

# The Other Israel

Newsletter of the Israeli Council  
for Israeli-Palestinian Peace

January-February 1987

No. 24

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## The Supreme Court's Failure

The Israeli Supreme Court enjoys considerable prestige – more, perhaps, than any other Israeli public institution. In many cases, it had acted as the guardian of civil rights and liberties. However, the best of judges can hardly be at his best when he is bound by laws which are inherently unjust. The legal system which operates in the occupied territories contains many such laws, designed to give the Israeli military governors an almost unlimited power over the lives of a million and a half Palestinians.

One of the most harsh and dreaded of these laws are the so-called "emergency regulations" which enable the military authorities to expel inhabitants of the occupied territories and condemn them to lifelong exile.

Because of many protests, in Israel and abroad, Menachem Begin's government decided in 1979 to suspend the use of this measure. Ironically, it was Defence Minister Rabin, of the Labor Party, who reintroduced expulsions in 1985, and who had, ever since, zealously maintained this policy.

Of the many Palestinians expelled by Rabin, none received as much attention as Akram Haniyeh, editor of the A-Sha'ab daily newspaper in East Jerusalem. Haniyeh's extensive journalistic, literary and political activities made him well-known to Israelis and foreigners, as well as to fellow-Palestinians. Thus, it was clear that Haniyeh was not a "terrorist", and that his political views were the true reason for his expulsion.

In the Israeli public, there was wide opposition to the expulsion of Akram Haniyeh. Knesset Members, parties and political movements raised their voices against it. Israeli journalists, too, came out in opposition to the expulsion of a newspaper editor, regarding it as a gross infringement of the freedom of the press, and a precedent endangering their own position.

However, on appealing to the Israeli Supreme

Court, Akram Haniyeh encountered an impassable legal barrier: the rule of "secret evidence". The Israeli secret services claimed to have no less than 311 documents allegedly proving Haniyeh's involvement in "terrorist activities", but neither Haniyeh nor his lawyers were allowed to see these documents, which were declared to be "classified material".

The Supreme Court ruled this procedure to be legal under the provisions of the "emergency regulations", and the secret documents were admitted as evidence. Akram Haniyeh, in protest, decided to cancel his appeal. He declared his refusal to participate any further in a trial in which his fate would be decided on the basis of evidence which he could not see, and against which his lawyers could offer no defence. On the following day, Haniyeh was taken from his prison and put on an airplane leaving Israel. He may well never see his homeland again.

It must be admitted that Akram Haniyeh was given ample grounds for being sceptical about Israeli justice. For Israelis who are concerned about the moral and legal norms prevailing in their country, this is a sad day indeed.

The Editor

### Chronicles of the Peace Struggle

3/12 – 200 Arab and Jewish students demonstrated together in Jerusalem, to protest the anti-Arab pogroms carried out in the Old City of Jerusalem by settlers and racist groups. After demonstrating in the center of Jewish West Jerusalem, the students intended to go to the Old City and visit Arab families whose houses were burned down by the racists. The police, however, closed down the medieval gates of the Old City,





denying them passage; at the Damascus Gate, police horsemen assaulted the demonstrators, six of whom were arrested.

A week before, the police left the Old City gates wide open for the extreme right mobs to stream through, destroy Arab property and burn down Arab houses.

- Alon Olearchik, a well-known Israeli singer, produced together with the Arab singer Amal Murkus a new song called "Shalom-Salam" ("Peace" in Hebrew and Arabic).

4/12 - Two students were shot dead by the Israeli army at Bir-Zeit university on the West Bank. Within hours, 150 Jewish and Arab students organised by "Campus" held a protest demonstration at the residence of Prime Minister Shamir in Jerusalem.

In the following weeks, The Occupied Territories were the scene of mounting violence and bloodshed. Palestinian demonstrators were each day wounded or killed by the Israeli army. The escalating violence and repression sparked the largest mobilisation of the Israeli peace camp since the end of the Lebanon War. Unfortunately, the Labor Party was able to exert pressure behind the scenes and prevent the "Peace Now" movement, many of whose members belong to the Labor Party, from coming out against the repressive policies of Labor Defence Minister Rabin. In the absence of "Peace Now", the lead was taken by the Jewish-Arab "Campus" student movement, which acted both inside and outside the university campuses.

