



The Other Israel

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THE HAWK IN THE DOVECOTE

At an early morning hour on June 23, all crossing points between Israel and the Occupied Territories were sealed off, and the passage of Palestinians into Israel forbidden for the coming twenty-four hours: Israel was preparing for general elections. While the future of the Occupied Territories was a central issue in these elections, the Palestinian population had no part in this democratic process. Tight security measures were employed to prevent Israel's disenfranchised subjects from using knives or bombs to express their point of view.

Already the previous elections – those of 1988 – were held under the influence of the Intifada, then one year old. And already at that time, it was becoming increasingly clear to the Israelis that military means would not eliminate the Intifada; that negotiations of some kind would have to begin sooner or later. In effect, the leaders of Israel's two big parties – Labour and Likud – were competing for the position of chief Israeli negotiator.

Shimon Peres, who headed the Israeli Labour Party in 1988, enjoyed a worldwide reputation as a wise statesman, and was perfectly at home in international diplomatic forums – much more so, in fact, than on the streets of Israeli towns, where many people regarded Peres as a cold, distant, scheming politician, a man whom they did not trust to defend their interests.

The 1988 elections gave a small – but decisive – margin to Likud leader Yitzchak Shamir. For many of his voters, Shamir was the tough negotiator, who would drive a hard bargain with the Arabs and obtain the best possible deal. And indeed, Shamir is a past master in the art of holding his ground. But unlike the pragmatists who voted for him, Shamir was a dedicated man, totally committed to preserving Israeli rule in the whole of *Greater Israel*, and keeping each and every inch of territory captured by Israel in 1967.

Since any conceivable agreement with the Arabs would entail considerable territorial concessions, Shamir intended to either avoid entering negotiations altogether, or prevent such negotiations from reaching any conclusion. Thus, in early 1990, Prime Minister Shamir wrecked James Baker's plan to start Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Cairo. Shamir's

National Unity Government collapsed, and the Israeli political system plunged into months-long chaos. Shimon Peres made enormous efforts to form a Labour government – and failed. It was Shamir who again emerged on top, heading the most right-wing government in Israeli history.

Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait gave Shamir an unexpected respite, as the world's attention shifted to the Gulf; but as soon as the war ended, Baker came back, with new plans for negotiations. Shamir made every effort to stall – but after six months of constant American pressure, he had no choice but to go to the Madrid Peace Conference. Thus, it was Shamir out of whom a historical concession was wrung – to start negotiations with a Palestinian delegation, unofficially representing the PLO. By doing so, he gave such talks legitimacy among the Israeli public.

Having started negotiations, Shamir's policy was clear: to wage prolonged battles over every procedural detail, to obstruct wherever possible, while at the same time continuing, with an increased pace the construction of new settlements. Indeed, after his elections defeat Shamir openly admitted this, in a statement which got worldwide headlines: *I would have let autonomy negotiations drag on for another ten years, and in the meantime half a million Jews would have settled in Judea, Samaria and Gaza.*

Defeat of the 'Greater Israel' ideology

In the months after Madrid, Shamir's policy got entangled in growing contradictions. Trying to please both the Americans and the settlers, he ended up losing both: because Shamir continued with settlement activities in the Occupied Territories, President Bush denied Israel the Housing Loan Guarantees; and because Shamir agreed in principle to negotiate on Palestinian autonomy, his extreme-right coalition partners broke away, forcing him to call new elections.

At the same time, discontent was growing among the Likud voters. Most of them had never really been staunch believers in the *Greater Israel* ideology. They started to feel more and more insecure in daily life – with any Israeli, at any time, being a potential target

for a knife-wielding Palestinian. If anything, they wanted to get rid of the Gaza Strip, the poor and overcrowded part of the Occupied Territories from which most Palestinian assailants come. They did not regard settlements and settlers as a particularly worthy cause – certainly not one worth the sacrifice of ten billion dollars in loans. In short, Shamir was striving with all his might to perpetuate a status-quo which his voters found increasingly intolerable.

The impasse in which the Likud found itself was reflected in an intense power struggle during the formation of the Likud elections slate. A major split was barely avoided, and the Likud entered the elections campaign divided against itself.

During the leadership struggle Foreign Minister David Levy – the only Moroccan Jew ever to get that high in Israeli politics – quoted on television some of the ethnic insults hurled at him by his rivals. Levy was, in the end, induced to stay in the Likud – but these insults were well-remembered by his Oriental Jewish followers.

Hard-hit by the deteriorating economy, Likud supporters in the slum neighborhoods felt bitter at the Likud functionaries who, since the Likud came to power, succeeded only in improving their own living conditions. This phenomenon was dramatically underlined by the publication of the State Comptroller's report, detailing instances of wide-spread corruption among Likud officials. Particular attention was given to Uri Shani, Director-General of the governmental housing corporation Amidar, a follower of Housing Minister Ariel Sharon. According to the report, Shani and his wife were permanently accommodated in luxury hotels while the task of providing cheap housing – for which the corporation was founded – was neglected.

A further factor undermining the Likud's electoral position was the deep dissatisfaction among the immigrants from the Soviet Union – the very same people whom Shamir had hoped to make use of in the fortification of *Greater Israel*. The immigrants failed to be impressed by the Likud's Russian-language propaganda, in which the Labour Party was called *red, leftist, Bolshevik and Leninist*.

Even more than native Israelis, the immigrants suffer from the deteriorating economy, with 40% of them unemployed – and they blamed the party in power. As many pointed out when asked by media reporters: *We know what it means to have a Likud*

government, we don't yet know about Labour. When elections came, Labour gathered four seats from the immigrants' votes; Likud – only one.

With the Likud trailing far behind Labour in the polls, some of Shamir's associates – in particular Defence Minister Moshe Arens – repeatedly prevailed upon him to modify his policy, and to announce before the elections his willingness to withdraw unilaterally from Gaza, or to make a compromise with the Syrians about the Golan; Shamir, however, remained to the last true to his principles. On the night of June 23, as the elections results were read, Shamir looked tired and strained but also relieved, as he announced his resignation from political life.

In its downfall the Likud dragged with it other groupings proclaiming the *Greater Israel* ideology. Like the Likud, the extreme right contested the elections in an extremely divided and fragmented condition, with numerous fiercely competing parties and splinter groups. Most of them failed to get any parliamentary representation. "Shooting Rabbi" Moshe Levinger had set up his own party and posed on television with his gun, Western style – but it brought him few votes. Also wiped out was the Techiya (National Revival) Party – the settlers' party *par excellence*, which opposed all peace negotiations from Camp David to Madrid. Techiya lost all three of its seats and disappeared from the parliamentary scene.

The "Transfer" party, Moledet, did survive the elections and even registered a modest gain, from two to three seats. This, however, was far from the meteoric rise which analysts had predicted. Moledet leader Recha'am Ze'evi had expected to capitalise upon the Israeli population's fear of and anger at knife-wielding Palestinians. As it turned out, most people did not accept mass deportation of Arabs as a feasible solution.

