

The Other Israel

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BITTER PILLS

Two months after December 13 – the date when Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho was supposed to start – the “from the Territories” page in the newspapers still seems much the same as it has been for years: clashes, leaving young Palestinians dead or wounded; lethal raids by Israeli “Special Units”; lethal ambushes by armed Palestinian groups. A Fatah fighter in Gaza told *Ma’ariv* (13.2.94): “At first I obeyed Arafat and stopped the struggle, but now I don’t believe this peace business anymore. As long as I see soldiers and settlers around here, I will shoot at them.” (Such frank interviews with Palestinians of all political factions, including those hunted by the Israeli army, are a new phenomenon.)

Increasingly, the Palestinian population loses confidence – and even interest – in the far-flung Israel-PLO talks migrating through the globe, touching at Granada, Rome, Oslo (where it all began), Versailles, Davos, Cairo, and a host of other venues. Only after months of negotiations – with countless ups and downs, breakdowns and reconciliations, all eagerly reported in the daily news – did an agreement in Cairo resolve some of the most contentious issues.

In the Jericho area, the Cairo Agreement gives the Palestinians only a small enclave, but after much haggling they did secure a foothold on the northern Dead Sea shore – to be connected to the main Palestinian enclave through some kind of corridor. In the Gaza Strip, the position is reversed: it is the Israeli settlers who will live in three enclaves – one big and two small – each separately connected with Israel by very long and very narrow corridors cutting through the Palestinian territory. An arrangement was also found for control of the border crossings, for months the main stumbling block. Palestinian flags will fly and armed Palestinian policemen will be present at the crossings – but Israel would still have a veto over the entry of “unwanted” Palestinians (i.e., refugees who may wish to set up residence in Gaza or Jericho). At least, though, Palestinians will henceforward be spared the very humiliating strip-searching, practically mandatory at the border crossings over the past two decades.

In all its parts, the Cairo Agreement contained

some bitter pills – which Arafat decided to swallow, when it became clear that Rabin was not going to offer better terms, and was willing to delay the withdrawal indefinitely. Furthermore, the arrangements made leave so much room for friction and conflict that implementing them will require a great deal of good will; yet good will becomes increasingly scarce as the beginning of Israeli withdrawal is held up yet again, pending an agreement on many more difficult questions. The basic question, however, remains the simple one it had always been: Will the Palestinian “autonomy” eventually develop into a fully independent state?

By now, a near-majority of Israelis seem ready to answer this question in the affirmative – 47 percent, according to the latest poll (as against 40 percent opposed and 13 percent abstaining).* This huge constituency increasingly finds a voice in the statements of mainstream politicians – such as Labor Party Secretary General Nissim Zvili, who stated on February 11: “I never heard of an autonomy, anywhere in the world, which did not eventually lead to independence. Whether we like it or not, by the year 2000 the Palestinian state will be a fact.”

Though he never said so explicitly in public, Foreign Minister Peres is reputed to share this view. On several occasions, Peres argued that more generous terms should be offered to the Palestinians. But the ultimate decision-maker remains Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin, who still seems determined to give the Palestinians “something less than total independence” – which means, in practical terms, giving them as little as possible, since nearly everything they get may help their independence to come about.

In the short run, Rabin holds the advantage: the military power is in his hands, and there is no international pressure upon Israel to counter-balance it. (Indeed, Western governments and financial institutions delay giving economic aid to the Palestinians until the autonomy is implemented, thus playing into the hands of Rabin who pressures the Palestinians by delaying the military withdrawal).

However, the Palestinians have one inestimable advantage: independence is for them a vital interest,

an interest for which they are willing to make enormous sacrifices – as they amply proved. The Israelis, on the other hand, are sick and tired of the occupation, and regard denial of Palestinian independence as anything but a vital interest. It is this difference which must, in the end, prevail.

This, basically, is the reason why Rabin had to deal with Arafat in the first place; why Israel, possessor of the strongest army in the Middle East and of a considerable nuclear arsenal, had to negotiate with and make concessions to a people armed with stones and a few stolen rifles.

It is the same set of circumstances which also imposes a limit to the concessions which Rabin could extort from the Palestinians. It was Rabin's rival and partner, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who recently observed: *It is not in Israel's interest to bring Arafat to his knees; if we do, nobody will follow him.*

No agreement – even an interim one – has the slightest chance of holding, unless it gives the Palestinians a reasonable expectation of achieving their long-sought independence. Yitzchak Rabin, who has built his political future on the promise to bring lasting peace to the Israeli people, has the choice of coming to terms with this fundamental feature of the conflict – or ending his career in dismal failure reminiscent of his predecessor, Yitzchak Shamir.

The editor.

* According to the results published by Yediot Aharonot (18.1.94), 38% of the Likud voters are in favor of a Palestinian state, and 54% against; among Labor voters, 67% are in favor and 23% against.

The Golan's dark side

by Beate Zilversmidt

In Israel, one of the main effects of the Clinton-Assad summit of January 16 was a renewed debate on the Golan question. Already for more than a year the Golan – conquered from Syria in the 1967 Six Day War – has been the focus of right wing opposition to the Rabin Government. It is for them a quite safe item: the Golan is considered a strategic asset; there is no Intifada on the Golan, and what is more, many of the Jewish settlers there are traditional Labor voters. Thus, the nationalist opposition to giving back occupied territories could – by concentrating on the Golan – count on more popular support.

For much the same reasons, the Golan question is not at all popular in circles of the Israeli peace camp. Peace Now never organised a demonstration on the issue, and until lately the Communists were the only ones to pay any attention at all (*see TOI-59, p.8*).

The day after the Geneva summit, Rabin announced that he would not give up the Golan without first hearing the people in a referendum. This was reason for the paper *Ma'ariv* to instantaneously hold a poll among its readers. The results were published on January 28: as could have been expected, there was a majority against withdrawal from the Golan, but a surprising 28% of this right-wing daily's readership declared itself in favor of giving back all of the Golan Heights in return for peace with Syria.

On Saturday, January 29, Gush Shalom members set out northward, at eight in the morning, with buses from Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem. On the way, at junctions near suburbs and kibbutzim, more activists joined to take part in a demonstration on the Yehudiya Junction at the approaches to the Golan Heights, and to see the Golan in an unusual guided tour. In the invitation letters sent out a week before, Gush Shalom had been warning its activists to take food and warm clothes since it was going to be "a long and cold day."

Appeal

In all possible ways, but with very limited means, the Gush Shalom movement is trying to influence the outcome of these crucial times. Any contribution you can make will be more than welcome. Please, send your donation to POB 11112, Tel-Aviv 61110.

At the Yehudiya Junction, a hundred activists lined the roadside with signs: *Better peace than occupied Golan!* – some of the participants handing out leaflets to passing drivers. Reactions were friendly above expectation: quite some of the families driving along agreed that *Peace without Golan is better than Golan without peace*, though some did express doubts as to whether there is really a chance for peace. There were also some disputes. One of the drivers confronted the demonstrators with a recording of a 1992 Rabin election speech, in which he made promises to the Golan settlers which at present seem unlikely to be kept. This Golan settler was rather surprised when he found the Gush Shalom activists not to be the greatest of Rabin fans themselves.