5/12 - In Kiryat-Tivon, at the northern part of Israel, anti-racist demonstrators picketed a meeting organised by the racist Meir Kahane. They were assaulted by Kahane's thugs, who used fists, clubs and razor blades.

In this, unlike other cases, the police had exhibited a commendable rapidity of action. Two of the racists were arrested, and their trial, on charges of violent assault, began within three days.

6/12 - Israelis and Palestinians have worked together on the fields of a Palestinian West Bank village, which are due to be confiscated for Israeli settlement. The organisers regard this as one of a series of symbolic actions, expressing non-violent opposition to the occupation.

- "Yesh Gvul" activists painted a green line on the site of the pre-'67 border between Jewish West Jerusalem and the Arab eastern part, to show that the "unification of Jerusalem" is but a myth and camouflage for the military occupation of the Arab part - a lesson driven home by the week of anti-Arab pogroms.

Members of Kahane's racist movement tried to interfere, but were held back by the police.

- In Nazareth, the PLP (Progressive List for Peace) held a meeting to protest the Bir-Zeit killings. Speakers included the two PLP Knesset members, Arab poets, a representative of Bir-Zeit university and a representative of the Oriental Jewish "East for Peace" movement.

- In Tel-Aviv's main street, the police dispersed, with extreme brutality, a demonstration organised by "Campus" to protest the Bir-Zeit killings. Police horsemen swung their clubs as they charged the demonstrators, and members of the notorious "Border Guard" unit dragged more than 20 demonstrators to the waiting police cars. Two demonstrators, both of them Arabs, were severely beaten and had to be hospitalised.

7/12 - In all Israeli universities (except for the Bar-Ilan religious university) "Campus" demonstrations took place. In the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the university administration called in the police, which dispersed the demonstrators with tear-gas. The police claimed that this was necessary "to separate the Campus demonstrators from right-wing counter-demonstrators and prevent a violent riot." In fact, however, the tear gas was shot only at the peace demonstrators.

In Beersheba university, too, the "Campus" demonstration was violently dispersed and three demonstrators were arrested. In the other universities, the demonstrations passed quietly.

8/12 - Defying a two-weeks ban on political activity imposed by the Hebrew University administration, a demonstration against police brutality took place on the university campus. It was not molested.

- Members of the Communist Party's women's organization held a vigil in front of the Defence Ministry in Tel-Aviv, to protest the Jerusalem pogroms and the Bir-Zeit killings.

- Near midnight, members of Mapam and "The East for Peace" picketed the house of Prime Minister Shamir.

10/12 - "Campus", together with students affiliated to Mapam and Ratz, demonstrated at Tel-Aviv University both against the repression in the occupied territories and against police brutality inside Israel.

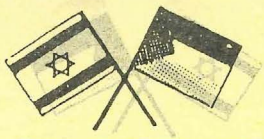
11/12 - The "Bir-Zeit Solidarity Committee", which had been completely inactive for over two years, resumed its activity. Together with "The East for Peace" it held a demonstration in the center of Jerusalem, to protest the West Bank killings and repression. Police forces kept away the racist Meir Kahane and his followers, who shouted: "Death to the traitors!"

The Bir-Zeit Committee's demonstration converged with a demonstration held nearby, organised by the youth movements affiliated to Mapam and the Labor Party, who called for Jewish-Arab coexistence and denounced the anti-Arab pogroms. In practice, the two demonstrations merged, producing a wide coalition of peace forces.

12/12 - Ten members of the Israeli delegation, who had participated in the Roumania meeting with the PLO, visited Bir-Zeit University and addressed a meeting organised by the Bir-Zeit student council.