The only right-wing party to do well was Tzomet, headed by former army chief-of-staff Rafael Eytan. Like the others, Eytan advocates *Greater Israel* and an *Iron Fist* policy against the Palestinians. But unlike the Techiya, which made these issues the sole theme of its election campaign, Eytan downplayed them. He concentrated on such issues as electoral reform, a "clean" government, and opposition to the stranglehold of the Orthodox parties upon Israeli politics – issues on which his program was virtually indistinguishable from that of the left-wing Meretz alliance.

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After a month of duty in Gaza, 36 soldiers and officers of a reserve company signed a petition calling for immediate withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. One of the signatories, the company commander Major Lavi Me'iri, told *Yediot Aharonot*: *We did not, and will not, disobey orders. But we do want to tell the politicians of all parties how much fed up we are. In our month of service, we did nothing to help Israel's security. On the contrary, we only increased the hatred between the two sides.*

Eytan also succeeded in establishing a (not entirely deserved) reputation for honesty and integrity. Altogether, Eytan's Tzomet Party registered a dramatic success, raising its representation from two to eight seats. Many of Eytan's new voters were, apparently, disaffected Likud voters who did not go as far as voting Labour.

Once the results were announced, Eytan lost no time in joining the winning side. Already on elections night he opened negotiations with the undoubted victor, Labour leader Yitzchak Rabin, and declared his willingness to serve as a minister in Rabin's government.

The hawk in the dovecote

In the 1977 general elections, the then-ruling Israeli Labour Party was defeated and went into opposition. During the following decade, party leader Shimon Peres made enormous efforts to lead his party back to power, but repeatedly failed; the closest he got was a Labour partnership with the Likud in two consecutive governments. In the process, former hawk Peres started hatching complicated peace plans – none of which came to anything, due to the Likud veto in the "National Unity" governments.

Inside the Labour Party, Peres' leadership was challenged by the more hawkish Yitzchak Rabin. Rabin's tough image in the Israeli public was considerably enhanced since the outbreak of the Intifada, when Rabin – acting as Defence Minister in Shamir's government – gave the infamous order to *break the bones of Palestinian rioters*. After each Peres failure, Rabin's followers claimed that he is the only leader capable of leading the party to victory, since – with his hawkishness – he could appeal to Likud voters as Peres could not.

In early 1992, Labour's 160,000-strong membership participated in primary elections to select a new party leader and the party's parliamentary candidates. The results were rather puzzling: Rabin was elected party leader, beating Peres by a considerable margin; but most of the top slots on the Labour slate went to prominent doves, whose views were far different from those of Rabin.

The answer to this seeming paradox soon became evident: many of the doves themselves supported Rabin, having become convinced that he was indeed the only one who could lead the party to victory. Also, to gain the doves' support, Rabin did make such statements as *for the sake of peace we will have to make concessions, and they will be measured in kilometres, not in centimetres*.

Such statements dwindled and disappeared, however, once Rabin won the party leadership and turned his

attention to attracting Likud voters. In that, he had the silent consent of the Labour doves, who agreed to let Rabin run the campaign in his own way. To the left of Labour, the newly-formed Meretz alliance also muted its criticism of Rabin, and pledged in advance to join his government and try to influence its policy from the inside.

Upon taking charge of the Labour campaign, Rabin charted an aggressive elections strategy, aimed at penetrating traditional Likud strongholds in the slums and Development Towns. In propaganda full of nationalist phraseology and constant displays of the Israeli national flag, Rabin was presented as *a National Leader who stands above factions and parties; the only man who can unite the people and lead the country*. Old photographs of Rabin in military uniform, as the victorious Army Chief-of-Staff of 1967, were dug out and prominently displayed. In particular, Rabin boasted of the role he, as well as other former generals in the Labour leadership, had played in *liberating East Jerusalem and placing it under Israeli rule that would last forever*.

Still another ploy was used to bolster Rabin's image as a popular leader. Broad hints were made that Rabin is, in fact, the natural successor to the late Menachem Begin, since the present Likud leaders are *too narrow-minded to assume Begin's mantle*.

Four or eight years ago, such extravagant claims by a Labour Party leader would have been received with ridicule, if not outright hostility. However, in these elections it fell on ground already prepared by the Likud leadership's alienation of its own grass-roots support.

On May 24, a hitherto tranquil elections campaign was disrupted by a sudden crisis. At Bat-Yam, one of Tel-Aviv's less thriving suburbs, an Israeli teenager was stabbed to death by a Palestinian from Gaza. The murder touched off several days of riots, with mobs shouting *Death to the Arabs!* ranging the streets, shops and construction sites in search of Palestinian workers. Even after all Palestinians fled the town, large-scale rioting continued for several more days, with the television showing each night new clashes between unemployed youths and the Bat-Yam police.

On June 3, sixteen members of **Re'ut/Sadaka**, a Jewish-Arab youth movement, held a vigil in central Tel-Aviv, calling for Jewish-Arab reconciliation. The youths stood for about three hours, holding lively debates and discussions with bypassers. (They told TOI: *It wasn't as difficult as we expected!*)

Contact: *Re'ut/Sadaka*, POB 571, Tel-Aviv 61004

Rabin's reaction was swift. The Labour leader failed to voice any condemnation of the racist violence; instead, he swung into a furious attack upon the Shamir government, accusing it of failing to ensure the security of daily life in Israel. A frequent refrain was: *Send the Gazan workers back to Gaza*.

At the same time, Rabin also clearly indicated his intention to evacuate the Israeli troops holding down the Gazan population – an idea known to enjoy wide

After Bat-Yam, the authorities severely restricted the entry of Gazan workers into Israel. Under the new rules, only married workers over 28 were allowed in. Other conditions were that their Israeli employer would personally pick them up from Gaza checkpoint, and that at least ten workers would be employed in the same workplace.

After being confronted with international pressure, with an unprecedented joint demonstration by Palestinian workers and their Israeli employers and with a Supreme Court appeal by Kav Le'oved (Workers' Hotline), the government eased the constrictions. However, Palestinians aged less than 20 are still prevented from leaving the Strip, as a result of which some 10,000 (!) Gazan youths are left without work and money. The Supreme Court has not yet ruled on the appeal to have all restrictions removed.

popularity among the Israeli public, including right-wingers – and especially among soldiers in the Gaza Strip itself. Rabin's mixture of racism and dovishness apparently appealed to the Bat-Yam voters – more so than the solutions offered by the extreme right, whose activists converged on Bat-Yam in the hope of making electoral capital. When the votes were counted, it turned out that Rabin scored 41% in Bat-Yam – considerably above his national average.