After an hour, with a lot of Golan mud sticking to

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the shoes, the crowd returned to the buses.

Also present on one of the buses was the respected journalist Gideon Levy. He apparently found this a good opportunity to confront his readers, in the weekend supplement of *Ha'aretz*, with the Golan issue. As it turned out a week later, not only the Golan and the meeting with its Syrian inhabitants were new and exotic for him; he did quite a lot of sight-seeing inside the bus itself. Such an eccentric collection of people, among whom could be found *young boys with earrings*, side by side with activists *whose T-shirts have seen many demonstrations*, and not to forget *old women with woollen caps*. And – how admirable – *Uri Avnery, who had been a member of parliament and chief editor of a major weekly magazine, does not scruple to act as the commander of a miscellaneous 'peace platoon'*.

Levy's observations were not equally appreciated by all activists, but did help in letting the readers of *Ha'aretz* (4.2.94) share in what became altogether an impressive day.

The following impression of the second half of the day is adapted from Gideon Levy's two-page article.

The central figure in the monument, at the village square of Majdal Shams on the Golan Heights, is Sultan Al-Atrash, hero of the uprising against French colonial rule. His sword is directed to the West, from where the French came – and from where the Israelis also came, two generations later. The base of the monument is covered with posters portraying Syrian President Assad.

Inside the modest club, an electric heater tries vainly to confront the freezing cold. Several dozen members of the **Gush Shalom** movement sit listening. The wall bears several more portraits – of the late Egyptian President Nasser, of the Lebanese Arab Nationalist Walid Jumblatt, and of local martyrs, youngsters killed by the Israeli army while trying to illegally cross the border into Syria. Side by side with these heroic figures are to be found soccer stars such as Diego Maradona. Furthermore, there is a Syrian flag and the text of the Syrian anthem, praising the "Proud Defenders of the Inviolable Arab National Home, who never surrender."

Both, Salman Fakher A-Din and Taysir Mar'i speak impeccable Hebrew. The one acquired this knowledge during a long stay in Israeli prison; the other – during equally long studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Before reaching this club, they have traveled as guides on the buses and gave their Israeli guests a chance to see and hear things which very few Israelis ever saw or heard.

During that day, the dark side of the Golan unfolded before us: the ruined villages scattered unnoticed at the side of the roads average Israelis use to get to the Mount Hermon ski resort; the shadow of more than a hundred thousand Syrian inhabitants who escaped, or were chased away, in 1967 – and about whom Israelis on their winter holiday prefer not to think; the hurt feelings of those referred to arrogantly by the Israeli media as "the Golan Druse" – without notice of the fact that many of them simply

feel themselves to be Syrians. Now, with withdrawal becoming a less unrealistic option, their voices will probably ring louder.

■ On February 15, **Gush Shalom** brought the Golan down to Tel-Aviv by inviting Dr Taysir Mar'i and Salman Fakher A-Din to be the speakers in a public meeting.

English-language brochure available from:
Arab Association for Development, Majdal Shams,
Golan Heights, via Israel.

The Orient House targeted

Since the time of the Madrid Peace Conference, the Palestinian negotiating team has maintained its headquarters at "The Orient House" in East Jerusalem. Gradually, the place assumed a de-facto extra-territorial status, being surrounded by stout fences patrolled by several dozen armed Palestinian guards. After the Oslo Agreement, the Palestinian flag was flown from the flagstaff of what was now openly acknowledged to be a PLO building.

The Israeli government was far from pleased at this focus of incipient Palestinian sovereignty inside annexed East Jerusalem – but the Palestinian *fait accompli* was widely recognised by senior foreign diplomats, who made it their habit to "counterbalance" each visit to the Israeli government offices in West Jerusalem by a visit of equal duration to the Palestinians in the Orient House.

On December 22, 1993, the so-called "Judea and Samaria Council" – leadership of the Israeli settlers in the Occupied Territories – declared its intention to "impose a siege" on what they termed "The Orient House Terrorist Headquarters". The settlers scheduled their action for a week later, December 28.

Within hours of this arrogant announcement, **Gush Shalom** started mobilising for counter-action. Contact was established with the Palestinian leadership in East Jerusalem, and a telegram sent to Police Minister Shahal, calling upon him to forbid the settler provocation and making it clear that, should the settlers attack the Orient House, they would find **Gush Shalom** activists in their way. Activists were phoned and asked to prepare; at the time, the possibility was contemplated that the confrontation would last for several days, during which the Orient House would actually be under siege.

After several days, the Jerusalem police made up its mind, and decided that they would allow "neither the settler action nor the counter-action of **Gush Shalom**" (*Yediot Aharonot*, December 27). The settlers promptly appealed to the Supreme Court (with the help of the Association of Civil Rights in Israel which supports the right to demonstrate regardless of political content). The definite Supreme Court hearings were scheduled for noon on December 28 itself.

By that hour, some thirty **Gush Shalom** activists were gathered at the American Colony Hotel, two hundred metres from the Orient House, listening tensely to the radio reports from the court and maintaining telephone contact with the Palestinians.

It was clear that the Palestinian leadership was in a delicate position, subject to conflicting pressures. On the one hand the Israeli police asked them to "act responsibly" and "avoid any provocative act"; on the other hand, the Palestinian grassroots activists felt angry at the settlers and wanted to confront them.

The decision finally taken was that "The Orient House will be held solely by its regular staff and corps of guards"; hundreds of Palestinian volunteers who intended to come were turned away. For their part, the Israelis of **Gush Shalom** were welcome to demonstrate – but outside, not inside the Orient House fence. Meanwhile, at two o'clock the radio announced a compromise at the Supreme Court: fifty of the settlers would be allowed to demonstrate in front of the Orient House, the rest could hold a rally some distance away.

The **Gush Shalom** activists debated their next step, considering the Palestinians' rather ambiguous position and the possibility that – as on many previous occasions – the settlers would not honor their pledge, and thousands of them would arrive at the Orient House. Some activists already had the experience of being attacked by furious settlers. In the end, despite some misgivings, the group proceeded to the Orient House, just before the police sealed off the whole area.

The arriving police found the peace demonstrators already in place, holding their colourful signs outside the locked Orient House gates and – since the settlers did not yet appear – getting the full attention of numerous press and TV cameras. After a hasty radio consultation with his superiors, a senior police officer accepted the **Gush Shalom** presence.

An hour later, two members of the Palestinian negotiating team, Ziad Abu-Zayad and Dr. Saib Arikat, came out of the building, and warmly shook hands with all the demonstrators. Abu-Zayad also made a speech thanking the Israelis who had come to express support.

There was a feeling that the Palestinians were very embarrassed with the possibility that something could happen and in fact wanted **Gush Shalom** to leave before the arrival of the settlers. Therefore, the demonstration was declared over, and most of the activists – including the not so young and more fragile among the demonstrators – went home. About a dozen demonstrators – mostly Jerusalem students – did remain to await the settlers. They were later joined by KM Taleb A-Sana, of the Arab Democratic Party, who used his parliamentary immunity to get through the – by now very massive – police cordons.