13/12 - A large demonstration was held in





Nazareth by the Communist Party's "Democratic Front for Peace and Equality," to protest the acts of repression in the occupied territories. The Communists also held demonstrations in several other Arab towns and villages.

14/12 - Members of the religious dovish "Netivot Shalom" ("Peace Roads") movement picketed a hall in Tel-Aviv where supporters of the anti-Arab terrorist underground held a concert of Chasidic songs, in order to raise funds for the pro-underground public campaign. Since its formation in 1982, "Netivot Shalom" has been battling against the tendencies of nationalist fanaticism, which are spreading among large sections of the Jewish religious community in Israel.

Members of the Human and Civil Rights League picketed the Defense Ministry in Tel-Aviv, calling for the immediate closure of a new detention center in the Gaza Strip.

This prison was established by the army authorities to deal with the overflow of new prisoners, detained during the weeks of continuous demonstrations and riots. The prison became known by Gaza inhabitants as "Ansar 2" (in reference to the notorious Ansar prison camp, established in South Lebanon in 1982). In its month of operation, a large number of testimonies have already come out of the new prison, regarding the torture and mistreatment to which the inmates were subjected.

15/12 - A group of reserve paratroopers who ended a month of military service in Hebron told the press: "We had to serve as oppressors. A large part of the duties which we were called upon to perform consisted of deliberate harrassment of the local population. Such assignments have very slight connection with anything genuinely required for Israel's defence".

They also told that the Gush Emunim settlers in Hebron resort to constant provocations in order to take over the whole of the Patriarchs' Tomb/Al-Ibrahimiya Mosque, a place holy to both Jews and Muslims. According to the paratroopers, the military authorities turn a blind eye to the settlers' provocations. The paratroopers' testimony was published by Knesset Member Ran Cohen of Ratz, who demanded a thorough investigation of its contents.

16/12 - At the Supreme Court in Jerusalem, the appeal of Akram Haniyeh against his expulsion was heard. In front of the building, two demonstrations protested the expulsion. One was organised by Ratz, and the other by the ad-hoc "Committee Against the Expulsion of Akram Haniyeh".

17/12 - In Haifa, a newly formed "Committee Against The Occupation" organised a demonstration at the city center.

20/12 - Members of a new group called "Women Against Violence" held a vigil in downtown Jerusalem, calling for an end to violent acts in the city. Their banner read: "Solutions, not victims."

25/12 - Six students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and five at Haifa University were prosecuted before university disciplinary boards for participating in the December 7 demonstrations, which were held in defiance of a ban by the university administrations. Ja'aber Asakler, chairman of the Jerusalem Arab Students' Committee, was suspended from studies for a whole semester. On the other students large fines were imposed.

26/12 - In the West Bank towns of Ramallah, Hebron, Betlehem and Jericho, members of "Yesh Gvul" distributed leaflets to patrolling Israeli soldiers. The leaflets read: "Soldier, remember that it is your legal right to ask for a transfer back to the territory of the State of Israel. Remember that, by military law, it is *your duty* to disobey any illegal order".

The army authorities were apparently caught unprepared by this action, which is completely unprecedented, and the leaflet distributors were unmolested. Later, however, Lieutenant General Moshe Levy, the army Chief-of-Staff, ordered an investigation, and army sources stated that they regard this leaflet distribution as being "incitement" and "a serious law-breaking".

## MEETING IN ROUMANIA

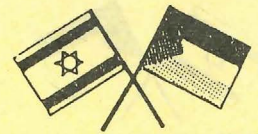
Since the enactment in August 1986 of the Anti-Peace Law, outlawing all meetings of Israelis with PLO officials, a quiet but intense debate has been taking place within the Israeli peace camp.

One school of thought believes that peace activists should break no law, however obnoxious. In the past, it was the peace camp that insisted on the rule of law, while arguing against the excesses of the security service, against illegal settlements in the occupied territories, etc. This is the point of view of Mapam, Ratz (The Citizen Rights Movement) and the Labour doves.