During his elections campaign, Rabin made few direct references to the American loan guarantees and to Shamir's failure to obtain them, not wishing to appear as endorsing an outside pressure upon Israel. Instead, Rabin claimed that he is opposed to settlements because of internal Israeli reasons having nothing to do with the American demands.

In opposing the settlements, Rabin did not scruple to take up wholesale the arguments used, over the past decade, by Peace Now: *The settlements constitute both an obstacle to peace and an enormous waste of resources, which would better be spent for social purposes inside Israel.* Still another Peace Now argument extensively – and successfully – used in Labour propaganda was to connect congestion and road accidents on Israel's major highways with the Shamir government's concentration on building new roads for settlers in the Occupied Territories.

Unlike the peace movement – which is opposed without distinction to all settlements – Rabin proclaimed himself opposed only to “political” settlements, while being in favour of maintaining and even strengthening “strategic” ones. Apparently, the “strategic” settlements are those on the Golan Heights and near the Jordan River – the areas Rabin intends to keep under Israeli rule. In addition, Rabin pledged to continue settlement in and around annexed East Jerusalem.

Rabin's attack on the settlements placed the Likud wholly on the defensive; even Likud hardliner Ariel Sharon was driven to lame and half-hearted apologies, explaining that *the settlements don't cost so much.*

Yitzhak Rabin had one clear objective throughout his whole campaign: to prove to the Likud voters that he was the tough negotiator for whom they were looking; that he would *negotiate with the Arabs from a*

position of strength, while continuing to fight Terrorism; that he would reach an interim agreement with the Palestinians within nine months; and that he would get the loan guarantees and improve relations with the United States – strained by Shamir nearly to the breaking point.

Some Likud voters – not very many, in fact, but enough – were convinced, and shifted their vote to the Labour Party. Others felt indecisive and stayed home on elections day, depriving the Likud of additional, crucial Knesset seats. Together with its overwhelming support among the Russian immigrants, Labour obtained 44 Knesset seats, with the Likud trailing far behind with 32.

Meretz, Rabin's ally to the left, gained 12 seats, having also done well among the immigrants. The anti-Likud block was completed by the parties drawing most of their votes from the Arab citizens of Israel: the Hadash Communists, with three seats, and Abd-el-Wahab Darawshe's Arab Democratic Party, with two. Altogether, these parties command 61 seats in the 120-member Knesset – a slender, but sufficient majority.

The television broadcast showed Labour Party headquarters in Tel-Aviv, where jubilant crowds were singing: *Long live Rabin, King of Israel!* – a scene reminiscent of the Begin adoration manifested on the night of Likud's coming to power, fifteen years earlier.

Rabin's balancing act

Immediately following the elections Rabin had in hand a working Knesset majority. However, the inclusion of Hadash and the ADP in the coalition would have violated a taboo as old as the Jewish State: *never should a government rely on Arabs for its parliamentary majority!* Rabin did open public negotiations with the Arab parties – which is more than previous Prime Ministers did – but with the sole object of securing their support from the outside.

Rabin did intend to include Meretz in his government, but he definitely did not want them to be too dominant – especially since Meretz maintains close ties with the Labour doves, who already hold many of the parliamentary seats of Rabin's own party.

Rather than head an outspoken dovish government, Rabin sought to include partners to the right that would act as a counterweight and let Rabin, as Prime Minister, occupy the middle ground. Rabin's preference was for Tzomet: Rabin and Tzomet leader Eytan know each other from the time they both were senior officers in the army.

For his part, Rafa'el Eytan indicated his willingness to bend his *Greater Israel* principles, in return for a ministerial post. Eytan regarded himself as eminently suitable for the job of Education Minister, and Rabin was willing to grant that wish. But in the general public, there was an outcry against the idea of General Eytan – notorious for comparing Arabs to cockroaches – being put in a position to define the curriculum of Israeli schools. Under strong pressure, Rabin was forced to grant the Education Ministry to Meretz leader Shulamit Aloni, and Eytan went away in a huff. At least for the time being, Rabin had to

Peace activists to visit U.K. and Scandinavia

Two members of Workers Hotline, *Kav Le'oved*, hope to meet interested groups during their early September visit to Britain and the Scandinavian countries.

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give up the Tzomet alliance – though he made clear that, should Eytan change his mind, he could still get charge of both the Police and the Security Service...

Rabin had to make do with another partner – the Orthodox Oriental Jewish Shas Party. Hitherto, Shas was a Likud ally – but its dovish leaders, Rabbi Ovadya Yosef and Interior Minister Aryeh Dera'i, have long been flirting with the Labour Party. In 1990, a previous attempt to forge a Labour-Shas coalition was foiled by the party's mentor, the 96-year old Rabbi Eliezer Shach; but following the 1992 elections, in which Shas did well, Yosef and Dera'i were able to defy Rabbi Shach's threats of excommunication, and join the Rabin government.

On July 13, Rabin presented his new cabinet to the Knesset. He got a majority of 67 out of 120. It was not the broad coalition Rabin had in mind, but it seems sufficient to carry out his policies in the face of a demoralised and deeply fragmented right-wing opposition.

Upon his election, Rabin was hailed in the American media as a "flexible, pragmatic leader". Rabin is certainly more flexible than Shamir. However, when Rabin meets with President Bush and takes up the loan guarantees issue, some serious disagreements could surface.

So far, the U.S. avoided public comment on Rabin's distinction between "political" settlements and "strategic" ones. Until the U.S. Presidential elections, the hard-pressed Bush would probably take great care to avoid a confrontation with Israel's new Prime Minister. But an American acquiescence in the "strategic settlement" doctrine, and the granting of loan guarantees to Israel while such settlements continue to be expanded, may seriously damage the Middle East peace process.

Prominent among Rabin's areas of "strategic" settlement are the Golan Heights, whose return is the Syrian condition for peace with Israel. With regard to the Golan, Rabin's position is far from flexible, for reasons of internal Labour Party politics. Israeli settlements on the Golan Heights were originally authorised by Labour governments between 1967 and 1977 and constructed by the Labour-affiliated Kibbutz movement. Many Golan settlers are Labour voters, and the Golan settlers' leader was a delegate at the November 1991 Labour Conference. Moreover, Rabin's own confidential aide Shimon Sheves, one of the most powerful officials in the new administration, is a Golan settler and an active member of the *Golan Lobby*.

Rabin has indicated his inclination to reach an agreement with the Palestinians first, and leave the Syrians for later. However, Rabin may not have such an option. Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad is a powerful and crafty man. After many years as a Soviet

ally and a leader of the radical Arab camp, he sided with the United States in the Gulf War and its aftermath, and entered the Madrid Conference – for all of which Assad expects a suitable reward from Washington. Should he feel excluded from the process, Assad controls numerous means of disrupting it, such as the Shiite organizations in Lebanon and the Damascus-based Palestinian groups.

Rabin's inclination to give priority to the Palestinian issue was clearly expressed in his inauguration speech where he pledged to hold the Rome negotiations *continuously, not just for a few days each month*.