When the fifty settlers at last arrived on the scene, they too were accompanied by sympathetic KMs, including Likud Party Leader Benyamin Netanyahu. They were vocally frustrated at "finding the best place already occupied by leftists". The police, however, took no chances, keeping a good distance – and a whole Border Guard platoon – between the opposing groups. But there was a good deal of shouting and exchange of slogans (as well as some curses and insults). Inside the Orient House compound, the

Palestinian guards at first obeyed the order of their commander to stand impassive at attention. But gradually, many of them – recruited from among young Palestinian activists – joined the fray, shouting slogans and singing Palestinian songs. Half an hour later, it was all over: Netanyahu ended his TV interview, and the whole group departed.

The following day's papers were unanimous in describing the event as "a right-wing fiasco."

Hebron solidarity

TOI received the following report from Yoel Shem-Tov, member of the Hebron Support Group.

The situation in the Occupied Territories – after the short euphoria following the famous September 13 handshake – was as tense as ever, with the army hunting and shooting "wanted Palestinians" and Hamas activists ambushing soldiers and settlers.

In addition to all this, settler rampaging on the West Bank grew to alarming proportions. Every Palestinian attack on settlers was answered by retaliations upon the Arab population as a whole. Setting Arab cars on fire, and shooting at sun-boilers on the roofs of Arab homes, became for the settlers a daily routine; such behavior was legitimized by opposition Knesset Members as "a natural expression of anger."

Worst of all was the situation in Hebron. Not only is the large settlement Kiryat Arba located nearby, but a considerable number of fully-armed and rather trigger-happy fanatics established themselves at the heart of the town, under army protection – to the discontent even of some of the soldiers (*see previous issue, p.7*). The killing of a Palestinian taxi driver in Hebron, by settlers whose identity was not clarified, occurred in circumstances which made it no less than a cold-blooded murder.

The settler outrages were widely published – and condemned – but did not get an adequate response from the existing peace movements (mostly still paralysed by excessive confidence in the government). The Palestinians in the West Bank, particularly Hebron, continued to be virtual hostages.

In Jerusalem, a group of young Israelis decided to go to Hebron and visit their Palestinian friends. The visit resulted in the formation of the **Hebron Support Group (HSG)**. From the start, it was clear that the group neither could nor wanted to adopt a political program (other than calling for an end to the occupation). The group's short-term aims and methods of operation were to be flexible, to be defined and re-defined through practical experience, getting to know the conditions on the ground, and – above all – through consultation and coordination with local activists. Provisionally, the following aims were decided upon:

- Monitoring and documenting the actions of the settlers and the army, in an effort to make both politically and judicially accountable for their actions.
- To establish, through regular visits, friendly relations between Hebron inhabitants and Israelis.
- To draw public attention and increase public

opposition to the army and the settler violence.

On December 25, a group of twenty Israelis held a meeting with the Hebron leadership, at a large house in the town centre. All parts of the Palestinian political spectrum were represented; among those present were deposed Hebron Mayor Mustafa Natsheh, member of the Palestinian negotiating team, and Dr. Aziz Dweik of the Hebron Islamic University, but recently returned from a year's exile at the deportees' encampment in South Lebanon. All Palestinian participants expressed the wish for cooperation with HSG. The considerable political differences between them did not affect their conviction that the situation in Hebron was unbearable and required as wide a front of opposition as could be formed.

Following the meeting, the Israeli group went for a walk through the city center. Though this was by no means a demonstration, the military present acted in their customary way: the city center of Hebron was declared on the spot to be "a closed military area", and the activists were ordered to leave. After a prolonged debate with the officers, and after large military forces arrived, the activists - with very mixed feelings - decided to go.

Some days later, a new crisis erupted in Hebron. Following the killing of the two settlers by the Az-Din Al-Kasam Squads (military arm of the Hamas), a week-long curfew was imposed upon the whole of Hebron - but only upon the Palestinian inhabitants. As always, the settlers were given the right of free movement - and used it. Each night, dozens of Israeli settlers set out to raid nearby Palestinian houses, smashing windows, cutting electricity lines and setting on fire whatever they found in the backyards. The army, enforcing the curfew, did not even allow the inhabitants to leave their houses and put out the fires; nor were the Arab firemen of Hebron allowed to operate.

Immediately after the curfew was lifted, members of HSG went once more to Hebron. They spent several hours at Palestinian houses near the Giv'at Haharsina settler enclave, an area which seemed to have suffered the most. The main question was: What to do beyond expressing sympathy?

As we heard, efforts by the Palestinians to lodge complaints with either army or police encountered enormous bureaucratic difficulties. Advocate Linda Brayer, who was among the visitors, undertook to do what could be done on the judicial level. Contact was established with journalist Yosef Elgazi of *Ha'aretz*, who himself later visited the site and wrote an extensive article in the weekend supplement.

The idea arose that next time HSG should come *during* rather than *after* the curfew - though there were doubts whether this really could be done.

In early January, large military forces raided a house on the outskirts of Hebron, where four armed Palestinians had been hiding out; two of them had long been on the army's "most-wanted" list. After an hours-long battle, the house was blown up and the four killed. The incident provoked numerous demonstrations and protests by Hebron inhabitants, and

there were further casualties during their dispersal.

During the weekend, HSG activists arrived to visit the homes of the bereaved families. While they were at one of the houses, shots were heard. The news came that two young people had been wounded, and a curfew had been imposed on the old city of Hebron.

In hasty consultations, the Israelis decided to immediately hold a protest demonstration and to disobey any military order to leave. Clutching improvised signs in Hebrew and Arabic, they started marching towards the area under curfew, gradually joined by hundreds of Hebronites in a completely quiet demonstration. As expected, the army, immediately upon becoming aware of this procession, came up with "a closed military area" declaration. The Israelis, as decided in advance, refused to leave and seven of them were arrested. The Palestinians dispersed quietly, and were left unmolested by the army. After several hours of rather perfunctory police interrogation, the HSG members were released. All felt that it was a modest price to pay for having manifested their solidarity with the Palestinians in an outspoken way.

In early February, there was again a curfew in Hebron, following a Palestinian ambush in which three settlers were wounded. Members of HSG felt worried about the Hebron people, particularly those they already knew personally. Penetrating the curfew proved far easier than expected: the activists simply took advantage of the settlers' privileged position. In the morning, they boarded in Jerusalem the Israeli public bus going to the settlements - and therefore enjoying settlers' privileges. They got off at the settler enclave in Hebron, without attracting much attention. From there, they easily crossed the short distance to the Palestinian area which they had visited on their previous trips, and started a house to house distribution of chocolate.

They were relieved to find out that there was no special settler harassment this time. After several hours, the activists got out the same way they came. HSG, attn. Yoel Shem-Tov, POB 31417, Jerusalem.

Traveling peace tent

Since December a Peace Now tent, manned day and night by local groups of youthful activists, has been travelling through the country accompanied by Dudu Gerstein's "Dove Tree" sculpture. Arik Segev reports on the two-weeks stay in Tel-Aviv.