Another school of thought holds that the law may, under certain conditions, be broken, but only in a well-considered political context. This would necessitate the involvement of an international umbrella of eminent personalities or organizations and a final communique indicating a political program designed to convince Israeli public opinion that the meeting has been beneficial to peace. This is generally the opinion of the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace. The ICIPP would certainly support any proposal designed to test the law by trying to arrange meetings which would conform to the letter of the law, but contravene its intentions, such as holding international press conferences with PLO officials or international conferences on academic subjects with PLO participation. (These two possibilities are the narrow "loopholes" which the Anti-Peace Law leaves half-open.)

On the other hand, quite a number of people





insist that the law, being anti-democratic and anti-peace, should be broken even as a pure act of protest. It is among this group that the initiative for the Roumania meeting took hold.

With the best of intentions, this initiative was ill-conceived from the beginning. Decisions were taken – it never became clear by whom and how – that finally frustrated many of the hopes connected with the meeting.

The first decision was to have the Israeli delegation include only people who have not taken part, in the past, in meetings with the PLO. Ostensibly, this was done in order to avoid any party labeling of the delegation. Thus, everybody who has any experience with Israeli-PLO contacts was left out.

While this was held to be in accordance with PLO wishes, it later appeared that the contrary was true. According to official PLO statements after the event, not only Yasser Arafat himself but most other PLO officials, including Muhammad Milhem, (who did come to Bucharest) decided, at the last moment, not to attend the meeting because of the low level of the Israeli participants.

Equally dubious was the decision to hold the meeting in Roumania. This automatically gave the Israeli Communist Party, and the Roumanian leadership – as well as pro-Communist elements in the PLO – an effective veto-power over all parts of the proceedings, and especially over the composition of the Israeli delegation. This in turn led to the elimination of a number of groups distasteful to Rakach, the Israeli Communist Party, by the simple device of not sending them tickets.

One result was that the main hope connected with the meeting, namely that a major part of the Israeli delegation would consist of new peace activists of Oriental-Jewish descent, was dashed. Groups like East for Peace, the Oriental Front and others did in the end boycott the initiative altogether, because of this resentment to Rakah's taking over the responsibility for the whole venture.

Only twenty-one Israelis went to Roumania, instead of the 120 envisioned. Of these only two were Oriental Jews. None of the Israeli participants was a major figure in the Israeli peace camp, or in Israeli politics.

From there on, nearly everything went wrong. The Roumanian government either had second thoughts or got cold feet, and unilaterally transferred the meeting from Bucharest to an obscure place on the Black Sea shore. Instead of chairing the meeting, the Roumanians disappeared from it mysteriously and completely.

Major PLO leaders either did not come at all to Roumania or stayed behind in Bucharest, explaining later that they did not wish that the Palestinian delegation should outrank the Israeli one. The PLO delegation was led by Brigadier Abd-al-Razak Yahya, a member of the PLO executive committee hitherto unknown in Israel.

The formal meeting lasted only two hours. No dialogue took place. Both sides read statements –

the Israelis highly emotional ones, the Palestinians formal and precise ones. No common statement was adopted; only at dinner did the two delegations mingle and chat amicably.

Official PLO statements later pointed out that on the Palestinian side the only objective was to help the Israelis defy the law, and that no political dialogue was intended.

The meeting thus fell far short of all hopes and expectations, and some might say that it did more harm than good. However, it may be said that in spite of the mistakes and intrigues involved, the very fact that a meeting took place at all, and that an unjust law was defied, made the whole exercise worthwhile.

Uri Avnery

## Challenging The Anti-Peace Law

It can hardly be denied that the Roumania meeting was seriously marred; that it could have achieved much more than it did.

During the hectic days of September 1986, many individuals and groups worked to organise a meeting with the PLO, in order to defy the newly-passed Anti-Peace Law. Many Israelis who were not previously involved were galvanised into action by the passage of the law. This meant that a great part of the people involved had little previous experience in organising such meetings – though they made up for it by their enthusiasm.