Also, he made clear that he would not bother about the Palestinian negotiators' consulting with Yasser Arafat, though Rabin himself would only negotiate with Palestinians from the Occupied Territories.

Rabin declared himself ready, in principle, to accept general elections in the Occupied Territories – not the mere municipal elections which Shamir offered. An offer for general elections is, however, meaningless without an agreement with regard to the elected Palestinian body's authority.

Old debating points, such as the control of state lands and water sources in the Occupied Territories, are bound to reappear. But a more fundamental question will have to come first: once the Palestinian "autonomy" comes into force, would the Israeli army retain the right of patrolling Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps, the right of shooting, arresting, imposing curfews, blowing up houses? If the answer is "Yes", then "autonomy" is nothing but a sham, a mask for the continuation of the occupation.

On the other hand, if the answer is "No", then the Palestinian population centers would at last be free of the oppressive presence of an occupying army. The Israeli army would still be present at camps throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the area would still be dotted with settlements, inhabited by armed settlers. Nevertheless, it would be a real step forward on the long and hard road to Palestinian independence.

The editor

The peace camp in election time

Despite their reservations about Labour leader Yitzchak Rabin, a considerable number of peace activists were active in the Labour Party campaign. The feeling that *now or never* could the Likud be defeated made even such radicals as ICIPP member Uri Avnery come out in favor of voting Labour.

Peace Now called upon its supporters to vote either for Labour or for the Meretz alliance. The latter brought together three dovish parties, having widely divergent socio-economic views: the socialist Mapam, the moderately liberal Ratz, and the staunch free marketeer Shinuy.

The three united on a program calling for recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination – to be expressed through a Confederation with Jordan, or through an independent demilitarized Palestinian state. There was also a call for negotiations with the

PLO, to be opened 'after the PLO renounces terrorism and recognises Israel'. The latter condition – a compromise between the leaderships of the three parties – was rather displeasing for many activists who felt that the PLO had already passed that test.

But despite such shortcomings, most Jewish supporters of the peace movement – as well as a considerable number of Arabs – regarded Meretz as their representative, making it the third largest party in the Israeli parliament, and a major partner in Rabin's government.

In the 1980s the Progressive List for Peace, founded as a joint Jewish-Arab party, offered an alternative to more radical activists. However, in the 1988 elections the Jewish KM Matti Peled lost his seat, and KM Muhammad Miari remained the PLP's sole parliamentary representative. Thereafter, the Jewish component of the PLP disintegrated and dwindled to practically nothing. In the 1992 elections nearly all PLP candidates were Arabs, and the party propaganda was published in Arabic only.

As a party representing the interests of Israel's discriminated Arab minority, the PLP presented a program practically identical to that of Abd-el-Wahab Darawshe's Arab Democratic Party. Prolonged negotiations, aimed at a united PLP-ADP slate, ended in failure, mainly due to personal differences between the parties' respective leaders. As a result, the two parties competed fiercely for the same voters.

In this contest, the ADP proved the clear victor, gaining two seats in the new Knesset, while the PLP lost the single seat it had and disappeared from the parliamentary scene. Elections experts estimate that a united PLP-ADP campaign would have brought in voters who now stayed home, and could have gained three to four seats – which would have increased both the anti-Likud majority and the parliamentary representation of Israel's Arab citizens.

The only one to run as an Arab-Jewish party (though most of its voters were Arabs) was the (Communist) Hadash (Democratic Front for Peace and Equality). Hadash also got the support of non-Communist peace activists, who appreciated the party's consistent fight against the occupation, its support for soldiers who refuse service in the Occupied Territories, and its outspoken opposition to the Gulf War. Such voters gave Hadash the margin necessary to obtain its third parliamentary seat.

'More serious'

KM Tamar Gozansky, third on the Hadash list, participated in the party's negotiations with Labour. Beate Zilversmidt talked with her

"Although we don't agree with Labour's political standpoints – their continued rejection of the two-state solution – we are ready to stand together with them in the common fight against the Likud and its allies to the right. We have made it clear to Rabin in our meeting: We would support a Labour-Meretz coalition against the right wing. But we can't support a government including parties which are against

elections in the Occupied Territories and against any form of Palestinian autonomy. If Rabin wants really to take in parties which are opposed to agreement, but favour collective punishment and further settlement construction, he will have to do without us.

We had some hopes that in return for our support the Labour Party might be willing to discuss their political agenda. Our only demand was that Rabin would, right after becoming Prime Minister, make a few goodwill gestures: releasing detainees; allowing Palestinian political organizations to work openly; changing the law against meetings with the PLO; and stop collective punishments. We did not ask them to change the Labour Party program. We only ask Rabin to show that he is willing to turn a new page in the relations with the Palestinians. I am really disappointed that Rabin reacted with a great Nyet. He explained that *as long as the Palestinians don't stop the violence Israel will continue with all steps needed to fight them.*

The best outcome of these elections would be a Labour-Meretz government with maybe some of the Orthodox. But Rabin does his utmost to get also the extreme nationalist Tzomet. He wants them in because he is afraid of a very strong opposition on the right, but one should also not forget that Rabin himself was all those years part of the policy towards the Palestinians. Mr. Rabin is still thinking in the old way. He prefers to negotiate, not on equal terms, but as the head of a powerful state dealing with helpless Palestinians. Of course I am very sorry that Mr. Rabin has not been transformed like Mr. Weitzman. It would have been better for both peoples.

Still, I hope that Rabin will fulfill what he has promised: negotiations, reaching an agreement within a year; general elections in the Occupied Territories; the freezing of most of the settlements (I hope that this means not to continue constructing 20,000 housing units planned by the Likud government). If he would take all these steps it would be very nice, indeed...

On July 13, as members of the new Knesset arrived for the inauguration of the new government, their path was lined by *Women in Black*, holding placards reading: **Now, more than ever: Down With the Occupation!**

In fact, the duty of the extra-parliamentary peace movement and of the peace camp in the Knesset is now more significant. Before, when we were demanding something from Shamir we knew it was unrealistic. In fact, we made such public demands only in order to change the public opinion, to create a different atmosphere. We had no illusions that Shamir would do what we demanded.

With the new government, it could be different. The peace movement will still have to be vigilant about human rights in the Occupied Territories. We did not forget Rabin's previous performance as a Defence Minister. The peace camp will have to concentrate on demanding an end to torture, of the deportations of political figures and "unrecognized residents" (the problem of the married women).

With this government, if only we work hard enough, there is a chance to really put an end to such practices. Inside the government there are so many

doves. We will try to have good contact with all the good elements. The peace movement can be satisfied that a step forward was achieved. Now our work will be more serious, more practical. By real pressure we can influence the Rabin government to do a little bit more, and do it a little bit earlier. That is important!

You see, we are people who are used to disappointments. In our political life, we had so many moments of despair, of feeling that nothing is ever going to change. We know how to appreciate even little changes."