Peace Now's return to the streets was long-time due. The frost period, currently ruling the peace process, aroused growing doubts in the minds of many citizens, giving the right-wing a perfect opportunity to spread its propaganda. The fight over public opinion left Peace Now no choice but to leap head-on into street action, influencing the public by seeing it eye-to-eye.

During the last week of December and the first week of January, the "Peace Tent" was put up in front of the Tel-Aviv Cinemathèque, collecting signatures on postcards to Rabin, encouraging him to move forwards with the peace talks. It turned out that quite

a lot of people liked the idea of sending Rabin a postcard. "Tell Mr. Rabin that I'll understand it if he doesn't write back", said a young student as he wrote down his name and address.

The tent functioned also as a peace process information desk: again and again we were explaining why a withdrawal from the Territories is needed for a peaceful settlement. Furthermore, we engaged in the free distribution of stickers.

Right-wingers made their appearance only rarely. On one occasion, the police warned participants of an impending counter-action. Therefore, a considerable number of peace activists were mobilized, but in the event, only a single "Archie Bunker" arrived, expressing loudly his disapproval. All in all, the whole experience convinced us that the common man and woman who walk the streets are in favor of ending the bloodshed.

The right-wing did make life difficult for the Peace Now youth of Netanya, a coastal town north of Tel-Aviv with 75,000 inhabitants. About the four days' stay of the tent there, Shai Kamarini writes.

It was quite a daring idea to have the "Peace Tent" in Netanya for four days and nights. Nobody ever did something remotely similar around here. Our biggest achievement so far was to maintain a weekly vigil on the coastal road junction, opposite the right-wing vigil – and they always greatly outnumber us. Netanya has always been a very right-wing town. True, recently a Labor mayor was elected, for the first time in decades – but that was only because the Likud incumbent was such an arrogant man, about whom there were rumours of shady deals with public money.

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We could rely mainly on the local Meretz people. The Labor Party has practically no grassroots activists here; in the elections they rely on hired campaign workers. But we did have access to the new mayor, Poleg. This was very important because the lower-level municipal employees did everything to harass us. At least once a day, we had to call on the mayor to tell them to leave us alone. We also got much help from the Meretz councilors who brought us food and drinks and were always on hand to help.

The number of people in the tent varied between fifteen (during the most busy hours) and three (during the night). It was mostly a youth action; perhaps the grown-ups here have become too timid.

We knew that we should be prepared for violent reactions, and we decided not to yield: we would not resist if the odds were overwhelming, but we would also not go away but repair whatever they would destroy and start again. And that is more or less how we did it.

Twice the ropes were cut and the tent collapsed, and several times our table was overturned. The first and the third day were the worst. A Likud councilor came with his two buddies, plus a woman who said she was a

bereaved mother – but I don't believe her. They were all shouting and screaming "Traitors! Leftists! Throw them out of here!" and collecting a mob against us. Then, when the police came, they had the cheek to say that *I* attacked *them*!

We did stay put, except for the last night. At half past one, a huge drunkard came with a knife and said he would stab us if we didn't go away within half an hour. Then we went. We tried first to stop a police car but they did not agree to stay and protect us. Angry and frustrated, we decided that we had no choice but to dismantle everything and lock it in the Meretz Club. But we did come back in the morning, as soon as there were people in the street, and carried out the last day.

I learned during these days that there is a lot of difference between right-wingers. On the second day, the right put up a competing table; some of the people were nasty, but I became quite friendly with a girl who suggested that we talk a little bit about "other things than politics." There was also Suliman, an old Likudnik, who came every night to bring us coffee and sit with us for hours of hot debate. He said it was good to see young people who care, even if for "the wrong things".

There were also many people supporting us: some came with happy smiles, saying: *At last! I have been waiting years for this!* Many took stickers for their cars, even the stickers which have slogans in both Hebrew and Arabic. We also got many signatures on the postcards to Rabin. Every hour we brought the filled ones to a safe place, and again and again I counted them: 900, 1,000, 1,100... It gave me such a confident feeling. Altogether we collected about 1,500.

At the end of the last day, we had a concluding rally. About a hundred and fifty people attended. Also many who are afraid to come to the vigils in front of the right, did come now and asked me for placards.

I think that – even though the majority in this town is on the right – there are quite a few people on our side, and we have given them a bit more courage. **Contact: Peace Now, POB 6733, Tel Aviv 61066.**

Struggle for the junctions

During the Intifada years, the Women in Black set up an impressive network of groups throughout the country, protesting against the occupation in weekly vigils at road junctions. At the movement's peak strength, more than thirty junctions were "covered" each Friday noon. Several other groups such as Yesh G'vul and Down with the Occupation joined in, holding their own vigils – either beside the women or at different locations. It had a tremendous effect: the insistence of a group of devoted activists – not extremely big in number, but easily recognized and with a simple and clear message – each week caught the eye of tens of thousands of motorists. Week after week, year after year, many of these proved unable to pass by without expressing their own opinion (with the means available to a driver of a car). The vigils were also commented upon in the media and by

politicians from all parts of the spectrum. In short, "junction demonstrations" became a concept in Israeli politics.

In the period of euphoria following the Oslo Agreement, many peace activists felt their task to be about over, and most of the weekly junction vigils ceased. The right-wingers, busy mounting a campaign against the Israel-PLO Agreement, decided to fill the vacuum and take over the junctions for their own demonstrations. At first, they tried to frankly mimic the **Women in Black** – both "Women in Blue and White" and "Women in Green" were tried – but without much success. However, once both the settler leadership and the major right-wing parties entered the fray, with their organizational and financial resources, they did manage to establish a considerable weekly presence along Israel's main roads.

Meanwhile, in Tel-Aviv the **Women in Black** continued their weekly protest – though with adjusted demands – on a narrow traffic island at the junction of the main northbound roads out of the city, where traffic is immense each Friday noon. (The **Women in Black** have been demonstrating there every week since early 1988, including the difficult time of the Gulf War.)

On December 17, a well-organised right-wing alliance of the Likud and Tzomet parties occupied the site, surprising and outnumbering the **Women in Black**, whom they harassed in all possible ways short of actual violence (see previous issue, p.7). News of the incident spread quickly. Over the following week, **Peace Now**, **Yesh G'vul** and **Gush Shalom** mobilised their supporters.

On the next Friday, the nationalist alliance found itself outnumbered by the united peace groups. The police – which on the previous week seemed to side with the right – now tried a more impartial approach. Their solution was to partition the contested "territory" with hastily erected barriers and assign each group of demonstrators one half. This proved, however, a rather impractical solution: shouts and insults were traded across the police barrier, and a dozen policemen found it hard to maintain the delicate balance.

Two days later, a meeting took place at the Tel-Aviv police commander's office, with both sides represented by activists, lawyers and Knesset Members. (The peace movements got the support of Labor KM Yael Dayan – who had also participated in the demonstration itself, holding a large carton dove bearing the words *Give peace a chance!*) After a prolonged debate, the police commander gave his decision: the **Women in Black's** prior claim was recognized; the right-wing was relegated to the opposite sidewalks. To their protests he replied: "I don't have enough manpower to keep you separated each week."