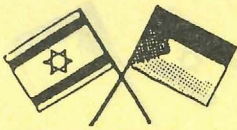
Sadly, events proved that a few of those involved were also motivated by factional considerations; a series of sordid manoeuvres and machinations has alienated many of those who had originally intended to participate. As Uri Avnery remarked, the most serious loss was the withdrawal of almost all the Oriental Jewish peace activists. It was the Orientals who had initiated the meeting, and then comprised the bulk of the 120 Israelis who originally intended to participate.

Had the meeting taken place as originally envisioned – with Oriental Jews taking the lead – it could have been a historical breakthrough; it could have had wide repercussions among the entire Oriental community in Israel, from which the right-wing Likud draws its main electoral strength. It is known that the Palestinian side, too, greatly appreciated the importance of Oriental Jewish participation. It can only be hoped that Oriental Jewish peace activists will take place in future, better-organised meetings.

Even as it was, however, the Roumanian meeting – in which I am proud to have participated – was far from being insignificant.

For several weeks, the Israeli newspapers, radio and television devoted an immense volume of words to the act of these 21 people. Nearly all politicians in Israel expressed a view on a meeting lasting two hours, none of whose participants was previously known to the public. The Knesset hotly





debated this meeting and attempts were made to whip up a hate campaign against the delegation members. The racist "Kach" movement held a demonstration, its members holding hangmen's nooses and signs reading "Death to The Traitors!" Itzhak Shamir, newly elected Prime Minister of Israel, was not far behind them; he used one of his first public appearances to denounce the delegation members as "unspeakable traitors, for whose heinous deed no words are bad enough".

At the very same time, the enemies of peace on the Arab side also expressed their furious opposition to the meeting; the Palestinian participants were threatened with death by the Abu-Nidal group, which had in the past assassinated Palestinian peace fighters such as the late Said Hammami and Dr. Issam Sartawi. In Lebanon, Muslim fanatics denounced the PLO leadership for its participation in the Roumania meeting, calling it "A capitulation to the Zionist enemy and a betrayal of Islam", using much the same words as their Jewish counterparts in Israel, who regarded the meeting as "A sell-out to the terrorists" and "An act of treachery against the Jewish People". The Roumanian hosts, for their part, were exposed to

strong diplomatic pressure exerted by the Israeli government, while at the same time the Roumanian embassy in Beirut was attacked by rockets; both kinds of pressure had the same objective: to prevent the meeting from taking place.

The meeting aroused so much interest and so many passions, not because of any particular thing said or done in the meeting hall of an obscure hotel on the Roumanian Black Sea coast. The meeting was significant, and was regarded as such on both sides of the border, because it was a symbol of defiance: Defiance of the Anti-Peace Law and defiance of the whole anti-peace policy embodied in that law. This is why all enemies of peace could not but regard it with unrelenting hostility. For the same reason, its participants received a surprising amount of sympathy, even in very unexpected parts of Israeli society.

\* \* \*

Before the delegation left Israel, government officials threatened that all its members would be arrested upon their return. However, when the delegation did go to Roumania, the government was put on the horns of a dilemma. To go ahead with arresting all 21 members of the delegation at the airport and prosecuting them immediately would have meant a big political trial, which would have become the focus of wide attention in Israel and abroad. Moreover, at the advice of their lawyer, Amnon Zichroni, the delegation members stated that they had not, in fact, broken the law, taking advantage of various "loopholes" in its text; thus, it was clear to the government that any trial would be a long drawn-out legal battle, and that the state would find it far from easy to secure a conviction.

The government could not, on the other hand, afford to ignore the open defiance of a law just enacted – especially as right-wing elements inside and outside the government coalition were vigilantly watching against such a possibility. Therefore, the government tried to steer a middle course. Only four members of the delegation were summoned for interrogation. Mysteriously, these were the four elected in Roumania as a steering committee; summons were made out to them before they arrived home, thus making it clear that Israeli security service agents had maintained close surveillance over the delegation.