■ On the second day of the Rabin government, July 14, Najah University in Nablus was surrounded by large military forces. The army's hunt for "armed Palestinians", who were supposed to have participated in the student elections, precipitated a prolonged siege of the campus and a curfew over the entire city of Nablus.

On July 15, some 25 peace activists picketed the Labour Party headquarters in Tel-Aviv, calling upon Rabin to lift the siege and to completely break with the practices of the previous government. A second, day-long vigil took place on the 17th in front of Rabin's private home in North Tel-Aviv. There were also sharp protests by the Knesset Members of Hadash and the ADP, as well as by the Arab KMs of Meretz and the Labour Party. The KMs went several times to Nablus, but were not allowed to enter the besieged campus. They also met Rabin in person to express their protest.

David Ish-Shalom free!

In early May, David Ish-Shalom - imprisoned for his dialogue with Yasser Arafat and other PLO leaders - held a hunger strike in his cell at Kfar Yonah Prison, protesting his conditions of imprisonment. This rebellion gained Ish-Shalom the respect of his previously hostile fellow prisoners.

Shortly after Labour's elections victory, President Chaim Herzog signed a decree commuting Ish-Shalom's remaining term to suspended imprisonment. He was released on July 8, having served only three of the seven months imposed on him.

There is a fair chance that the prohibition upon meetings between Israelis and PLO members will be soon abolished. Already on the first day of the new Knesset, Labour Knesset Members Yossi Beilin and Ya'el Dayan presented a bill to that effect. The new Labour Justice Minister David Liba'i is also known to be an outspoken opponent of the legal prohibition on peace dialogue.

■ On June 30, four Jerusalemites arrived in London: Moshe Amirav, Meretz City Councillor and Lotti Velzberger, Director of the Neighborhood Councils Board, as well as the prominent East Jerusalem Palestinians Hana Siniora and Sari Nusseibeh.

In a conference, sponsored by the University of London, they met with Afif Safieh, PLO representative to Britain, to discuss possible frameworks for joint Israeli-Palestinian administration of Jerusalem.

Hopes and reservations

by Israel Loeff

On June 24, the day after the elections, the headlines of all Israeli papers ran bold and clear: **An upheaval on the political scene!** For the first time in 15 years the Likud would be unable to form a government as the anti-Likud block consisted of 61 Knesset members - out of a total of 120.

The final results were: Labor 44 (+4), the dovish Meretz 12 (+2), the Communist Hadash 3 (-1), and the Arab Democratic Party 2 (+1). Because of the new threshold The Progressive List lost its one seat.

The Likud obtained only 32 seats (-7) - with on its right 3 (+1) for the ultra-racist Moledet, while Tehiya - emphasizing settlements - fell from 3 to 0. Other parties hitherto supporting the Likud achieved the following results: the two Orthodox parties, Shas 6 (no change) and Agudat Israel 4 (-2) seats; the nationalist-religious Mafdal 6 (+1) seats; and the nationalists-secularist Tzomet with its spectacular rise from 2 to 8 seats.

This gave Rabin the possibility of immediately creating a peace government based on Labor and Meretz, and with the two mainly Arab parties supporting it from the outside. The two Orthodox parties, Shas and Aguda, tend strongly towards peace. Their affiliation with the Likud government has been motivated largely by their religious-financial interests which the Likud has been supplying lavishly. Participation in a Rabin government could safeguard to some extent the interests of their religious educational system, while not being a barrier on the road to peace.

During the coalition negotiations it became, however, clear that such a peace government was not Rabin's first choice. In fact, Rabin wanted very much to reach an agreement with Rafael Eytan's Tzomet Party. Chief of Staff during the Lebanon War, Eytan is opposed to a freeze of settlements as well as to any evacuation of however small a piece of conquered territory. And Rabin also conducted negotiations with the Mafdal, a religious party ruled for the last 20 years by an extremely hawkish mystical-nationalistic ideology. How did Rabin think that such contradictions could be overcome? What policy could actually be expected of Rabin himself? To answer these questions we have to analyse shortly Labour's election campaign as conducted by Rabin.

First of all, Rabin did all he could to blur the ideological dispute while emphasizing his personal qualifications as a contender for the Prime Minister's office. Furthermore, Labour stressed its democratization: for the first time its rank and file members had elected directly the Knesset candidates. But the fact that the rank and file had voted an impressive number of doves to the top of that list was not at all reflected in the election propaganda. The doves, as well as Shimon Peres, the former Prime Minister and previous Labour Party Leader, have been pushed aside throughout the campaign.

The political message put forward by Rabin

could be summed up in the following three points:

□ In the near future the definite solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict is not yet on the agenda. The government Rabin intended to form will deal with the first, intermediary stage, namely the establishment of Palestinian autonomy in the Occupied Territories. This part he promised to conclude within 6-9 months.

□ Rabin distinguished between 'political settlements' and 'strategic settlements', implying that the spectacular settlements in the densely populated Palestinian areas were to be stopped or cut down strongly, while the settlements in the Jordan Valley (along the border with Jordan), on the Golan and around Jerusalem would continue. This policy, he claimed, would satisfy the US government, which would therefore provide the requested loan guarantees, thus changing drastically Israel's economic situation.

□ Since in the near future there seems no real chance for an agreement with the Syrian government, any effort for accommodation with Syria was to be postponed to a later stage.

On the basis of these assumptions, it would have been indeed conceivable for Rabin to come to an understanding with the hawkish Tzomet and Mafdal parties, assuming that these parties do have their own strong interest in being inside the government. But even without a compromise with such right-wing parties, it is difficult to see how Rabin – on the basis of his own declared policy – could ever meet the legitimate demands of the Palestinians.

Autonomy is a concept with a range of possibilities. Three different versions have so far been put on paper.

The chronologically first, which is part of the Camp David agreement, demands a withdrawal of the Israeli army from areas densely populated by Palestinians; the establishment of an Arab police force; and the convening of an elected Palestinian assembly. After lengthy talks with the Egyptians, the Begin Government failed to implement that agreement, though it had been Menachem Begin who signed it in the first place, as part of the Camp David agreement and the peace treaty with Egypt.

The Palestinians never accepted the Camp David agreement, to which they had not been signatories. They demand an appreciable extension of the autonomy, (which they prefer calling "interim self-government"). In this version, it should include the participation in elections of the Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, the control of the water resources, and the authority over the so-called public lands, hitherto earmarked for Jewish settlement. Furthermore, the Palestinians demand an agreed timetable for the definite solution, a solution in which the permanent status of the Palestinian lands will be defined and in which Jerusalem must be on the negotiations agenda.

The third version of autonomy is the so-called Shamir Peace Plan: autonomy limited to municipal matters only, and minimal Israeli commitment as to continuation of the process once this token autonomy is established.