On the following Friday, the right-wingers obediently stayed away from the traffic island. They did, however, bring a consolation price. Among the Likud demonstrators could be discerned, a sign in his hand, none other than former Prime Minister Yitzchak Shamir.

The Tel-Aviv events gave a great boost to restarting the weekly peace vigils around the country, now with

the active involvement of **Peace Now**, the **Meretz Youth** and various Labor-affiliated youth groups.

At the time of writing, 25 junctions are once more regularly "covered" on Fridays and several more local vigils are in the process of being established. Occasional clashes with the right-wingers have been reported, though in many places a local *modus vivendi* was achieved.

■ Since December, the popular Israeli singer Yishai Levy can be heard daily on Israeli radio with his new song *Goodbye to Gaza*. The refrain goes *I say goodbye to you without sorrow, Gaza/ I will leave you without looking back/ Sit on the beach and forget about my uniform*.

The singer told *Yediot Aharonot* that he had had no political intentions when introducing the song. "I am not involved in politics," he said. "I thought the song sounded good and anyway, everybody I know feels the same about Gaza, whatever their political opinion."

■ On December 12, **Young Labor** (Labor Party members under the age of 33) invited to its Tel-Aviv public meeting both Sirhan Salaymeh, head of the PLO East Jerusalem office, and Ron Schechner, a settler and senior member of the "Judea and Samaria Council". At first, the experiment seemed to go smoothly, as Salaymeh and Schechner engaged in a quite civilised debate and, to the photographers' delight, even shook hands. However, when Salaymeh explicitly mentioned receiving his instructions from Yasser Arafat, Schechner suddenly burst out: "I have been cheated! I don't talk to terrorists!" and stormed out of the hall. Salaymeh continued to address the audience, and on many issues they went along with him. On one issue, however, they did not reach agreement: the future of annexed East Jerusalem.

■ On December 17, a **Young Labor** delegation met with a delegation of the Palestinian FIDA party – a "pro-Oslo" faction which broke away from the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. They decided on a joint project of establishing contacts between young Israelis and Palestinians involved in such fields as economics, communications, environment and tourism, in order to support and advance the peace process.

Also agreed upon in principle was the idea of holding a joint demonstration in support of the Israel-PLO negotiations. However, subsequent discussions on the details of the demonstration revealed too many practical difficulties and the idea was shelved.

■ On December 22, two Israeli settlers were killed in a Palestinian ambush at Bituniya on the West Bank. Within hours the right started violent demonstrations in different places around the country, and the radio reported them to be engaged in clashes with the police.

The Tel-Aviv **Meretz Youth** decided to cancel their meeting scheduled for that evening and went all together to one of the hot spots, a junction north-east

of the city. On their placards they wrote: *We mourn all victims of violence!* This text aroused the fury of the nationalists, who assaulted them and tore the placards to pieces. Policemen first tried to protect the youths, but after some time ordered them to go home.

"We knew in advance that it could end this way," one of the youths later said on TV, "but we felt we had to make our voice heard on such a day, at any cost." **Contact:** *Meretz Youth, 21 Tchernichovski St., Tel-Aviv.*

■ Following Prime Minister Rabin's veto on a major Labor Party campaign in support of the peace process (proposed – and prepared – by Labor's rather dovish Secretary-General Nissim Zvili), **Young Labor** decided on December 24 to launch a campaign on their own. Without extra finances from headquarters, they produced *The young believe in peace!* signs and stickers, and a series of weekly vigils all over the country was started.

One of these vigils, near the Tel-Aviv Northern Railway Station, became the target of a vicious attack by right-wingers, but the young Laborites stood their ground. They also stand at the Ra'anana junction, northeast of Tel-Aviv, where they got on one occasion the active support of senior Labor Party member Masha Lubelski, Deputy Minister of Commerce.

Contact: *Young Labor Party (Hamishmeret Hatzeira), attn. Aviram Beltzer, 110 Hayarkon St., Tel-Aviv 61032.*

■ On December 25, Christmas eve, the annual **Rapprochement** procession by Israelis and Palestinians took place for the third consecutive year, at the (mainly Christian) West Bank town of Beit Sahour. As some 150 Israelis got off their buses, several new features were obvious: for the first time, huge Palestinian flags were openly displayed; and there were no soldiers to be seen anywhere around. (Two days earlier, the Palestinian and Israeli organizers met with the military governor and succeeded in convincing him of the wisdom of such restraint.) Yet the atmosphere was far from jubilant: there was too much disappointment and frustration at the indefinite delay of the Israeli withdrawal, due to have begun two weeks earlier.

Israelis and Palestinians lighted their candles and walked, a colourful long procession winding quietly through the narrow streets. At the conclusion there was a rally with a wide spectrum of speakers: from Israeli and Palestinian grassroots activists, to such dignitaries as the local mayor and the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. Among the many issues spoken of, one seemed predominant: the hope and indeed the firm demand for the release of the prisoners, which alone could create a real atmosphere of peace.

Contact: *Centre for Rapprochement, POB 24, Beit Sahour, West Bank via Israel; or: Rapprochement, c/o Hillel Bardin, 19 Kfar Etzion St., Jerusalem 93392.*

■ Kochav Ya'ir, one of the outermost suburbs of Tel-Aviv, ends where the Green Line (pre-'67 border) begins. On December 24, some 70 local right-wingers marched to that border, unfurling signs reading: "We don't want PLO terrorists here!", "The settlers are our defence!", and "Danger – Border!"

The demonstration, which got an extensive press coverage, did not please everybody in Kochav Ha'ir.

A week later, on December 31, about a hundred inhabitants marched on the same route and stood at the spot on the old border with a giant sign reading *We are not afraid of a peaceful border!* "I had to do this", one of them told *Ma'ariv*. "Otherwise I would be ashamed to tell people where I live."

■ At noon on Friday Jan. 7, several dozen **Gush Shalom** activists lined the road at Gillo Junction, on the Jerusalem-Bethlehem road – much frequented at that hour by settlers. To these was handed a *Message to Israelis going abroad*:

"Dear citizen! You have left the territory of the state of Israel. You are now the guest of the neighboring Palestinian state. Please avoid antagonizing the local population and observe the basic rules of behavior customary among civilized nations, such as: no killing, no trespassing, no damaging of property, and no uprooting of trees. It is recommended that you obey the instructions of the local Palestinian police. Remember, the people at home have no desire to become entangled in war because of irresponsible acts committed by Israelis abroad. Go in peace and return safely!"

Some of the passing settlers were not amused; in fact, they tried to assault the **Gush Shalom** demonstrators and smash a giant cartoon of an armed settler. Police intervened to push them back.

■ On Jan. 19, a large public meeting held by the Gaza Islamic movement hosted Arab mayors from Israel and Jewish activists of **Gush Shalom** and the **Nitzotz** group – all of whom participated in last year's struggle against the deportations (see TOI-54/55). At the entrance to the a-Shawa Cultural Center they met face to face for the first time and shook hands with a large number of former deportees – now returned home from their year's exile in the South Lebanon no-man's-land. Also present in the great hall were many of the lay and spiritual leaders of the Gaza Islamic Movement, for most of whom this was their first meeting with Israelis.