Only three months after the meeting was an indictment, even against these four, submitted to the courts. Clearly, the government feels uncomfortable about the whole affair, and will try to postpone the judicial process as long as possible. When a trial does take place, an attempt will be made to keep it quiet and unobtrusive. In that, however, the government is unlikely to succeed. A political trial of people whose sole "crime" was to engage in peaceful dialogue is sure to receive very wide attention, and cause the Israeli government a big embarrassment.

Adam Keller

### Twenty years of occupation – a new "Yesh Gvul" petition

On December 19, the "Yesh Gvul" movement published a new petition, signed by 300 reserve soldiers. Its text read:

To the Prime Minister and Defence Minister

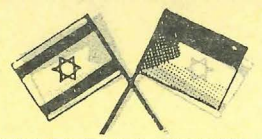
We, the undersigned, serve as reserve soldiers in the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces); many of us participated in Israel's wars. We have different ideologies and do not belong to a single political party; but we are united by our concern for the morality of Israeli society and for its very existence.

The Lebanon War, the creation of settlements and the acts of oppression in the occupied territories are symptoms of unconcern for human life, of the loss of moral values and of the loss of any sense of reality. These phenomena close all options of peace with the Palestinian people and with our other neighbors; they are isolating Israel in the international community, and prove that Israel's government prefers territory to peace.

The occupation has corrupted our moral values and made nationalist extremism and racism acceptable in Israeli society. Jewish terrorist groups and racist doctrines are now considered to be legitimate phenomena.

We have sworn to defend the existence and security of the State of Israel. We remain loyal to this oath. Therefore, we call upon you not to coerce us into participating in the process of occupation and oppression which is taking place in the occupied territories.





## A Palestinian view of the meeting

The meeting in Roumania was widely described and discussed in the Arab and Palestinian press. The following are excerpts from an account given by Rashida Mahran, one of the Palestinian participants. They were translated and published in Ma'ariv, one of the main Israeli daily newspapers, on December 1, 1986.

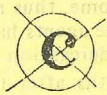
"We had to wipe the tears from our eyes when we parted from the brave members of the Israeli delegation". With these words Rashida Mahran, a senior member of the PLO, summed up the first meeting with Israelis in her life, which took place in Roumania last month.

She gave the following warm description of that meeting, which she regards as historic, to the Kuwaiti daily "a-Ra'i al-Am": "When we arrived at the Roumanian capital, our hosts brought us to a hotel, distant from the city. We thought we were going to meet the Israelis there, but found that the hotel was intended only for us. We did not dare to ask our hosts where the Israelis were.

On the next morning, we heard that we will have to go elsewhere to meet the Israelis. We waited tensely for the moment that we would see them. Muhammad Milhem and Abd-el-Razak Yahya, members of the PLO Executive Committee, have arrived together with us in a special plane from Amman, but did not stay in the hotel with us. Later we were told that Milhem will not come, and that he left to Yahya the leadership of the Palestinian delegation.

We had waited, excitedly asking each other: "What will happen when we see the Israelis?" Then we went into cars, which we thought will be taking us to the place of the meeting. In fact, we were brought, under a heavy guard, back to the Bucharest airport. There we boarded a helicopter which, after an hour's flight, brought us to Constanza, on the Black Sea shore. We traveled again by a convoy of cars, and within half an hour reached a charming building on the seashore.

I noticed that all the delegation members were very tense, but Yahya smiled and calmed us, saying:



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"We are not going to meet horned devils!" We were told that the meeting will take place only at 5 P.M. We went down to the first floor to eat, but had no appetite because of feeling so tense. We still saw no one from the other side.\*

At five P.M. we entered, very hesitantly, a room where the members of the Israeli delegation were waiting for us. They greeted us as if we were old friends.

The truth is that all of us froze in our places. To our wonder, the Israelis acted very warmly. They greeted each one of us, introduced themselves and asked "From where are you, from which part of Palestine?" Gradually, we also warmed up and answered their questions. They smiled and expressed their gladness at meeting us. Some of them said: "We hope to meet next time in your independent state". They said that they came to this meeting for peace, which is their only wish; that they want to live in their own state while we live in ours. They had all shown affection in a way none of us expected.