On the day that the Israeli election results became

known, several PLO speakers welcomed these results expressing high hopes. Indeed, there seems good reason to expect that the peace talks will at last take off. One can also expect that Rabin, unlike Shamir, will avoid creating crises on irrelevant matters. But it is not at all sure how he will react to issues such as the establishment of a real Arab police force, or Palestinian control of the water – a highly sensitive issue for Israeli public opinion – and authority over the public lands, which would virtually put an end to any settlement program. How, in short, will the Rabin government react to those demands which could guarantee the Palestinians that "autonomy" is not going to be a barrier on the way to independence but, on the contrary, a real step in its direction?

Another point is that a deadlock in the negotiations with Syria might prove fatal for the whole peace process. Not without reason did Egyptian President Mubarak already pressure Rabin to make a positive move towards Syria, while – not after – negotiating with the Palestinians.

Do the Israeli election results herald a real political and ideological landslide within the Israeli people? The Israeli right-wing has been defeated, but the force remaining to it should still not be underestimated. Israeli public opinion is still rather hawkish, out of concern for Israel's security and fear of the Arab World. The defeat has especially afflicted the ideological right, but that does not make the majority of Israelis adherents of the peace camp.

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It seems that an important factor in the political change is rooted in internal Israeli politics, especially in the economic crisis. For example, the votes cast by the new immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who arrived in Israel during the last two years and who comprise nearly 10% of the total electorate, were overwhelmingly for Labour. The Likud is regarded as responsible for their unemployment and housing difficulties. The Labour Party took advantage of those justified grievances and promised to improve the relations between Israel and the United States, which would secure the loans Israel needs for the absorption of the immigrants.

The ideological right has lost power in the Knesset, and the post-elections disputes inside the Likud – with regard to who will be the new leader after Shamir's resignation, and who is to blame for the defeat – might further widen the gap between the people and the ideological expansionists. But all that does not mean that they have been silenced. The settlers, and the racist supporters of Moledet and Kach (the party of the late Rabbi Kahane, barred from the elections), can be expected to cause the new government some trouble. They might get the support of at least a part of the Likud supporters, with Sharon as their leader, in militant street activities and demonstrations to obstruct advances in the peace negotiations.

Much will depend on the decisiveness of Rabin, who could not have expected better conditions for moving forward with the peace process. It is also to be expected that groups such as Peace Now, which support the new government, would rally in force to confront any right-wing provocation.

Matti Peled on tour

For almost a month in April and May, Matti Peled was on a lecture tour throughout the United States and Canada. The tour, which was organised by AICIPP, was sponsored by a combination of interested groups. There were organizations such as New Jewish Agenda, International Jewish Peace Union, Jews for a Just Peace, locally organized peace groups, Church organizations which focus on the Middle East, Quakers, Political Science as well as Arab Literature and Theology University departments and, last but not least, the Chicago University Arab Cultural Club.

Here follows Matti Peled's own report.

The strongest impression I got from this tour is that the American public, including American Jewry, feels that the whole situation in the Middle East should be re-examined. A year after the Gulf War it was generally felt that, in order to avoid similar traumatic experiences, a new approach to the region's problems should be adopted. One could sense that, due to this expectation, the current peace talks between Israel and the Arab nations are looked upon as the beginning of a process which might lead to a workable situation of the Israeli-Arab conflict. This process was the main issue discussed in most of the public and the private meetings.

There was no need to point out the difficulties involved in the process, since one more of the futile meetings had taken place in Washington in the last week of April, with the usual display of total disagreement between the delegations. The prevailing disappointment at the absence of any progress since the inaugural meeting in Madrid was matched only by the bewilderment at the lack of the constructive American policy which was promised by President Bush immediately after the war.

His call for a "New World Order" as well as his promise to curb the unrestricted arms race in the region were all seen to be empty rhetorics completely brushed aside by the shocking events in Los Angeles. But there was no way of ignoring the fact that part of the disappointment was due to the Israeli stubborn policy of accelerated settlement in the Occupied Territories, continuing in spite of the American request to stop such activity in order to allow the talks a chance. The riposte of which, in the form of refusing Israel's request for ten billion dollars in loan guarantees, signalled the beginning of a new and disconcerting phase in the relations between the two countries.

Against such an unusual, and unexpected, turn of events there was a widespread feeling that old arguments would not suffice to clarify the situation, and that a new approach was imperative. Perhaps this can account for the unusual lack of orchestrated

opposition by supporters of the Jewish establishment, of the kind which was in the past encountered in every public meeting with a dissident Israeli speaker. It was clear that the public would not accept attempts to disrupt a meeting where these sensitive issues were examined in earnest.

Out of a sincere desire to see some light ahead, a spontaneous but unwarranted expectation was built up toward the coming general elections in Israel. The hope that a Labour government would bring about a significant change became widespread, and there was a sense of reluctance to hear that the basic premisses of Labour are not different from those of Likud. If this were true, so the argument went, where should a solution come from?

The unavoidable answer is that the Israeli-Arab conflict can only be resolved through an active involvement of the international community, which would see to it that in an International Peace Conference all parties to the conflict would participate on an equal base. In spite of the far more active and decisive role played by the UN in recent international crises, the suggestion that the United Nations take up this issue is met with understandable skepticism.

Invited by the Dutch Green Left Party (*Groen Links*), Matti Peled met in late June with various groups in Holland, to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the light of the elections in Israel.

At a public meeting held in Amsterdam, Peled shared the platform with Ms. Leila Shahid - PLO representative at The Hague. It was clear that the PLO has great expectations from the changeover of government in Israel - expectations which Peled found somewhat too high and likely to lead to eventual disappointment. At the meeting was presented the Left Green's document "Shalom/Salam", prepared by its Middle East Working Group.

A special meeting with the working group members was held the next day, when a discussion developed about a proposal, which has gained some currency, to call for a boycott of Israeli goods. Peled's position was that such a campaign is not likely to be effective. Moreover, on the street level the project could easily assume an anti-semitic character. It should therefore be discouraged. A more useful approach would be to call upon the European Community to take a more active part in the various attempts to revive the peace talks. This should not exclude sanctions of the kind employed over Israeli restrictions upon the export of agricultural products from the Occupied Territories. In that case, a determined position by the EC has already proved very effective.

A further meeting with the **Jewish-Palestinian Dialogue Group** and **Friends of Peace Now** indicated that there is a lot more room for grassroot activities in support of a just solution of the Middle East conflict.

Walking into prison

■ Actions marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the occupation, in early June, were reinforced by the arrival of nearly two hundred international participants

in the **Walk for a Peaceful Future**. The walk started on June 5 in the center of Jerusalem, where France Square – traditional meeting place of the Women in Black – was filled to overflowing.

From there, participants went on to Silwan Village. Israelis and foreigners joined the local Palestinians in protesting the village's invasion by settlers.