A place of honor was accorded to Cadya Hajaj, a 18-year old **Gush Shalom** activist, who knows Arabic, and – while blind – had made a special effort during the whole year not only to support but also to make contact with the deportees, by writing letters, telephoning, and sending faxes. She was invited to the podium and presented an olive wood plaque she had prepared for Abd-el-Aziz Rantisi, the deportees' spokesperson now incarcerated at Ansar III. The text on the plaque was read and answered by warm applause: *Welcome back to your homeland, after your persistent struggle against the deportation. We hope to see you take an active part in building peace between the state of Israel and the state of Palestine.*

In the speeches differences regarding the Israel-PLO Agreement were not concealed. Still, the hope expressed by Uri Avnery – that this meeting would be the start of a fruitful dialogue between the Israeli peace movement and the Islamic movement – was received very well by the audience.

■ On January 21, two days after meeting with the returned deportees in Gaza, Uri Avnery was invited

to take part, not far from there, at a panel discussion organized by the Israeli army division stationed in Gaza. The entire officer corps of the division, from the commanding general to lieutenants, were present. Except for Uri Avnery, the panel included El'azar Granot of Mapam, and two right-wingers, settler leader Avi Farkhan and former KM Geulah Cohen.

The great majority of officers, of all ranks, sharply attacked the right-wingers, arguing that they were not offering any solution, and that the Oslo agreement should be given a try. Only a few criticised Avnery for advocating a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

■ The trip of the Israeli intifada casualty and Gush Shalom activist Amir Avramson and his wife Daliya Becker to Tunis, for a meeting with Arafat, drew quite a bit of media attention. *Kol Ha'ir* weekly even sent its own correspondent all the way to Tunis in order to write a two-page article on "The Terrorist and the Victim" (*Kol Ha'ir* 21.1.94).

Israeli TV filmed the newly-married couple (who met during peace actions) at Ben Gurion Airport. On the evening news, Avramson was shown saying: "All Palestinian prisoners must be released. Yes, also the one who put me in this wheelchair. And Israelis who killed Arabs should be released as well. That is the only way. If we really want peace and reconciliation, we must wipe the slate clean and forget the past."

■ On January 29, some fifty peace activists from Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem participated in a visit to five Arab villages and towns in Northern Israel, organized by the Nitzotz group. At each place, the visitors were hosted by inhabitants and heard about ongoing local struggles with the authorities, issues of land ownership, development funds or (in two of the cases) government non-recognition of the villages' very existence.

One of the participants told TOI: *Of course I knew that Arabs in Israel are discriminated - but I never realized how systematic it is, and how government officials use every possible law or regulation to the Arabs' disadvantage. Whatever the outcome of the talks with the PLO, this will remain a very serious problem, right within Israel.*

Contact: Nitzotz, POB 1575, Jerusalem 91094.

■ On February 9, a delegation of declared PLO members entered the Israeli parliament building - to meet with Members. The Knesset visit of the Palestinians was organized by the group Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue Nablus-Jerusalem, of which several Israeli members also participated. The delegation met with the Communist Hadash faction and the two Arab Democratic KMs as well as with several KMs from Labor and Meretz, and last but not least with KM Shlomo Benizri of the religious-Oriental Shas.

Among the Palestinians, who represented different PLO factions, was former deportee Shab Shaheen, exiled in 1968 and allowed back only last year. The *Ha'aretz* photographer caught her with KM Tamar Gozanski - the two women emotionally embracing.

The main theme of the meeting was humanitarian rather than political. A consensus was easily found about how favorable an effect the release of prisoners

and the clarification of the fate of MIOs would have on the public atmosphere on both sides. Once this basic formula was accepted, the discussion turned on the two points of basic asymmetry: numerically, Israel demands the return of a single prisoner and information about the whereabouts of six missing servicemen, while the Israeli prisons and detention centers hold some 12,000 Palestinians. Moreover, the PLO would not be able to reciprocate an Israeli release of prisoners since the Israeli known to be alive and imprisoned - Ron Arad - is held by one of the Lebanese armed factions connected with Iran and/or Syria.

KM Benizri suggested - speaking Arabic - that a Palestinian delegation to Lebanon, Syria or Iran might help convince official as well as unofficial decision-makers; and that the release of Israelis - or information about missing ones - might facilitate the release of Palestinian prisoners. The Palestinians agreed to consider seriously some action along these lines, probably through Palestinian women's organizations to whom action on a "humanitarian-non-political" basis is easier.

Prolonged discussion on the missing Israelis roused strong reactions from some of the Palestinians. They pointed out that while the fate of the six missing Israelis has been repeatedly taken up by President Clinton and other major world leaders, virtually nobody even knows that many dozens of Palestinians disappeared at various stages of the conflict, and Israel is under no pressure to provide information on their fate. Dr. Mahmud Sawalha of Al-Najah University said: "Palestinian families have the right to know the fate of their missing dear ones, just as much as do Israeli families" (*Ha'aretz*, 10.2.94).

Among settlers

Labor KM Yossi Katz - an outspoken dove - maintains intensive contacts with settlers. He tells them openly that he expects a Palestinian state to come about, and does not try to give them false reassurances. Rather, he supports those who want to re-settle within Israel's pre-'67 borders, and has already proposed a bill for compensations, to enable settlers, who own a house which they can now hardly sell, to buy a house somewhere else.

On December 21, Katz was the guest of honor at the founding of a Settlers for Compensations association at the Ginot Shomron settlement on the West Bank.

Several polls indicated that about a third of the settlers in the Territories are more than willing to go - if they could get compensations. However, Prime Minister Rabin would not hear of it. Katz's bill was rejected - as was a similar one presented by Meretz KM Avraham Poraz. "For the time being, we have no interest in encouraging settlers to leave," Rabin stated (*Yediot Aharonot* 16.2.94).

■ On February 10, the Golan Settlers for Peace association was officially formed at Katzrin, largest Israeli settlement on the Golan heights. Its founding members, several dozen Golan settlers, accept the possibility that peace with Syria will require them to

leave, expecting to receive fair compensations in that case. The groups spokesperson, Re'uven Ze'evi, told Israeli television: "In 1978, I supported the peace with Egypt, though it required the dismantling of the North Sinai settlements. I still think this was the right thing then – it already gave us nearly two decades of peace on our southern frontier. Now, when we have the chance to do the same with Syria, I can't ask the people in Israel to give up this chance just so that I can stay on in the Golan. What is at stake is much more than the fate of this house or that street – it is the chance for a secure future to all our children, and this we must not miss."

■ On Feb. 5, a group of twelve Israeli and Palestinian volunteer doctors arrived at Ras Atiya Village, in the Northern West Bank, where no medical facilities of any kind are available for the 2,500 inhabitants. During the day, the doctors treated some 250 patients, from Ras Atiya itself and eight neighboring villages. Thirty five cases requiring further treatment were located. Two children who require heart operations, and who are not insured, will get their treatment paid for through the "children's fund" maintained by the Physicians for Human Rights (AIPPHR). Other patients, it turned out, are insured in the military government's sick fund – but failed to get costly treatments and medicines which they need, and to which they are entitled. Pressure from AIPPHR already proved quite effective in such cases.

