both in the present crisis and in the many crises and rounds of negotiations ahead.

Recently, Yitzhak Rabin declared: "We and the Palestinians have both passed the point of no return." He may have been even more right than he thought.

The editor

**An opinion poll, conducted among a sample of 430 settlers, found 33% of them already willing to evacuate in return for compensations (Yediot Aharonot, 3.12).*

The killing of a peace activist

After two months of relative calm – a new explosion in Al Bireh.

Not all army units know how to behave in the months before withdrawal. And the Palestinians continue to be tense, the peace still being only a piece of paper. Why did a van with soldiers have to start appearing every morning, at half past eight, at the highschool gate? On the morning of November 16, some kids started throwing stones – from a distance. An army sniper, equipped with a telescope rifle, aimed and hit one of them; the boy fell to the ground bleeding. The next victim, Rami Al-Razawi, was shot to death when he came to the help of the first.

Quickly the standard army communiqué was issued: *The soldiers were in life danger and shot in self-defence.* But when the whole Al-Bireh population

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Austria, West Germany: Israel-Palästina Komitee, John Bunzl, Biberstr.8/20, 1010 Wien/Austria

The Netherlands: Uitgeverij Cypres, Heemraadschapslaan 33, 1181 TZ Amstelveen, Holland; Phone (020) 6410388

Japan: Misako Sono, 1-36-5-205 Kamikitazawa, Setagaya, Tokyo 156, Japan.

The U.S.: America-Israel Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (AICIPP),

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took to the streets in despair and fury, like at the outbreak of the Intifada, a senior army officer arrived at the Al-Razawi family's home to apologise for "the regrettable accident."

For a group of Israeli youths the news about the death of Rami Al-Razawi came as a personal shock: they had known him very well. Chen Raz, coordinator of the **Peace Now Youth** told *Ha'aretz* (18.11): "In the past we protested against what happened in the Territories, out of political principle. This time it is different. Rami Al-Razawi has participated in our bi-weekly meetings of Israeli and Palestinian youths in Jerusalem. He was a member of the joint delegation to Vienna, and was all the time trying to convince other Palestinians. He was so happy about the meeting of Rabin and Arafat!"

Israeli television paid special attention to this burial of a 15-year old Intifada martyr in the presence of his Israeli friends.

Contact: *Peace Now Youth*, POB 8159, Jerusalem.

Peacemaking on the ground -Gush Shalom and PLO on the barricades-

Immediately after the historic handshake in Washington, **Gush Shalom** (Peace Bloc) activists established contact with PLO activists "on the ground". A pattern of close cooperation with the PLO leadership in East Jerusalem came quickly into being. The Palestinian side was represented by former Fatah fighters, all of whom had done time in Israeli prisons. A coordination committee was set up, consisting of Sirhan Saleime, Munia al-Kassem and others for the Palestinians, Uri Avnery, Michael Warshawski and Amir Abramson for the Israelis.

The most urgent issue concerned the more than 12,000 Palestinians still held in Israeli prisons. It became apparent that their immediate release was crucial to the creation of an atmosphere of peace in the Occupied Territories. The Rabin government was completely oblivious to this critical point - as to many others. Therefore, it was decided to mobilize public opinion on this issue by a massive demonstration.

The Jneid prison near Nablus - central prison for the West Bank - was chosen as the site for the first-ever demonstration officially summoned jointly by the PLO and an Israeli movement. The initial opposition of the occupation authorities was overcome only through an appeal to the Supreme Court. At the court, complicated negotiations took place between the army and the organizers regarding each detail of the program.

On the morning of October 7, Palestinian and Israeli demonstrators set out from Jerusalem to Nablus. Along the way, additional cars - often flying the hitherto forbidden Palestinian flag - joined the convoy. Passing through the main streets of Nablus, the caravan was enthusiastically cheered. Among the graffiti on the walls, the slogan *Nablus welcomes Israeli peace seekers* was conspicuous.

At a schoolyard near the prison, the thousands of demonstrators gathered for a rally, addressed by Feisal al-Husseini and many other Palestinian leaders, as well as by the representatives of **Gush Shalom**, Prof. Binyamin Cohen of Tel-Aviv University and Ruth Cohen. The well-known Israeli-Arab writer Emil Habibi and Hadash-KM Tamar Gojanski were also invited to speak. Large military forces were present, and here and there small incidents occurred. The soldiers were plainly nervous: prior to September 13, such a crowd would have been violently dispersed. Even under the new conditions, a major clash might have broken out but for the presence of the Israelis, which made the soldiers more restrained.

The tensions, however, grew with the second stage of the event: a hundred and twenty demonstrators - the number which had resulted from prolonged haggling at the Supreme Court - left the schoolyard and marched in the direction of the prison. The soldiers carefully counted them, one by one, and then roughly held back the rest of the crowd. According to the terms agreed upon, the 120 halted on the crest of a hill overlooking the prison. From there, a small delegation, consisting of Uri Avnery and the mother of two prisoners, was sent to the prison itself to deliver a letter to the inmates. But the warden reneged upon his obligation to the Supreme Court: the prison gates remained shut.

The demonstration was widely reported on TV, radio and in the press, both in Israel and abroad. However, it did not succeed in effecting a real change in the policy of the government - with consequences which became obvious all too soon. Rabin did order the release of several hundred Palestinian prisoners - about 5% of the total - most of whom were soon due to be released anyway. After weeks of negotiations on this issue and rising expectations among the prisoners and their families, the meagre gesture only increased the feelings of frustration among the general Palestinian population.

Meanwhile, a new trouble spot appeared at East Jerusalem, where extreme right groups are constantly working to establish Jewish settlers in the midst of the Arab population. The latest such effort targeted the Ras-el-Amud neighborhood, opposite Mount Olive. There, "a Jewish housing project" is to house several hundred settlers, surrounded by a high "security fence" for "defence against terrorists".

The project required a municipal licence. Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, in the midst of a hard-fought elections campaign, vacillated on the issue, trying to capture the votes of both Jewish nationalists and the Arabs of annexed East Jerusalem. Thus, when the matter came to a vote, Kollek stayed out of the town council room - while the other councillors of Kollek's Labor faction voted in favor of the Ras-el-Amud settlement plan, giving it a large majority.