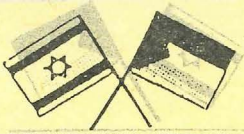
One of them raised a glass and said: "Let us all drink to peace". Most of them spoke Arabic. This reception lasted about half an hour. Afterwards we went downstairs to the meeting hall.\* \*

The Palestinian representation was at a very high level - a member of the PLO Executive Committee, who is the equivalent of a government minister, two members of the Palestine National Council (the Palestinian Parliament in Exile), two members of The Revolutionary Council, and Arafat's special adviser on Israeli affairs, Imad Shakur, who welcomed the Israelis in Hebrew. On the Israeli side, there were no official representatives, but mainly intellectuals and youths."

\* At that time, the members of the Israeli delegation were waiting, just as tensely, in another part of the same building. The Roumanian hosts had kept both delegations completely in the dark regarding the time and place of the intended meeting. The Israelis, who thought they were going to Bucharest, were surprised to land at Constanza and be brought to the seashore hotel at Costinesti. The Roumanians maintained tight security, with thousands of soldiers and policemen spread all around, all roads blocked, and warships patrolling offshore. Apparently, Abu-Nidal's threats were taken very seriously.

\*\* The meeting had three stages: First, the informal reception, lasting half an hour; then the formal meeting, with speeches and official statements, for two hours; and last, a dinner at which Israelis and Palestinians again mingled freely, exchanging both political views and personal experiences. In the opinion of most participants, Israeli and Palestinian alike, it was the informal parts which turned out to be the most significant and valuable.





### Censorship Defeated

On February 5, 1987, the Israeli Supreme Court established an important precedent, when it ruled against the Theatre Censorship Board and lifted the ban which was imposed in 1985 on the play "Ephraim Returns to the Army", by Itzhak Laor. The play sharply denounces the practices of the Israeli military government in the occupied territories. It was originally banned on the grounds that "it defames of the Israeli Defence Forces". However, the Supreme Court, in lifting the ban, stated that the freedom of speech may be infringed upon only in extreme and exceptional cases, of which this is not one. Moreover, Judge Shoshana Netanyahu recommended in her verdict that the Censorship Board be abolished altogether.

### "Irangate" or "Armsgate"?

Strange as it may sound, while the Irangate is shocking the political institutions of the United States, in Israel it has very little effect. Till now, the Israeli political leadership successfully avoided any serious discussion of the case. This is quite symptomatic for a political system that has, for a long time, evaded any confrontation with the crucial questions of the country.

The selling of arms to Teheran is the tip of an iceberg, "Armsgate" more than "Irangate". It is not clear why the discussion started only now. Already in 1982, abundant evidence about the arms sales to Iran has come out: after an Argentinian plane carrying Israeli arms for Iran crashed in Soviet territory, different versions about Israeli arms sales to Teheran were published in England, France and other countries. Also in 1982, Undersecretary of State Valiotis has told the US Congress that the United States had discussed with Israel the question of arms sales to Teheran. In May 1982 Israeli Defence Minister Sharon declared, in an interview with American Television, that Israel sold arms to Iran "because Iraq is a menace to peace". The then ambassador in Washington, Moshe Arens, added in October 1982 that the sales were done in coordination with the American government, in order to stimulate a coup against Huméini and to establish contacts with Iranian army officers who will eventually come to power. During the following years, there were enough indications that the Israeli sales to Iran continued.

In Israel the Armsgate should arouse serious questions, on several levels. The first question is

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related to the accountability of the Israeli government. It shows a very weak public or parliamentary control over the executive. Shimon Peres, former Prime Minister and present Foreign Minister, publicly denied the possibility of serious control over foreign policy, demonstrating once again the superficiality of his democratic rhetoric. Not only the "simple" citizen, but also Knesset Members must learn to stop asking questions. The knowledge that "our leaders are clever" must be sufficient.