The next day started in cooperation with Yesh Gvul, on the mountain overlooking the Atlit military prison – where soldiers who refuse service in the Occupied Territories end up.

From there, the walk went on to Haifa, with a peace demonstration on the city streets and a rally in front of the Beit Hagefen Jewish-Arab Cultural Center.

The next day, June 7, was the most fateful: after a vigil at Megiddo Prison, where hundreds of Palestinians are incarcerated, the participants sought to enter the Occupied Territories – only to find their way barred by large military and police forces. Several hours of stand-off ended with the arrest of no less than 115 demonstrators, the majority of them foreigners.

Altogether, they spent 48 hours behind bars, causing the authorities a serious headache. (This was the first time ever that Scottish bagpipes were played in the detention cells of the Tiberias police station!)

■ On June 13, several dozen demonstrators gathered in front of the Ashkelon Prison, where Mordechai Vanunu is incarcerated. The demonstrators included Europeans and Americans who had just finished the **Walk for Peace**. Besides protesting the total isolation imposed on Vanunu, going on for already more than five years, they called for Israeli adherence to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and for nuclear disarmament of the Middle East.

Contact: *Vanunu Solidarity Committee, POB 7323, Jerusalem 91072.*

□ In a lingering conflict, the Workers' Union of the Dimona Nuclear Pile has presented an appeal to the Supreme Court. Several workers are said to have contracted cancer, due to insufficient safety standards. Thus far, the Dimona Pile's administration has denied them access to their medical records. The Union demands that control of radiation hazards be taken out of the Dimona Pile's administration and be vested in an independent authority.

Israel's Ministry of the Environment expressed its support for the workers' demand.

■ On April 28, sixty Israeli and Palestinian women demonstrated outside Hasharon Prison, calling for the immediate release of three inmates: Rabiha Shtay, who suffers from cancer – and was sentenced to eight years; Khamisa Mahanna, became blind while in prison (ten years); and Husniya Abdul Qader, who suffers from problems with her spine and a heart disease – and was placed under *Administrative Detention* (without trial) for the third time.

The new Justice Minister should receive reminders!
Letters to: *Minister of Justice David Liba'i, POB 1087, Jerusalem; fax: 972.2.285438.*

Copies to: *Women for Political Prisoners, POB 31811, Tel-Aviv; phone/fax: 972.3.5286050.*

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settlers. There were the cases of settlers attacking the army (always a mistake in Israel). The settlers were more and more seen as a crazy sect while at the same time they were felt to be depriving the underdeveloped Oriental Jewish towns and slum neighborhoods (the Likud's traditional electoral base) of the billions needed for their improvement.

One of the master-strokes of the Bush administration was to make guarantees for a 10-billion loan for the absorption of new immigrants conditional upon a total freeze of settlements. This brought home to all Israelis that they must choose: either to solve the economic and social problems or to set up settlements for privileged fanatics. Once the choice was clear, the decision was made – and it was neither stupid nor crazy.

This, by the way, should serve as a lesson to Americans: even Rabin needs such American pressure, in order to convince the Israeli public that compromise is essential.

What now?

Rabin is no candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, but he is a logical person who analyses situations and draws practical conclusions.

When forming the new government coalition, he was in the happy (and in Israel unusual) position of being able to choose between several options. He could set up a narrow "peacecoalition" with the left-wing Meretz, the Communists and the Arab Party which could count on 61 votes in the 120-seat Knesset. Instead he decided – I believe, rightly – to create as broad a coalition as possible, which would enable him to take the next step towards a solution: to negotiate a meaningful self-government ("autonomy") of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories – and to implement that agreement in the face of strong, and perhaps violent opposition by the settlers and their allies.

This would be an interim solution – defined as such. Rabin denies that it would be a step towards a Palestinian state – but he is far too intelligent to ignore the fact that self-government nearly inevitably leads to statehood. This we know from our own experience as a "state on the way", before 1948. Recent experience in Eastern Europe has given many new examples.

Rabin is going to negotiate an autonomy that will be far, far more than the Likud would have ever granted, but probably less than we would wish. As the most *Americanist* leader in Israel, he will accommodate American interests and considerations; if these lead him further, that is fine. Rabin has come a long way since his first term in the 1970s – when he was the exponent of Israeli rejectionism towards any Palestinian political aspirations whatsoever. Now, Rabin realises that an accommodation with the Palestinians is the first item on the agenda – even exaggerating in the opposite direction by trying to postpone an accord with the Syrians.

Can one be optimistic?

Yes indeed – but cautiously, please!

Growing debate on 'Special Units'

The Israeli army's "Special Units" are trained to penetrate Arab towns, disguised in Arab clothing, in order to hunt "wanted" Palestinians. Usually, the only witnesses to such raids, which often end lethally, are the soldiers themselves and Palestinian residents. The testimonies of the latter – collected by Palestinian, Israeli and International Human Rights organizations – are usually dismissed out of hand by the Israeli authorities, which regard them as biased.

It was not so easy to dismiss the testimonies of David Elimelech and his wife Aviva, Israeli citizens and Likud voters. On April 20, the couple visited a Palestinian business contact who lives in Dura, a West Bank town. While sitting on the veranda, they were watching three Palestinian youths writing graffiti. Suddenly, disguised soldiers arrived and shot the youths in the back, without warning. Elimelech and his wife, who could not believe their eyes, started shouting: *Don't shoot! Stop shooting!* That was reason enough for the soldiers to break into the house and start cursing and beating the couple (and their hosts). For several days, the story of Elimelech made headlines in the Israeli media.

A few days later, the Special Units were again front-page news. On April 27 a member of such a unit, Udi Berman (21), was killed at his base camp while playing "Russian Roulette" – apparently a common pastime among soldiers of the Special Units. Berman's mother told *Hadashot*: *Our children have been placed in a situation where human life is worth nothing. In the end, they play with their own lives.*

The *Yesh Gvul* movement has taken up a campaign for the abolition of the Special Units. There were a protest march in Central Tel-Aviv, a vigil in front of the home of Defence Minister Arens, and a visit to the football field of Sweika Village – where 23-year old Jamal Rashid Ganem was killed in a Special Unit raid while playing center forward in the village team. The regular weekly vigils of *Yesh Gvul*, in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, took also up the Special Units theme.

Following the protests, the former commander of a Special Unit operating in Gaza was court-martialed, on charge of giving illegal orders to his soldiers. (He got nine months' suspended imprisonment.)

Shortly after the elections, the Special Units again burst into public consciousness, after a night raid on Barta'ah Village during which Sergeant Eli Aisha, in his disguise as a masked Palestinian youth, was mistakenly shot to death... by other disguised soldiers. Public criticism of this affair caused the unit commander to lose his job. Yizhar Be'er of the B'tzelem Human Rights Organization commented: *Eli Aisha was the latest victim of the Special Units' modus operandi: Shoot first and ask questions afterwards* (Ha'aretz, 17.7.1992).