Following that vote, the **PLO-Gush Shalom Coordinating Committee** resolved to hold another joint demonstration. On October 30, hundreds of Israelis and Palestinians gathered on the threatened site at Ras-el-Amud, holding placards reading *New settlement*

is killing peace!, and *Jerusalem – Capital of Two States!* From an improvised podium – on the balcony of the Palestinian house which “stands in the way” of the planned project – the demonstrators were addressed by speakers from **Gush Shalom** and the PLO, as well as by Meretz Jerusalem councillor Ornan Yekutieli. The demonstration was reported nicely on Israeli TV and in the Israeli and Palestinian newspapers, and was covered by several international news agencies.

Three days later, the municipal elections took place. In Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek went down to crashing defeat; he was not rewarded by the religious and nationalist Jewish voters – who preferred the Likud candidate; nor did a last minute Kollek appeal to the Arab inhabitants of East Jerusalem bring about a substantial number of votes, with most Palestinians preferring to boycott the elections altogether. Furthermore, Kollek’s own constituency, voters of the Labor and Meretz parties, did not feel inspired to turn up in high numbers.

In the weeks after September 13, on the wave of Israeli-Palestinian peace euphoria, the idea was mooted of holding a peace caravan to Jericho – the West Bank city scheduled to become the first venue of the Palestinian self-governing authority. This was to be more a social than a political event, with Palestinian families receiving Israeli families for lunch in their homes; in the afternoon, Palestinians and Israelis were to take part together in a big festival of reconciliation and fraternization – with dance and music.

Thorough preparations were taken for the event, which was to take place on Saturday, December 4. Several times, **Gush Shalom** activists traveled to Jericho to talk things over. There, the program was worked out, in a good spirit, with the local Fatah activists. **Gush Shalom** spent a considerable sum on publicity – with advertisements placed in several papers. The response was above expectation: hundreds of people, whom nobody had ever seen in demonstrations, were quite eager to *visit Jericho as guests – not occupiers*.

However, in the weeks before December 4, the atmosphere of peace dissipated, to be replaced by the grim news of a renewed spiral of violence. In the afternoon of November 26, Israeli radio gave hourly bulletins of large-scale riots in Gaza, touched off by the renewed deadly raids of the Israeli army’s undercover “Special Units”. Soldiers were reported shooting into the crowds, and doctors at Gaza hospitals spoke of hundreds of wounded.

In hasty telephone consultations, **Gush Shalom** activists decided to call a protest vigil. On the following day, dozens of demonstrators gathered outside the Defence Ministry in Tel-Aviv, with placards reading *Dismantle the Special Units!* and *The shooting in Gaza is killing peace!* They were joined by members of **Yesh Gvul** and **Women in Black**, who came directly from their respective weekly vigils. The journalists present were especially interested in Amir Avramson. A member of **Gush Shalom**’s executive,

Avramson is confined to a wheelchair. He was severely wounded in the terrorist attack on a Jerusalem-Tel Aviv bus, in 1989. He became, as it were, a devoted peace activist in order to avoid being exploited by the right wing.

A few hours after the vigil, an urgent telephone call came from Jericho. Though this town had escaped large-scale violence, soldiers in Jericho were resuming their pressure on the population: Palestinian flags – which had flown freely all over Jericho since September 13 – were now suddenly torn down, and in the process the soldiers beat up Jericho youths, arresting some. Reluctantly, Israelis and Palestinians came to the conclusion that the upcoming peace festival had to be put off – hardly a week before it was due. There was no choice: the Palestinian families – so enthusiastic before – were not any more in the mood to prepare a feast for their Israeli guests.

The cancellation of the Jericho Peace Festival was announced at a press conference in East Jerusalem, where a joint statement was distributed, explaining *It seems that our happiness was premature. The time for celebration has not yet arrived*. Speakers included the chiefs of the Fatah offices in East Jerusalem, Jericho and Gaza, as well as **Gush Shalom** activists Uri Avnery and Amir Avramson. (On the Israeli television news in Arabic, Uri Avnery could later be heard stating *Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin’s peace policy seems to be thwarted by the provocative actions of... Defence Minister Yitzchak Rabin*.)

After 24 years

One of the results of the agreement: the Shabak is no longer interested in Maxim Ghilan, editor of the Paris-based Israel & Palestine. Informed through Meretz Minister Shulamit Aloni that he no longer appeared on the border control’s “wanted for interrogation” list, Ghilan could soon be found in the streets of Tel Aviv – his first visit after 24 years of exile. The “return of the lost son” was celebrated by his big circle of old friends from the peace scene – and got extensive coverage in all Israeli media. During a full month he was a regular at all small and big actions for peace.

A joint Palestinian-Israeli action did take place on December 4: a demonstration calling for an end to the bloodshed. As the venue for this was chosen the Al-Ram Checkpoint, which continues to cut off East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. Two weeks earlier, soldiers at this checkpoint had shot to death a 24-year old from Nablus, who had tried to bypass the roadblock by walking through the surrounding fields; the young man had been denied a permit to enter East Jerusalem and visit his fiancée.

On a low hill near to the site of that tragedy, several hundred Israelis and Palestinians arrived after a march along the Jerusalem-Ramallah road. As the soldiers looked on, speeches in Arabic, Hebrew and English were made. Keynote speaker was Sirhan Salaymeh – head of the PLO-Jerusalem Office, who stated: *We feel pain at any drop of shed blood, Jewish*

or Arab. That is why we call upon Rabin to accelerate the process of withdrawal.

The way many Israeli soldiers – stationed near the roadblock – mixed with the demonstrators was quite unprecedented. Eight soldiers surrounding with friendly faces one **Gush-Shalom** demonstrator, holding the sign: *Stop the shooting!* made a quite surrealistic scene – unfortunately overlooked by the television networks who sent a crew.

On December 8, Prime Minister Rabin went to Beit Sokolov, the Tel-Aviv Journalists' House, where he was to have a reception together with the editors of all Israeli newspapers. But as the motorcade approached its destination, the PM found the Beit Sokolov steps lined with dozens of **Gush Shalom** demonstrators, with placards calling upon Rabin to take firm measures in order to curb settler violence in the Occupied Territories. (On the spot were also Jerusalem Post journalists, protesting the union-busting campaign of their paper's publisher*).