On another level, the Armsgate is linked closely with the overwhelming dependence of Israel on the United States. Israel's political leadership finds it harder and harder to distinguish between American and Israeli interests. This is related to the acute economic crisis in Israel and to the burden of military expenditure. The famous concept of "self-reliance" is no more than a fiction, considering the huge amounts of American money that Israel consumes to feed this so-called "self-reliance" in the military field. A constant paradox rules this process: the strengthening of the Israeli army imposes a heavy burden on the Israeli economy as a whole (military expenditure rose from 9 percent of the GNP in 1950 to 27.9 percent in 1980). This reduces more and more the possibility of an autonomous policy reflecting true Israeli interests.

A third dimension is created by the same military-economic problem: the military-industrial complex is growing daily and this increasingly distorts the Israeli economy. About 20 percent of the labor force today is employed in the security-related economy, and some researchers speak about 50 percent of all industrial workers involved, directly or indirectly, in military-selected projects. In a very small country, the result of this is an imperative necessity of exporting in order to enlarge the market and the possibility of production. The exports in the military field are by now more than one billion dollars yearly, a big part of Israel's total exports. The products exported are various: different types of weapons, planes, electronics, spare parts, uniforms and – a very important element – "know-how". The last one is a very problematic item. Reserve officers of the Israeli army act as advisors to any kind of government, and the huge profits involved make them unwilling to accept real control by the government. In general the control over these exports is very limited; the Knesset is unable or unwilling to attempt any such control.

This leads to still another dimension of the "Armsgate": Israel sells weapons and know-how to many of the worst dictatorships in the world. In Iran, Israel started by selling arms to the Shah and helping him to establish his notorious secret police, the "Savak". The contacts survived the violent change in regime, and continue to flourish despite Humeini's virulent anti-Zionist speeches. Israel's link with South Africa (including nuclear cooperation) is becoming increasingly problematic.

Elsewhere in Africa, Israel played a major role in the rise to power of Idi Amin in Uganda, and Israeli-trained and equipped elite units are a mainstay of Mobutu's rule in Zair. In Asia, Israel helps the Sri-Lanka government in its efforts to crush the Tamil rebellion; finally, in Latin America, the list of Israel's clients included Somoza in Nicaragua, Videla and his successors in the Argentinian military dictatorship and Pinochet in Chile – to name only a few. In some cases, Israel was doing the "dirty work" for Washington administrations who did not want to arouse opposition in the Congress or in American public opinion. The administrations, thus, delegated to Israel the task of providing for regimes which were clearly using the military support for repression.

The "Contras" connection in the Armsgate is always denied by the Israeli government, but by now it is clear that Israeli advisors are in Honduras, officially in order to advise the Honduran army. It seems that Israeli "private entrepreneurs" are doing the same directly with the Contras.

The different dimensions that we, very briefly, mentioned here do not reflect a casual mistake or a problem of mistaken policy. The opposite is true: they are deeply rooted in Israel's military-political doctrines about peace and war in the region; they are linked to the most vital questions of Israel's identity. Peace, democracy, economics and Israel's future as part of the Middle East or as an "alien element" – all of these fundamental issues are inextricably involved in the present case, and are bound to arise even on a casual inspection of "Armsgate" and its implications.

Zvi Schuldiner

### Palestinians condemn attacks on civilians

On January 12, 1987, an old Israeli civilian was stabbed and severely wounded in East Jerusalem, after praying at the Wailing Wall. On January 14, the following petition was published in the Palestinian newspapers of East Jerusalem.

"After the January 12 incident, in which an old Israeli was stabbed in East Jerusalem, the Israeli media regarded the (unknown) perpetrators as being motivated by Palestinian Nationalism. We regard this stabbing as a deed contrary to the cultural content of the legitimate Palestinian struggle for the achievement of our just aspirations; we also regard it as contrary to the Humanist principles and Divine Law in which we believe. We condemn such acts, as much as we condemn their attribution by the Israeli media to Palestinian Nationalism".

The signatories were 28 Palestinian public figures, academics and journalists, known for their firm support of the PLO.