■ Until January 1994, the military government failed to pay for the medical treatment of Palestinians wounded by the Israeli army. AIPPHR, which encountered this practice, asked the help of Meretz KM Naomi Hazan. She wrote to the military authorities, pointing out that the army does pay for the treatment of "wanted" Palestinians who are wounded during capture and brought to hospital as prisoners under guard. This made it all the more strange that there was no payment for those whose wounding was "a regrettable accident" according to the army itself.

At the end of January, the military authorities promised to start paying for such treatments, and already on February 4 Naser Al-Sutri, an unemployed worker from Al-Bureij Refugee Camp, at last got the operation which he had needed for over ten months, ever since being shot accidentally in the leg by soldiers chasing "wanted Palestinians".

■ From Feb. 6 to 8, AIPPHR organized an Israeli-Palestinian conference on "Cooperation in Medicine and Health," held at the Palestine Hospital in Cairo. The Israeli participants included directors of hospitals, deans of medical schools and senior officials of the Health Ministry and of the major medical insurance associations. The Palestinian participants were of similar status, headed by Dr. Fathi Arafat, President of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society. Also attending were Egyptian doctors and Canadian ones involved in providing medical aid to Palestinians. Workshops on a variety of practical issues of health care were each presented by an Israeli and a Palestinian. The conference ended with the forming

of joint working groups to further actual cooperation on each of the fields discussed.

During the final meeting, Prof. Elic Aviram of the Tel-Aviv Asuta hospital announced that his hospital would donate a million Dollar medical instruments to a Gaza hospital.

Contact: AIPPHR, P.O.B. 10235, Tel-Aviv 61101

■ Also after Oslo the Tel-Aviv-based Women For Women Political Prisoners take care of dozens of new and old prisoners, whose harsh conditions they help to ameliorate. They collect money to provide the prisoners with such basics as blankets, and money for additional food, and persistently cover in their bi-monthly newsletter – in Hebrew and in English – what is going on behind bars. One of the members, Yosefa Pick, is a lawyer, and therefore has access to the prisoners, though the authorities are very inventive in finding always new ways to harass her. Another of WOFPP's sources of information is contact with the families. Every Friday at six in the morning, Chava Cohen boards the bus to Hasharon prison, to meet the families before and after they are allowed a visit. Another way to meet them is going to the Occupied Territories and visiting them at home. Regularly, Israeli or foreign journalists join the women. Chava told us the following touching story.

"On Saturday, Feb. 4, Osnat Ofer from the *Rosh Echad* youth weekly went with us to a small village near Ramallah, to visit M.A., 16-years old and a released prisoner. We came to visit on a beautiful but cold day. The family of M. is engaged in sheep raising, and sheep are everywhere. The family house, lacking water and electricity, is bare of anything but mattresses serving for sleeping and sitting. There were ten children, of whom M. is the eldest. We brought a sackful of toys, donated by families in Tel-Aviv, and the children, scantily dressed and barefoot, played and ran around most happily.

The room was warmed by a small fire burning in the middle, and we heard the story of M., who had been arrested at age 14, and had been beaten and tied up, kept in severe cold, and otherwise mistreated in the Ashkelon Detention Center. The signs on her arm and legs supported the truth of her story. Osnat Ofer, the journalist, was deeply shocked.

When we went back to the car, M. and her mother accompanied us politely, notwithstanding the cold and their inadequate clothes. Before entering the car, Ofer took off her coat and wrapped it over the shoulders of M.'s mother."

Contact: WOFPP, POB 31811, Tel-Aviv.

In front of the bulldozers

The following Jahalin update was adapted from an article by Israeli peace activist Maxine Nunn, which appeared in the first issue of the new English-language Palestinian weekly Jerusalem Times on February 2, 1994. For more background information on the Bedouins' struggle, see previous issue, page 9.

Two-time refugees, the Jahalin tribe is once again being threatened with expulsion, this time from the place where they have lived for nearly 40 years. The

settlement of Ma'ale Adumin, founded some 25 years after their arrival at this semi-desert area east of Jerusalem, is growing to accommodate more Jewish settlers, and the Palestinian Bedouins have been told to move – again.

At the moment, the Rabin government is working feverishly to create continuity of Jewish habitation from so-called metropolitan Jerusalem to an expanding Ma'ale Adumim, in order to cut the Jericho enclave off from the rest of the West Bank. The Jahalin, living literally on Ma'ale Adumim's doorstep, are the first in line for displacement, though not the last.

Some Israeli grassroots activists heard about the Jahalin's plight and visited the encampment. This was the start of the **Action Committee for the Jahalin Tribe**, consisting of Jahalin and Jerusalem residents, as well as people from the neighboring Palestinian town of Izariyeh and from as far away as Tel-Aviv and Lydda. A public campaign was launched, including demonstrations, solidarity activities, petitions, and last but not least: the dissemination of information.

The legal angle is being handled by a Jerusalem-based human rights and legal aid center, **The Society of St. Yves**. After an appeal to the Supreme Court on December 6, the government proposed to the Jahalin an alternative site. However, the site chosen is beside the Jerusalem garbage dump on a rocky hillside, which the state refuses to make habitable by clearing the land. Advocate Linda Brayer rejected the offer on behalf of her clients. The Jahalin have additional reservations regarding this site which, although purportedly "state lands," was in fact expropriated from people in the nearby village of Abu Dis, who still claim ownership.

A proposal made by the Jahalin themselves for a parcel of government land, which they are sure was not expropriated from other Palestinians, was rejected out of hand by the authorities.

Together with the government offer came the implicit threat that if the Jahalin did not accept, the bulldozers may be sent right into the encampment "even tomorrow". The **Action Committee** has accordingly set up an emergency response network, ready to send supporters and journalists to the spot, should the government's threat of forcible removal be carried out. Supporters also started to take turns sleeping at the encampment.

On the afternoon of Feb. 6, some fifteen men and children sat in the path of a construction company bulldozer and challenged the driver to run them down – rather than allow him to proceed with moving earth and throwing it upon their homes. The work was stopped and the contractor promised to bring settler representatives on the following morning. When the settler officials arrived, they found a crowd of activists, journalists and public figures – including several members of the Palestinian negotiating team – awaiting them. After some hesitation, the settlers declared their intention to revise their plans so as "not to inconvenience our Bedouin neighbors".

This momentary success does not in itself assure the future of the Jahalin tribe. The case has by now been taken up by several Israeli Knesset Members, notably

KM Taleb a-Sana who visited the site twice. He made a public appeal to Rabin, to stop all construction work in the area pending a solution acceptable for both sides.

At the time of writing, preparations are made for a demonstration at the entrance to the Ma'ale Adumim settlement, to be held on Saturday, Feb. 19.