Thereupon, Rabin told his driver to turn back, and ordered the police to "clear his way." However, when a senior police officer came to enforce the Prime Minister's will, the **Gush Shalom** organisers pointed out that they had been granted a police permit, a few hours earlier. Negotiations resulted in a compromise: the demonstrators retreated several metres from the entrance. But, when Rabin finally arrived and ascended the steps, he could see them and hear their chant: *Disarm the settlers! Now!*

Contact: *Gush Shalom*, P.O.B. 1112, Tel-Aviv 61110;
phone: 972.3.5241806 (evening); **fax:** 972.3.5232252.

*Gush Shalom works on a very limited budget.
Your support can make a difference!*

* *The English-language Jerusalem Post has been taken over by the Canada-based Hollinger Chain, which imposed upon it an extreme-right editorial line. This resulted in the immediate resignation of some (among them the editor) and other members of the staff being fired. The new management engages also in a policy of reducing salaries, and of sapping working conditions in general. The latest is an effort to break the JP workers' union and force the journalists to sign personal – rather than collective – contracts. The journalists try to get readers – also from abroad – to support their struggle.*

Letters of protest to: Yehuda Levy, Jerusalem Post President and Publisher, POB 81, Romema, Jerusalem.

To be or not to be

– the peace movement after the agreement –

The historical handshake on the White House lawn gave most peace-minded Israelis a feeling of euphoria. The events organized on September 13 by **Peace Now** were in the nature of victory celebrations in the open air, rather than political demonstrations; the participants at these events generally felt that, bar a few minor details, their task as peace activists was over. A last effort was devoted to organizing demonstrations outside the Knesset, as ratification of the agreement was debated; once the 61 to 50 parliamentary

majority was secured, a feeling of lassitude led to widespread demobilization. **Gush Shalom**, with its ongoing, intense activity (*see previous article*) was an exception.

The peace movements' **Coordinating Committee**, created at the initiative of the Labor Party in early September, fell apart. Boxes full of colourful stickers, with such slogans as *Israel supports peace!* and *Peace is my security!*, remained on the shelves, with nobody feeling energetic enough to take in hand their distribution.

For months **Peace Now** – Israel's largest peace movement – did not so much as issue communiqués to the press. In Jerusalem, the **Women in Black** – seeing attendance at their weekly vigils dropping sharply – decided to terminate the vigils, and devote themselves to publishing a book about their five years' struggle. (The Tel-Aviv **Women in Black** dissented from this view, and decided to go on demonstrating weekly at North Tel-Aviv, even in reduced numbers.) The situation was epitomized by Abie Nathan's decision to close down his "pirate" radio station, **The Voice of Peace**, which he said had fulfilled its task.

For its part, **Yesh Gvul** decided to remain in business as long as the Israeli army remained in the Occupied Territories, and as long as soldiers continued to refuse service there. But many individual members felt that there was no longer any point in refusing and going to prison, and that under the new conditions, there may be some good in going to the Territories and confronting the settler violence.

None of the human rights groups, however, shared in this mood of demobilization; their own data, collected in the Occupied Territories, convinced them of the need to stay vigilant. The **Women For Political Prisoners** continued their day to day support for the "girls" whose prison conditions did not improve a bit.

B'tzelem field worker Bassam Id declared the organization's intention of continuing impartial investigations of all human rights violations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, regardless of any change in political or legal status there, and regardless of the national identity of the perpetrators or the victims (*Ha'aretz*, 19.10). After being appointed Special Advisor to Yasser Arafat, Dr. Ahmed Tibi was asked to resign from the **B'tzelem** board, for the same reason that, a year earlier, the Meretz leaders were asked to resign on joining the government.

While the peace movement was demobilizing, the nationalist right made a supreme effort to rally all its forces. Its hardcore – the nationalist-messianic settlers in the Occupied Territories – mobilized themselves for continuous violent action, both in the streets of Jerusalem and in the Territories themselves; the lethal attacks by Palestinian opponents of the agreement played into the settlers' hands.

The settlers enjoy several important logistical advantages: due to the continuing generous governmental subsidies, their organizations have hundreds of full-time paid activists and organizers, as well as fleets of buses, mobile telephones, and many other

The rejoicing of dialogue

On the Simchat Tora Holiday at October 6, hundreds of Israelis and Palestinians came together on the top of Mount Grizim, near Nablus, for a "peace picnic". Among the Israelis were several Orthodox families who ate their strictly kosher sandwiches side by side with families from Nablus. The latter included members of the Palestinian negotiating team. Like many previous "dialogue on the ground" meetings, this event was organised by the Israeli Rapprochement group.

Contact: c/o Hillel Bardin, 19 Kfar Etzion St., Jerusalem.

material assets. Also, the settlers live in small close-knit communities, where everybody shares the feeling of being threatened, and where a demonstration could be instantly organized by the simple expedient of knocking on every door.

Thus, during October and November the violent settler demonstrations – gradually extended to include their sympathizers in Israel's main population centers – dominated the media, including the government-owned television. Such peace demonstrations as occurred were far from constituting a real counterbalance; only very determined peace activists could avoid being demoralized by the quick transition from peace euphoria to escalation and bloodshed.

On the evening of December 3, the TV news all over the world showed settlers advancing in line of battle through the streets of Hebron, shooting again and again at the Palestinian youths confronting them. Later came the news that settlers had set up a roadblock, shot to death an Arab motorist and – when soldiers came to arrest them – resisted by force and hurled racist insults at a non-Jewish army officer.

It was these incidents – coupled with the growing awareness that negotiations with the PLO were stuck and that the December 13 deadline was unlikely to be met – which finally galvanized the peace movements into new signs of life. On the day following the news from Hebron, some forty Jerusalem activists, hastily phoned by Peace Now, gathered at the Prime Minister's Office – where U.S. Secretary of State Christopher was holding talks; they were seen on the evening television news, with torches, and signs reading *Stop the settler violence!*

At a discussion and coordinating meeting, held two days later at the initiative of Gush Shalom, the representatives of Peace Now came under sharp attack for their movement's total inaction in the past two months; they replied that this inaction was now at an end. A second coordinating meeting, called by the International Center for Peace, resolved to send urgent "peace delegations" to meet with cabinet ministers and the general secretaries of the government parties.

■ One of the first mainstream groups to take to the streets was the General Federation of Young Workers and Students in Israel (GFYWSI) – affiliated to the Histadrut. On December 7 hundreds of its young members, Jewish and Arab, stationed themselves at thirty crossroads all over Israel, holding aloft hand-written signs *Give peace a chance!* and *Don't destroy*

the hope! The action went well, with passing drivers honking in approval. At the entrance to Jerusalem, however, the youths had to withdraw; the funeral march of two settlers, killed the previous day in a Palestinian ambush, turned violent.