Contact: *Yesh Gvul*, POB 6953, Jerusalem 91068; B'tzelem, 18 Keren Hayesod Str., Jerusalem 92149.

■ On July 17, the Israeli press reported a mutiny among soldiers of the Giv'ati Brigade, fourteen of whom ran away from their unit. The soldiers have been involved in operations at Gaza and Hebron.

Like in previous mutinies, the soldiers' grievances are not overtly political, but are connected with their being mistreated by the commanding officer.

■ On July 3, members of the Mapam-affiliated Kibbutz Movement visited Shati Refugee camp near Gaza. There, they met with 25 Palestinians, among them two members of the Palestinian negotiating team. The Palestinians expressed the hope that, following the elections, a real dialogue with the Israeli government would be possible. Israelis and Palestinians were united in the decision to hold further meetings. The possibility of organising a meeting between Israeli and Palestinian mothers was also discussed.

■ On June 6, hundreds of Peace Now supporters participated in vigils at Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa and Be'er Sheva, to mark the tenth anniversary of the Lebanon War, and remind the public that many of those responsible for the war were still holding public office.

■ On June 15, political debates burst out during the official memorial ceremony at Jerusalem's Mount Herzl Cemetery. Yisrael Zinder, who spoke on behalf of the bereaved parents, said: *This disastrous war has already claimed the lives of 750 soldiers! My own son, Amir, was thirteen when the war broke out. I remember how he cried when the names of the fallen soldiers were read on television. In 1985 we rejoiced when the government announced the end of the Lebanon War – but a year later Amir was killed in Lebanon. And it is still going on. For how long? Who can lead us to peace?*

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the debts are paid regularly because the aid is provided regularly. The other half has been, up to now, spent on setting up new Israeli settlement in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, much against America's declared opposition to such settlements. Nothing is left for economic growth, which is the declared aim of the grant.

This situation was known all along, although no Israeli figures were available to prove it. Recently, in the course of the elections campaign, the figures were divulged by the Labour Party, which promised to divert that money to more productive areas. How far that promise would be kept remains to be seen. But this explains why Israel's economy has remained so sluggish in spite of what seems to be such a liberal aid to its economy. If indeed some of the 600.000.000 dollars, now wasted on the settlements, will be diverted to more profitable projects, it would be the first time the economic aid would be partially used to boost the economy. The extent to which such an option really exists is dependent on the sum Rabin wants to reserve for further extension of what he calls "strategic settlements".

On the whole, it is clear that a nation which has access to so much easy money – most of which is spent on doubtful needs – tends to become lax in putting its own resources to rational use. Corruption cannot lag far behind.



American aid – blessing or fallacy?

by Major General (ret.) Matti Peled

The amount of the regular American aid to Israel is three billion dollars, which is granted annually. It consists of two parts: military aid of 1.8 billions and economic aid of 1.2 billions. No one seems to be bothered about what these numbers stand for. But it is commonly assumed that the money thus provided is of great help to Israel.

A closer look at the manner the money is used would give some grounds for doubt as to the benefit Israel is deriving from the aid.

The 1.8 billion dollars are not given to the Israeli treasury to use as it pleases, but as a line of credit which enables Israel to order arms in American firms. An additional expenditure of about 2-3 dollars for every dollar's worth of goods is required in order to absorb and maintain the new military stuff. This additional money has to come out of Israel's own resources. The combined sum of about 6 billion dollars constitutes the major part of Israel's military budget.

There is reason to doubt that the armed forces of Israel truly need replenishment and modernization of its American equipment to the tune of two billions a year. Had the military aid been limited to one billion dollars Israel's military budget could have been proportionally reduced without hurting the country's

overall military capabilities. One can even argue that with less money for hardware the forces would become streamlined and more efficient. A comparison between Israel's combat effectiveness prior to 1974 – the year massive American aid started – to its effectiveness since then clearly supports the argument that abundance of money is not necessarily a blessing. A reduction of military aid would certainly relieve Israel's economy of part of the burden imposed on it while helping its armed forces to lose unnecessary fat.

The other aspect of this aid to Israel is that it provides significant income to the American economy – not necessarily commensurate with its size. The multi-billion dollars worth of arms transactions, concluded yearly between American firms and the other countries in the Middle East, are due largely to the example offered by Israel. There are always American advisers at hand in these countries who point out that whatever Israel is buying should be doubly or triply matched by its neighbors. Thus, the investment of 1.8 billions of American money in Israel triggers off ten times that amount in additional orders from other countries in the region, paid with their own money. It would certainly not be in America's interest to reduce its military aid to Israel.

As for the 1.2 billion in economic aid, it is well known that half of it is used to pay debts to American creditors, and, as pointed out by Secretary Baker, (continued on page 11)

If anything, these elections prove that the Israeli electorate is neither stupid nor crazy.

Several reasons – most of them true and logical – have been offered as explanations for *The Overturn* (as the results have been generally referred to by the Israeli press). But none of them, nor all of them together, would have been able to effect such an upheaval had there not been a profound change of mind concerning the Occupied Territories and the Palestinians. Without that, neither the credibility of Rabin, nor the disaffection of the Oriental Jews and the new immigrants, would have had such an effect.

For several years now I have been baffled by the superficiality of commentators and foreign correspondents, as well as by the fashionable pessimism among Israeli "doves" – lamenting the "rightist radicalization" of the people.

I have felt for quite a long time that exactly the opposite was happening – beneath the surface.

Since the beginning of the Intifada, more than 300,000 Israelis have been called up to do reserve duty in the Occupied Territories, many of them several times. This has not turned them into avid "Arab-lovers" – but has convinced them, in a most elementary way,

Not stupid, not crazy

by Uri Avnery

that there exists a Palestinian people and that some solution must be found. The vox populi found its purest expression in the words of a 40-year old reserve soldier, who was interviewed in Gaza two years ago and exclaimed: *I don't know what is the solution. Let the politicians rack their brains over that. But I do know one thing: we need a solution.*

At about the same time, a respected public opinion poll had the most extraordinary results: there was a majority for "Transfer" (i.e. kicking two million Palestinians out of the country) and for "talking with the PLO" (which means, of

course, a Palestinian state.) The first solution is identified with the most extreme right, the second with the extreme left. But how can there be two contradictory majorities in one and the same poll?

When I happened to meet the perplexed pollster, I told her that, when interpreted properly, the results were not illogical. The vast majority of the Israelis want one thing more than anything else: *a Jewish state, with as small a non-Jewish minority as possible.* If one could kick out the Palestinians – that would be fine. If that is impossible – as it obviously is – *than to hell with the Palestinians and to hell with their territories.* Not a very nice attitude, perhaps, but one that spells disaster for the knights of the *Greater Israel.* This is the mood captured by Rabin, and it led him to victory.

A second factor eluding foreign and local commentators' notice has been the immense animosity generated among Israelis by the

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