For five consecutive months, the Bedouins expelled on August 29, 1993, from their ancestral lands at the Har Hanegev Plateau (see *TOI-58, p.4, and TOI-59, p.9-10*) stayed in a tent outside the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem. For a long time, their situation seemed hopeless: the Israeli media almost totally ignored their protest; government officials, with whom they tried to negotiate, treated them with contempt; and the Supreme Court already ruled that all Negev lands are the state's to dispose of, unless the Bedouin tenants are able to bring documents to prove the contrary (which they almost never can).

Nevertheless, the Bedouins and their supporters did not lose heart. Dr. Yitzchak Bailey, an anthropologist of Tel-Aviv university and a world authority on Bedouin culture, got an article published in the *New York Times* and was interviewed by CNN. He denounced as "ethnic cleansing" the government's policy of destroying the traditional Bedouin way of life and forcibly concentrating them in townships, which become pools of cheap labor. Subsequently, the problem at last gained the attention of the Israeli media, and the Knesset appointed a parliamentary commission of inquiry on the Bedouin Question.

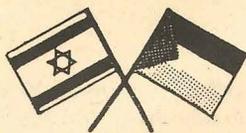
The decisive step was taken by KM Taleb a-Sana of the Arab Democratic Party, himself a Bedouin, who threatened to shake the Rabin government's narrow parliamentary majority. This threat worked, and on the very same day the Bedouins were officially promised an alternative land, comparable to their old one, on which they could establish "shepherds' residences" and maintain their traditional way of life.

It remains to be seen whether the present decision really constitutes a radical break with decades-old policies, from which other Bedouins are going to profit as well – or rather, an extorted concession which will stay alone.

Assoc. for Bedouin Rights, POB 5212, Be'er Sheba.

■ In the early morning of Jan. 4, settlers at East Jerusalem's Mount Scopus placed seven caravans on a site originally intended for an Arab girls' school, which the Jerusalem municipality agreed to give over to them. Within hours, **Peace Now** activists, reinforced by members of **Gush Shalom**, rushed to the spot and held a vigil with the slogan *Jerusalem municipality betrays peace!* The press took up the issue prominently, regarding it as "the first test of the new Jerusalem municipal administration." The publicity forced Ehud Olmert, the new Likud mayor, to make a tactical retreat. Though Olmert supports the settlers' aims, he ordered them to remove the caravans which had been placed *without legal procedure*.

On Jan. 22, **Peace Now** members picketed a fund raising dinner for the Mount Scopus settlers, in which the guest of honour was... Mayor Olmert.



Formalities and futilities

- the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations -

by Matti Peled

The conduct of Israeli decision-makers, since signing with so much aplomb the Declaration of Principles (DOP) in Washington, brings to mind the manner in which an earlier Israeli government managed to scuttle an agreement on Palestinian autonomy - the one signed at Camp David. Rather than getting down to the business of implementing the principles within the time frame agreed upon in the DOP, a process began of sabotaging the agreement in every possible way.

Initially, the Israeli public had only a vague idea as to the nature of the "difficulties" which Rabin had discovered in the DOP. All that was allowed to be leaked was that they related to fundamental security issues which had been carelessly glossed over in Oslo and now had to be taken care of. Since the nature of these issues was very intricate, so the argument went, their settlement required a very long time and thus made the timetable of the agreement unrealistic - and certainly deprived it of any "sanctity". For many weeks Israeli reporters and commentators failed singularly to explain what were these issues, which weighed so heavily against the obligation of fulfilling the terms of the agreement.

A visit to the PLO headquarters in Tunis at the end of December helped clarify the mystery. Although the personalities spoken to, Yasser Arafat, Yasser Abed Rabu, Hakam Balawi, spoke in a respectful manner about their differences with the Israeli leadership - at a time that an "Arafat is a madman" campaign was raging through the Israeli mass media - the nature of the Israeli reservations became quite clear. In brief, the Israeli proposals at the various rounds of negotiations held to discuss the practical application of the principles had one clear aim: to denude them of essence. This became evident in all three areas of disagreement: (1) border control, (2) evacuation of the Gaza and Jericho areas, and (3) the size of the Jericho area. All Israeli proposals on these issues clearly aimed at negating what had been agreed to in Oslo.

The manner of doing that was very simple: take certain phrases in the DOP which can be construed as negating its essence and argue that they are the heart of the document. Regarding border control it was argued that, since the DOP makes Israel responsible for defence against external threat, Israel should also be responsible for controlling the movement of people and goods into and out of the Gaza and Jericho areas - a task universally recognized as pertaining to the realm of internal security.

Regarding the requirement to evacuate the Gaza and Jericho areas, the Israeli negotiators argued that - since Israel retains the responsibility for the safety of the Israeli settlers in these areas - it could not

really evacuate the areas but only redeploy its forces around the settlements and along roads which the settlers may use. And concerning the Jericho area, Rabin claimed that it should be redefined so as to allow the Palestinians control over only a fraction of it. Rather than concede the whole of the administrative Jericho District, which is around 250 square kilometre, the Israeli version confined "the Jericho area" to no more than about 50 square kilometre. This falls far short even of the Labor Party's "Alon Plan" of the 1970s, which - though contemplating extensive annexation of territory elsewhere - did provide for Israeli evacuation of a "Jericho corridor" of considerable extent.

The outcome of the official Israeli arguments is clearly that the Palestinians would be deprived of anything resembling sovereignty. The motive behind the Israeli interpretation of the DOP is to deprive it of anything indicating that it may be seen as the beginning of a process leading to the establishment of a Palestinian state. This, of course, is diametrically opposed to the PLO view which considers the DOP as the first step toward a Palestinian state. And there is very little chance that a bridge could be thrown over this gap separating the Israeli and the Palestinian interpretations of the DOP.

But the two parties are linked inseparably to the process of reconciliation which none of them can risk breaking off. Therefore, they are bound to try ceaselessly to search for formulae which would appear to take the process further in spite of the irreconcilability of their respective basic positions. This is how the so-called Cairo Agreement was reached on February 10. In fact it is not an agreement since it covers only some issues deriving from the DOP, leaving a great deal to be completed within the next few weeks (or months). But what has been agreed to in Cairo is utterly impractical.

The procedures adopted for border control are, to say the least, unrealistic and unstable. The defence of the settlers and the control of the roads invite inevitable clashes between Israeli army units and Palestinian police. And the configuration of the Jericho area, although not yet finalized, creates an administrative monster. Thus, for the moment it seems that all this juggling with partial agreements is merely a manner of holding on to formalistic but futile negotiations until such time as one of the parties would be ready to modify its basic view regarding the final goal of the exercise.

■ Once again, Israeli soldiers were imprisoned for the crime of refusing to stand guard over Palestinian prisoners. On Jan. 11, the unit of Corporal Boaz Zohar, of Kibbutz Sa'ar, and Staff Sergeant Hagai Mischari of Granot was ordered to relieve the guard company at Fara'a prison on the West Bank - where adolescent Palestinians are held. The two refused, and were instead sent off to Atlit - the prison reserved for disobedient Israeli soldiers.

Contact: Yesh G'vul, POB 6953, Jerusalem 91068.