Three days later a similar action was taken by the Labor Party Youth – an ideologically similar, but organizationally quite distinct organization.

A major GFYWSI gathering at Ein-Gedi on the Dead Sea shore had been planned long in advance, to mark the federation's 70th anniversary. Now it was transformed into a rally in support of the peace process, with General Secretary Oved Tzur (himself a grown-up) making a fiery speech to the thousands of gathered youths.

GFYWSI, attn. Ephra, 120 Kibbutz Galuyot St, Tel-Aviv.

■ On December 10, the Women in Black were once more to be seen at their accustomed place in Jerusalem's France Square. The very fact that they had been absent for two months made their re-appearance a major news item. It was not decided how long the renewed weekly vigils will continue; this would depend on the government's advance towards peace.

Contact: Women in Black, POB 91060, Jerusalem.

■ On the evening of December 11, some two thousand answered the call of Peace Now to march in central Jerusalem against the murders by Hamas, enemies of peace, as well as against the violations of the law and the acts of vengeance by settlers. For the subtle listener the shouting of slogans reflected the heterogeneity of the crowd: *Rabin, the people support you!* was not chanted by exactly the same choir as *Rabin, get moving! Out of Ramallah!* But there was no real tension between moderates and radicals. The presence of right-wing counter-demonstrators following close behind the police cordons, and the feeling that major violence could erupt at any moment, made such differences seem trivial.

After half an hour a hitch developed: the nervous police allowed only 500 of the demonstrators to approach the Prime Minister's Residence, where a rally was to take place. After vainly protesting, the organizers decided to turn back and hold the rally at the main street, where the bulk of the demonstrators milled. Meanwhile, the settlers came very close, occupying the low roof of a nearby supermarket. The rally was repeatedly interrupted by their catcalls and shouts of "traitors!" – though actual violence was confined to isolated incidents at the edge of the crowd.

Several of the speakers addressed these uninvited participants. A great deal of shouting followed after Ya'akov Yona – a Jerusalem slum activist – thundered at them: *Give up! Accept that you have lost! 'Greater Israel' is over! There will be peace! Whether you like it or not!*

A group of Peace Now activists erected on the spot a "peace tent" where a continued presence was maintained over the following week. The tent was made conspicuous by a statue of a tree with branches ending in doves – by sculptor Dudu Gerstein.

Contact: Peace Now, POB 8159, Jerusalem 91081.

■ On the night between December 13 and 14, some 4,000 Israeli boy scouts, on their annual jamboree in the Negev, gathered on a hill near the Jordanian border and lit bonfires making up the word "peace" in Hebrew, Arabic and English. Jordanian scouts, with whom the event had been coordinated via the Geneva-based International Federation of Boy Scouts, were due to answer in kind from the other side of the border. However, because of the failure of the Rabin-Araft summit a day earlier and the delay in starting Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho, the Jordanian government revoked the permit for its scouts. The Israeli scouts, who had conducted a long struggle with the military for a permit to come this close to the border, expressed the hope that things will go better next year.

■ On December 15, students at all Israeli universities held simultaneous rallies and vigils, under the slogan: *When the extremists are shooting, we must not remain silent!* Initiated by Peace Now, the action was joined by various groups such as the Meretz Students, Campus and the Arab Student Committees.

■ On December 17, a large group of right-wingers, led by a Likud KM, occupied the regular site of the Tel-Aviv Women in Black vigil; though the women have a police permit, police refused to intervene and stood by while the rightists did everything short of outright violence to disrupt the vigil. At the time of writing, mobilization of men and women to support the next week's vigil is conducted among the Tel-Aviv peace groups.

■ Arna Mer-Khamis, veteran of the pre-'48 Jewish militia turned peace activist, has long been known for her passionate defence of Palestinian children. Care and Learning, the organization she founded at Jenin on the West Bank, has now gained international recognition – as well as some much-needed funds – through the "Right Livelihood Award" (better known as "The Alternative Nobel Prize") which was presented to her at Stockholm, on December 9.
Contact: POB 44984. Haifa; fax: 972.6.503668.

■ On December 10, Israeli TV gave the public a glimpse into the volunteer activities of Physicians for Human Rights (AIPPHR). As they have been doing over the past four years, Israeli and Palestinian doctors and nurses arrived at an out-of-the-way Palestinian village where medical services are rudimentary or non-existent – in this case Zabda, in the northern West Bank. The camera caught the broad smiles of the villagers, as they helped set up an improvised clinic in a living room – a marked contrast with other news items from the area.

Niv Gordon of AIPPHR told TOI that some 200 patients, from Zabda and surrounding villages, were treated that day. Fourteen require further treatment not available in the West Bank; AIPPHR undertook to get Israeli hospitals to treat them. Also, entry permits need to be obtained – which could mean fourteen separate, prolonged battles with the military bureaucracy.

Contact: AIPPHR, POB 10235, Tel-Aviv; fax: 972.3.5245343.

■ On November 5, thirty members of the Women's Peace Network – including KMs Tamar Gozanski of Hadash and Anat Ma'or of Meretz – set out for a meeting with recently-released Palestinian women prisoners in Gaza. However, at the Erez checkpoint large military and police forces blocked the Israeli women's way. The military commander on the spot demanded that the women accept a military escort "for their own safety". The women refused, explaining that they came for a private meeting with Palestinian women, aimed at getting a better understanding – and that a military presence would be very much out of place. Thereupon, an ad hoc military order declared the whole Gaza Strip a "closed military area". (The order was applied to the women only; all other cars were allowed to pass freely.)

Contact: Women's Peace Network, POB 9668, Jerusalem.

Soldiers and settlers

In letters sent to the press, to ministers and Knesset members, soldiers from different units complained that they had been ordered to stand aside as rampaging settlers dragged Palestinian motorists out of their cars, beat them up and set the cars on fire. In several cases, the orders to stay passive were given by officers who were settlers themselves. Such officers seem disproportionately numerous, especially on the junior grades, in the units stationed on the West Bank; the military authorities often approve requests to serve "in the vicinity of home."

A particularly difficult situation prevails in the city of Hebron, where a very fanatic and determined group of settlers have established themselves in the midst of the Palestinian population, expecting the army to give them full backing in the frequently occurring clashes. In November, soldiers fresh from a tour of duty in Hebron published in *Ha'olam Hazeh* their detailed testimonies of settler violence; a settler spokesman, asked to comment, told the reporter: *We know who they are, they are leftist paratroopers.*

The debate was continued on the pages of *Ma'ariv*, where a paratrooper officer stated: "These settlers complain that we don't do enough to catch terrorists – but when you try to tell them that their own wild behavior is keeping the army tied up half of the time, they start getting violent, calling the soldiers 'Nazis' and 'PLO informers' and spitting in their faces" (*Ma'ariv*, 10.12.'93).

■ Also in November, soldiers of a reserve company concluded their term of service in the Gaza Strip by sending a letter to Rabin: "We were told that our main task would be 'to protect the settlers against terrorist attacks.' But as things turned out, we were actually required to prevent settlers from attacking the Arab population. This was something for which we had no instructions – whether or not to use force and, if so, how much. Each of us had to act according to his own judgement. As a result, political debates started among us, creating such polarisation that it became nearly impossible to still function as a military unit." Ironically, this letter was publicized by the settlers' "pirate" radio station, November 27.

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■ On October 25, reserve soldier Adi Lakser was ordered to stand guard over Palestinian political prisoners. He refused – and became a prisoner himself. Lakser's month at the Atlit Military Prison was quite eventful, including a hunger strike which won him the right to vegetarian food and prolonged debates with two settlers, who were imprisoned for refusing service on the grounds that "an army which deals with the PLO is no longer a Jewish army". On October 20, all of them could see – and hear – the *Yesh Gvul* demonstrators who, in solidarity with Lakser, demonstrated on the nearby hill.

□ In the middle of November, Sinai Peter – like Lakser a prison veteran – received a call-up order for Ramallah, and decided not to refuse this time. He told TOI: "I had many hesitations, and still have. My main consideration was that after the agreement I no longer felt that any soldier who goes there is helping perpetuate the occupation." Peter spent his tour of service guarding the encampment. It was a time of tensions, and intense political debates. "I felt it was worthwhile to be there and talk with the soldiers." **Contact:** *Yesh Gvul*, POB 6953, Jerusalem 91068.

■ On the morning of December 18, hundreds of Arab and Jewish Israelis arrived at the Golan town of Majdal Shams at the call of the Communist *Hadash*. The trip was designed to remind the public that the question of Israeli-Syrian peace is still pending, and that some 15,000 Syrian citizens have also been living under Israeli occupation for the last 27 years.

The Israelis were met by a large crowd of inhabitants, led by the chief Druse clergymen – who during the decades of Israeli rule came to fill the gap of political leadership.

There was a large rally at the main square, and a march to the nearby Syrian border; the slogans carried and shouted faced Prime Minister Rabin with the choice: *Either the Golan or peace – you can't have it both ways!* Other slogans expressed the indivisibility of peace and mentioned the plight of the Palestinians and the South Lebanese.

From the Syrian side of the border, the demonstrators were addressed – in good Hebrew – by Samir Abu Salah, newsreader on Damascus radio and himself a native of Majdal Shams.

Contact: *Hadash*, POB 46081, Haifa; fax: 972.4.516486.

On the nuclear agenda

On October 2, a worldwide chain of demonstrations marked the seventh anniversary of Mordechai Vanunu's kidnapping by Israeli secret agents. The former nuclear technician is serving a term of 18 years imprisonment in total isolation, for breaching the secrecy about Israel's nuclear weapons, produced at the Dimona Nuclear Pile.

In Israel, several dozen activists of the *Vanunu Solidarity Committee* picketed the Tel-Aviv home of Environment Minister Yossi Sarid, with the slogan *Historical reconciliation – also for Vanunu!*

Minister Sarid of the left-of-Labor Meretz Party is one of those "nuclear doves" who believe that a nuclear deterrent is essential in giving Israel "strategic

compensation" for withdrawing from the Occupied Territories. (So far, none of the nuclear doves drew the conclusion that – since a strategic deterrent only exists when the enemy knows about it – they owe something to Vanunu.)

Active support for Mordechai Vanunu – and opposition to the Israeli nuclear armament – remain confined to a very small minority. But, as Vanunu's family members told *Ha'aretz* (28.9), little now remains of the widespread hostility which characterized the period after his 1986 arrest.

Contact: *The Committee for Solidarity with Vanunu*, POB 7323, Jerusalem;
or: *Campaign to Free Vanunu & for a Nuclear-Free M.E.*, 6 Endsleigh St., London WC1 0DX, UK.

While being internationally congratulated for its agreement with the PLO, the Rabin government showed itself embarrassed whenever the name of Vanunu was mentioned. When members of the European Parliament asked Rabin about his prison conditions, the Prime Minister reportedly snapped at them: *Vanunu has betrayed his country!* For a time, Vanunu's supporters placed some hope in Rabin's relatively liberal Justice Minister, David Liba'i, who visited Vanunu in his cell. But Liba'i failed to bring about an amelioration of Vanunu's conditions of imprisonment, as he had half-promised to the Vanunu family.

Instead, Liba'i made a completely new accusation: that Vanunu's information helped the three Palestinians who in 1988 kidnapped a bus carrying workers of the Dimona pile – an affair which ended with the death of three hostages. Momentarily, Liba'i's accusation stirred up a new wave of hostility to "Traitor Vanunu". It was, however, soon quashed by Haim Ben-Iyon, the former police officer who had handled the 1988 case: "These bus kidnappers were bungling amateurs. They had no advance information from Vanunu or anybody else, and did not know at all that the people they kidnapped near Be'er Sheva were nuclear technicians. I don't know where the minister got his nonsense" (*Yediot Aharonot*, 2.12).

Recently, the mainstream American Jewish community has taken up the call for the release of Jonathan Pollard, the former U.S. naval officer imprisoned for passing military documents to Israel. Prime Minister Rabin also made an official request for the release of Pollard, which is now being considered by the Clinton Administration. For its part, the U.S. Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu called for letters to be sent to President Clinton, linking the release of Pollard by the U.S. with that of Vanunu by Israel.

Actually, there is quite a bit of similarity between the two: both men committed, for ideological reasons, acts which are legally defined as espionage or even treason – but which many people find excusable or admirable; and both have already spent eight solitary years in prison – though Pollard's isolation was less total than Vanunu's. Moreover, the arguments set out in a recent petition signed by a

1,000 American rabbis – that Pollard had already suffered a lot and that there is no danger of his repeating his offence, since he would never again get access to classified material – certainly apply also to Vanunu.

Copies of letters to President Clinton, on: U.S. Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu, 503 Rock Creek Church Road NW, Washington DC 20010.

Available from this address, for \$20: a videotape on Vanunu, originally produced by the BBC.

In the wake of the increasing environmental awareness – at last coming up also in Israel – the Nature Preservation Society took up press reports of high radiation levels in the vicinity of the Dimona pile. This campaign by a semi-governmental agency, not used to tackle controversial issues, was effectively deflected by the Environment Minister – the above-mentioned “nuclear dove”. Sarid visited the Dimona pile and proclaimed his complete satisfaction with the safety measures of the pile’s management, while failing, of course, to disclose the *confidential data* on which his conclusion was based.

In September the issue was reopened – with extensive publicity – by four long-time employees of the Dimona pile itself, who contracted cancer during their work. Together with the widows of two workers who already died of the same disease, the four lodged an appeal to the Jerusalem District Court for an independent doctor to examine the reactor site and determine if their cancer could have been caused by exposure to radioactivity. In lengthy interviews, the families accused the Dimona pile directors of negligence and failure in protecting the workers’ health, and of concealing vital information. It was revealed that, in previous cases of cancer, workers got high compensations in return for keeping silent.

It was Likud KM David Mena who took up the workers’ case and demanded on the Knesset floor the opening of the Dimona pile to independent inspection. Engaging in a heated debate with Foreign Minister Peres – still proud of having initiated construction of the pile in the 1950s – Mena shouted: *Preserving the workers’ health will not harm state security!*

The new combativity of the nuclear workers was also expressed in their participation in the one-day strike of all public sector workers in Israel, on December 9 – the first strike ever to touch the Dimona pile.

‘Territorial continuity’

Though the Bedouins had hardly been involved in the 1948 Israeli-Arab warfare, many of their tribes were forced across the border after Israeli assumption of control over the Negev. In 1950, the Jahalin tribe was driven by the IDF to the then Jordan-held West Bank; on their land, the town of Arad was erected.

After some wanderings, the Jahalin settled at an uninhabited arid area east of Jerusalem. Their presence there went undisputed and unnoticed through the decades of Jordanian rule, nor were they initially disturbed by the Israeli conquest in 1967.

During the late 1970s, the Jewish settlement of Ma’aleh Adumim grew to the east of the Bedouin encampment – where gradually rude huts replaced the original tents.

In June 1993, more than 40 years after their expulsion from the Negev, the Bedouins were served with new eviction orders by Israeli authorities. One of the objectives of Yitzchak Rabin’s policy is to safeguard continued Jewish rule in ‘Greater Jerusalem,’ which he thinks would be served well by creating “territorial continuity” between Jerusalem and the by now affluent suburb of Ma’aleh Adumim.

The military government offered the Bedouins a piece of land about a kilometre away from their present encampment, with water and an access road constructed by the government. The Bedouins were willing to accept this offer, but asked that the new land be officially registered in their name – whereupon the offer was withdrawn.

Soon after, bulldozers started work on extending Ma’aleh Adumim, rolling large rocks down upon the Bedouins’ huts. An injunction by the Jerusalem Magistrate’s Court halted the work. Their lawyer had pleaded that under Jordanian law – never changed by Israel – squatters get a legal status if their presence had gone unchallenged for more than fifteen years. However, after three weeks the court lifted its own injunction “on technical grounds”. The bulldozers started again, and the Bedouins had to evacuate their eastward dwellings.

On November 28, Israeli peace activists, alerted by the East Jerusalem PLO office, held a protest vigil at the spot. An **Action Committee for the Jahalin Tribe** was formed, getting Labor Party KMs as well as those of the Arab Democratic Party to take up the case. A rally took place on December 6, with more than 150 participants, Israeli and Palestinian, all of whom signed a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Christopher – then visiting the Middle East. On the same day, an appeal was lodged with the Supreme Court, demanding “either to halt the work, or to provide a suitable alternative housing site”.

A week later the State Attorney’s office came up with a “take it or be expelled” proposal, which referred the Bedouins to a rocky hillside without water. The offer was rejected. Thus, at the time of writing, the Bedouins are in a precarious situation, with eviction possible at any moment.

Letters of protest to: Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister / Minister of Defence, HaKiryah, Jerusalem; fax: 972.3.6962757 or: 972.2.664838.

Copies to: Jahalin Tribe Action Committee, POB 32213, Jerusalem; fax: 972.2.253151.

■ Bedouins from the Har Hanegev plateau, evicted from their ancestral lands on August 29, are still staying in a tent opposite the Prime Minister’s Office in Jerusalem. They were given some promises for help by Housing Minister Ben-Eliezer. In the meantime, however, some of the expelled Bedouin families who had found refuge with relatives at another part of the Negev, were subjected to another brutal expulsion. The state, which disputes the relatives’ possession of their own land, denies them

the right to exercise the famous Bedouin hospitality... **Additional information, in Hebrew, Arabic and English, available from: Assoc. for Bedouin Rights, POB 5212, Be'ersheba; fax: 972.7.230289.**

■ A prolonged struggle by the Jaffa Arabs to save the old Kfar Shalem Muslim Cemetery ended in failure. On December 6, Tel-Aviv municipal bulldozers wiped out the cemetery – to make place for a housing project. Muslim clergymen retrieved the bones from the garbage heap, where they had been dumped.

A public outcry did, however, save another cemetery – at Nesher, a Haifa suburb – which contains the tomb of a revered Palestinian religious leader and guerilla fighter of the 1930s, Sheikh Az-a-Din El-Kasam.

From Amsterdam to Gaza

Only two weeks after the ceremony on the White House lawn, a fierce international competition already started over who is going to build a port in Gaza. In Hadashot appeared the comment of a "Dutch engineer living in Israel", who was involved in plans for a Gaza Port long before pragmatists gave it a thought. Beate Zilversmidt found out who he was, and spoke with him.

Robert Meents, born in Holland in 1933, was one of the "hidden children" between '42 and '45. Soon after the foundation of the Jewish state he joined a Youth Aliya project, preparing Jewish children for emigration to Israel. That is where he became "Re'even", and that is where it was decided that he was not going to be an architect, since *Israel does not need architects – it needs engineers*. In 1954 he visited Israel for the first time, as representative of the Dutch branch in the religious-Zionist youth movement B'ney Akiva. During that trip, the 21-year old Meents had one shocking experience. In the discussion after a lecture on the cultural history of "the Land of Israel", he asked why the non-Jewish cultural history of the land had not been mentioned, and found himself suddenly all alone...

In 1960, after finishing at Delft his studies of irrigation and coastal hydraulics, he moved to Israel. At that time, he worked for a Dutch company in setting up the Haifa-based Israel Shipyards. In nearly all the years since, Meents was involved in the construction of ports (with an interlude of seven years when he was involved in such projects as the construction of pumping stations for the Dead Sea Works). Nowadays, there is nearly no coastal area in Israel where Meents did not leave his traces. In 1984 he started his own Engineer's Bureau *Littoral – Consulting Engineers*.

Thus far, it all sounds like a new immigrant's success story. But something in Re'even Meents had changed through the years and was going to make him into a dissident of the technological establishment. In the same year 1984, Meents got interested in the coastal and social problems around the port of Jaffa. The plans to transform the Jaffa Port into a marina were fiercely opposed by the Arab fishermen. Meents made contact with them, and designed a port which would have place both for the yachts and for the

fishing boats. Director Semberg of the Tel-Aviv – Jaffa Port Authority – a Likudnik – disliked these plans immensely, since *it was better to get rid of the fishermen, all of them "PLO junkies" who should just be dumped somewhere far away*. Some time afterwards, one of Meents' colleagues tried to explain how come that nobody in Israel wanted to give him work any more: *"we don't know whether we can still trust you."* At that moment a new chapter started in Meents' professional and political thinking.

In the 1980s Re'even Meents got deeply involved in the struggle of the Jaffa fishermen, and became the consultant of Rabita (Association of Jaffa Arabs) conducting the Ajami neighborhood's fight against the garbage dump on the town's seashore.

In the years of the Intifada he also gradually started to work out ideas about a port for Gaza – investigating the conditions such a port would have to fit with. He was asked by Ze'ev Hirsch of Tel-Aviv University, to participate in a study for the Hammer Fund about "Free Port Gaza". Meents proposed a feasibility study, with the port of Ashdod as an example, and a calculation of the costs; he spoke with Fayez Abu-Rahme – a major local Gaza leader – and lobbied for a Gaza Port in circles of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs.

After the famous handshake, the idea of a Gaza Port had suddenly gained enormous actuality. A Gaza Port Authority was mentioned in the text of the agreement as one of the Palestinian institutions to be set up. British, Italian, Dutch and Israeli companies jostled each other for the lucrative contract. In their contacts with a group of Gaza business leaders who want to see results quickly, the idea came up of giving Gaza "a floating port". Soon this idea gained momentum.

Meents, however, is convinced that the floating port would be an economic and political disaster, for Palestinians and Israelis alike. While international companies try to overbid each other with promises of seemingly quick and relatively cheap successes, Meents explains why such a port would not survive a heavy winter. Furthermore, the port being "floating" would not prevent it from causing immense environmental problems. Sand banks would gradually accumulate in the sea south of Gaza, while a big part of the coast north of Gaza, stretching far into Israel, would be eventually left without beaches. Such developments can give rise to wars, says Meents.

The only way to prevent huge environmental changes is a more thorough approach, including dredging and letting huge quantities of sand "bypass" the port, to be carried northwards by the normal currents. And if this is included in the plans, as it should, then the floating port is suddenly not so cheap any more. In that case, a more traditional port – which would definitely be more appropriate during the storms which a port has to weather during many of this region's winters – proves in the long run to be not only the better but also the cheaper solution.

Meents already succeeded in penetrating towards high levels in Israel – as well as Holland – where his ideas were received well by the experts. But in these

contacts Meents also got the strong impression that, though experts tend to agree with him, nobody dares to speak out openly and advocate a more expensive alternative. All of them have links with companies, and these companies know how to convince experts into supporting what is "realistic from a marketing point of view".

Meents now tries to get access to Palestinian decision makers—who might be more interested to listen to him—though also in the communication with them he will have to confront the power of persuasion of international big business. And whether the Israeli Ministry of Environment will want to take Meents' criticism seriously is not sure either.

At the age of sixty Meents seems full of fighting spirit. Far from preparing for life as a pensioner, he is warming up for a one-man crusade against the hydraulics-industrial complex.

Looking ahead in Cairo

In November, the historic Mena House in Cairo was the scene of an unofficial conference on the permanent settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—about the very problems excluded from the "interim" negotiations because they seem to be too difficult to handle now: the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the question of East Jerusalem, the Jewish settlements, the Palestinian refugees.

Uri Avnery (ICIPP) reports that among the Palestinian participants were top PLO members, involved in the official negotiations. The Israelis included academics, former decision-makers and active politicians, among them three Labor MKs. There were also past and present senior American and Egyptian diplomats. All participants accepted the idea of a Palestinian state, implicit in the document "Two States—One Holy Land" conceived by the prominent American international lawyer, John V. Whitbeck, which served as the starting point for discussion.

Differences of opinion remained, not only between Israelis and Palestinians but also between the Israelis themselves. These concerned the future of the Jewish neighbourhoods implanted in East Jerusalem, the exact form which "a fair sharing" in Jerusalem (a formula accepted by all) would take, the implementation of the right of return, etc. But surprisingly, a wide-ranging consensus on the major issues was achieved. However, in order not to embarrass the Labor MKs, this was not put down in a joint statement.

There was general agreement that the interim period should be utilized for the preparation of public opinion for the difficult choices ahead—through debates in the media as well as further conferences of this kind.

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to do something about the violent expressions of opposition to the agreement—both for the soldiers' self-defence and to preserve the conditions for implementing the agreement—but that is no justification for killing, instead of detaining, perpetrators of violence. And, instead of proclaiming amnesty to all

Palestinian fighters who accept Arafat's call for a cease-fire—and by so doing winning rejectionists over—the hunt of "wanted Palestinians" went on, pushing several Arafat supporters, out of self-defence, to association with the fundamentalists.

The government also refrained from releasing a more than symbolic number of Palestinian prisoners. After seeing Rabin and Arafat shake hands, so many Palestinian families had expected the reunion with their loved ones to be imminent!

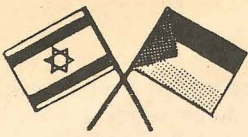
Not less disturbing is the behavior of the settlers. Their provocative behavior towards the Palestinian population is already long known. Ever since their first appearance at Hebron in April 1968, settlers have been reacting indiscriminately against the Arabs: burning cars, shooting into windows or at sun boilers on the roofs, overthrowing merchants' stalls in the Shuk.

Also in the past, settlers have shot to death Palestinian stone-throwers. Now, some settlers have moved towards simple murder of peaceful Palestinian workers as "acts of revenge". (Sometimes, you lose count of who is avenging whom, who is acting and who is reacting.) Furthermore, they state bluntly that they will disobey and resist by force any Palestinian police. Through the years, the Israeli authorities have been very "forgiving" towards rioting settlers; they have seldom been caught and—when they were—punishment was lenient.

The settlers claim that they have obeyed the call of successive governments and settled on lands confiscated from Palestinians "on the service of the nation." That is only partially true. Some of the settlements have indeed been established by Israeli governments—both of Labor and of Likud. But others have been pushed through by clandestine, unlawful actions, receiving government legitimation after the fact. And they were warned by the peace movement that one day they would have to dismantle the settlements (as happened in Sinai after the Israeli-Egyptian peace).

Considering the provocative behavior and political aims of the settlers, it seems ludicrous and unrealistic to suggest giving them the choice of leaving or staying on as Palestinian citizens—as some Israeli dovish writers recently suggested. Certainly, once trust and coexistence are established between the two nations, there must be no obstacle for Jews living in Palestine or vice versa—but this has nothing to do with the political motives which brought the present right-wing settlers to the Occupied Territories.

At the time of writing, there is still no agreement about the very first stage of the withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho. A second and a third stage are still ahead. Five years will elapse until the definite solution—such a long period that it opens numerous possibilities for provocation from opponents on both sides; thus it contains, immanently, the seeds of failure. In order to prevent the process from collapsing, the Rabin government had better already prepare the public for the necessary withdrawal from all territories occupied in 1967, including part of Jerusalem—and for the fact that there is going to be an independent Palestinian State.



A weakling government

– the real danger to peace –

December 10, 1993

by Matti Peled

The situation has never been more bizarre: while on the highest political level the main business seems to be the process of implementing the principles agreed in Oslo and signed in Washington, on the ground the country has never been so removed from anything remotely resembling preparations for peace. The military behave as if the news that the government has replaced the policy of indefinite war by one aiming at establishing peace with the Palestinian people has never been reported to them. Their actions in the Palestinian Occupied Territories (POT) have not changed one bit: ruthless treatment of Palestinian inhabitants, arbitrary arrests, arbitrary denial or postponement of the right to travel, summary punishment of suspects without due process of trial, illegal collection of taxes and – worst of all – a continuation of the death-squads' missions of indiscriminate assassinations – all of this as in the old days of the Intifada. No genuine confidence-building measures have yet been performed, and the negotiations on the terms for establishing the Palestinian autonomous authority in the Gaza Strip and Jericho are bogged down in the pettiness of the Israeli terms, always justified by false arguments of security. In short, no one wishing to see the agreement aborted could suggest a more destructive approach.

Worst of all is the encouragement given to the colonists, by the connivance of the government at their openly declared war against the peace process. Not only are they allowed to carry out with impunity pogroms against Palestinian cities and villages, they are also given free time on the state owned media to argue against the government and justify their crimes with brazen arguments of neo-Zionism which makes erstwhile Zionists ashamed of their past. Their leadership, the state-subsidized "Council of Judea, Samaria and Gaza", has been declared by the Attorney General a *sedition association* which – under the law – makes them an illegal bunch of criminals who should be put behind bars without delay. But the Chief Inspector of Police refrained from taking any action, and the Attorney General himself, after a meeting with that same group, reversed his judgment – declaring them to be *not a sedition association*.

It is worth noting that none of the group is a qualified jurist, and the reversal of the Attorney General's position was not the outcome of a legal flaw discovered in his ruling. Rather, it was the result of brute pressure exerted against him with the backing of the Executive Branch of the government. For the same reason, a judge released a wanted colonist who had been declared a criminal suspect by the police, and who had evaded arrest by hiding in one of the colonies to where the police are effectively barred from entering. The wanted suspect was finally

apprehended during a violent demonstration in which the police docilely allowed themselves to be beaten by the colonists, but was released by the judge, who saw *no obvious reason* to detain him.

There are well-wishers who try to put some logic into this chaotic state of affairs. The explanation offered by them is that the government's conduct is aimed at showing to "the world" how impossible it would be, in the next phase of negotiations with the Palestinians, to evacuate the colonists from their illegally acquired property in the POT; thus, the government would be vindicated in its opposition to a sovereign Palestinian state. But whatever the explanation may be, the immediate historical precedent that comes to mind is the Weimar regime in post World War One Germany. Israel is fast approaching the stage where a violent seizure of power by the fascists may seem, to a considerable part of the population, preferable to the chaotic existence under the present democratically elected but weak and bewildered government.

A step to peace – or to explosion

by Israel Loeff

It had been no other than Yitzhak Rabin who formulated, over the past 15 years, the Labor Party's "basic principles", better known as *the four "No's"*: *No negotiations with the PLO; No Palestinian state; No withdrawal to the 1967 borders; No Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem.*

Having surprised everybody by breaking one of the four No's, Rabin seems adamant not to give in on any of the others. Therefore, the crucial points have been excluded from the present negotiations and put off for five years, keeping open the option of implementing the traditional Labor position: extensive annexations of conquered territories, leaving to the Palestinians only densely-populated enclaves.

In spite of all this, the vast majority of the Palestinian population has accepted joyfully the interim agreement. Like during the 1991 Madrid Conference, one could see Palestinians handing olive branches to Israeli soldiers. On the Israeli side, the recognition of the PLO has been accepted by the public much better than by its political representatives in the Knesset.

However, very soon disappointment spread among Israelis and Palestinians alike. As could have been expected, opponents on both sides quickly started their destabilising actions. The Islamic fundamentalists escalated their terrorist activities, causing an increasing number of Israeli casualties. The Israeli rejectionists' demagoguery accused the PLO of not restraining these acts, though all coercive power in the Territories still remained in IDF hands.

For its part, the army did not show any sophistication in dealing with the situation. Undoubtedly, they had

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