



The Other Israel

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TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE BACK

The very first decision taken by the Rabin government was to stop all government-financed settlement activity in the Occupied Territories, pending a thorough investigation. Further steps were taken in the following days: any construction at the settlements was forbidden, even if financed by the settlers themselves; work stopped on "Intifada-free" roads going around Arab towns for the sole purpose of letting settlers pass comfortably; subsidies were cut off to industrialists establishing factories in the settlements; also cut were the generous grants and subsidised loans, hitherto given to Israeli citizens willing to move to a settlement...

The government decrees followed each other in rapid succession, dazzling even the most casehardened peace activist (during the Likud years, many lost hope that the spread of settlements could ever be halted). For their part, the settlers were shocked and scandalized, accusing Rabin and Housing Minister Ben-Eliezer of *continuing the work of the historical enemies of the Jewish people*. But the settlers' emotional outburst found little echo among the general public, whom the settlers alienated in the past years.

Adam Keller will be visiting Germany

For details of the speaking tour, organised by DFG-VK in the first half of November, call Rudi Friedrich: 069.431440 (or) 845016; Franz Nadler: 069.815128.

Within a few weeks, however, it turned out that the new government's policy was far from being clearcut. Rabin's distinction between "political" and "strategic" settlements re-surfaced. Settlements of the latter type were "defroze". This meant that in the West Bank's Jordan Valley and on the Golan Heights (seized from Syria) construction was resumed – as was the granting of loans and benefits to settlers there. Moreover, even in the "political" settlements, established by the religious-nationalist Gush Emunim ("Block of the Faithful") movement and regarded by Rabin as undesirable, construction did not cease entirely. Pressured by the powerful building constructors' lobby, Housing Minister Ben-Eliezer okayed continued construction in the settlements where such construction already was "in an advanced

stage" when the new government assumed power. There turned out to be quite a lot of such cases – some 11,000 housing units; should all of these be completed and inhabited, the settler population would substantially increase.

In all this, Rabin encountered little opposition from the dovish wing of his cabinet. The ministers representing Meretz, Rabin's coalition partner to the left, made no more than verbal protests. True, Meretz's bargaining position is weak, since the only alternative to the present government is one more to the right. Nor did Rabin encounter a substantial extra-parliamentary opposition from this quarter: the Peace Now leadership felt that its supporters were not ready to come out against Rabin, and the movement contented itself by holding a press conference and a fruitless meeting with the Housing Minister, concerning the continued construction.

Rabin announced a definite break with the "Greater Israel" policies characteristic of the previous government; at the same time, he proclaimed himself an adherent of "Greater Jerusalem". Like his predecessor, Rabin declared that Israeli sovereignty over the whole of Jerusalem is not negotiable – and in consequence Rabin, like Shamir, refuses to have East Jerusalemites such as Feisal Hussein and Hanan Ashrawi seated at the formal negotiating table. Rabin went even further: he proclaimed a wide belt of settlements on the West Bank, to the north, east and south of annexed East Jerusalem, to be all parts of "Greater Jerusalem" (though it is not clear whether all of these parts are equally "non-negotiable"). Construction at all these settlements resumed.

Rabin also gave his personal approval to continuing the "120-Million Highway", aimed at creating an *Intifada-free* connection between Jerusalem and the Etzion settlements to its south. The sum of 120 million Shekels (50 million Dollars) is required for this ambitious engineering project, which involves several long bridges and tunnels cutting across a rugged mountain terrain.

Nevertheless, the new government did put an end to the most provocative aspects of the previous government's Jerusalem policy: the penetration into the heart of the Arab areas – with settler takeover of

inhabited homes, and the blunt eviction of the Palestinian inhabitants.

Until the elections, the settlers had the full backing of Likud Housing Minister Ariel Sharon in their aggressive campaign to take over the Muslim and Christian quarters of the Old City, and the nearby Silwan Village. Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, a member of the Labor Party, was always outspoken in his opposition to these provocations (see TOI-50 p.5.). His position was adopted by the Labor government, which stopped funneling funds to the settler associations, and blocked new settlement ventures. A high-level committee, appointed by Justice Minister Liba'i, investigated the affair and ruled that in many cases the Palestinian homes were illegally taken over*. So far, however, the government refrained from returning such houses to their Palestinian owners.

Meanwhile, Mayor Teddy Kollek also distinguished himself by proclaiming that he would no longer sign demolition orders for illegally built Arab houses, since it has become nearly impossible for Arabs to get building permits in East Jerusalem. Yet, Teddy Kollek is by no means opposed to Jewish settlement in areas occupied in 1967, as long as it is done "in a subtle way". Shortly after the elections, the Jerusalem municipality opened to habitation the newly-erected houses at "Holland Village" on Givat Hamatos Hill near the Jerusalem-Bethlehem Road. (The settlement, mainly inhabited by new immigrants from Ethiopia, was partly financed by a Dutch group of Christian Fundamentalists.)

Municipality speakers stressed that the site was, before 1967, a Jordanian minefield – thus implying that settling Jews there harmed nobody. They did not mention the fact that "Holland Village" forms the last link in a chain of newly-created Jewish areas, completely surrounding the Arab neighborhood of Beit-Safafa and cutting it off from other Arab neighborhoods.

** The main instrument used by Sharon and the settlers was a 1950 law which defines all property located in Israel and owned by Palestinians who live outside Israel as an "Absentee Property", which could be taken over by the government's "Guardian of Absentee Property" – who may then freely dispose of it. According to Israeli law, this applies to East Jerusalem which by virtue of the 1967 annexation is considered part of Israel. In the past years, the practice became to get Palestinian collaborators to sign an affidavit that a*

certain house is owned by an "Absentee". The settlers brought the affidavit to the "Guardian", who – at Sharon's orders – accepted it with no further checking, and assumed legal possession of the house. A Housing Ministry committee – on which the settler leaders themselves sat, having been appointed by Sharon – deliberated on the fate of the new government property, a deliberation which always ended with a decision to rent it to Jews at a nominal fee. All these proceedings took place in camera. The Palestinian inhabitants were usually not informed until the moment when settlers and police arrived to evict them.

Already in 1990, these uses (and abuses) of the old Absentee Property Law were systematically uncovered by Mapam Knesset Member Haim Oron. At the time, the Likud government denied Oron's allegations. Now, they have been fully confirmed by the Liba'i committee. However, whether it will lead to proceedings against Sharon remains to be seen. Sharon told the press: "This is the way lands were acquired for Jews throughout the history of Zionism."

For the organized American Jewish community, the election victory of Rabin came as a last moment reprieve. American Jewish leaders had found the policies of the Shamir government increasingly difficult to defend against the criticism of the American public opinion. Rabin changed all that, virtually overnight. The steps taken by the new government were unanimously hailed by the American media, and the flaws in them overlooked. Rabin's trip to the United States, a few weeks after his inauguration, almost assumed the proportions of a triumphal procession.

For Rabin, getting the loan guarantees – whose denial to Shamir had played a significant role in the Likud's downfall – became a foregone conclusion. President Bush, hard pressed in his uphill struggle against Clinton, desperately needed as much of the Jewish vote as he could still regain; therefore, he could not afford an open breach with Rabin, which may have resulted from insisting on the conditions he had put to Shamir half a year earlier: *not a single new house in any settlement, anywhere in the Occupied Territories.*

Thus, Bush accepted Rabin's very partial settlement freeze as sufficient to grant Israel ten billion Dollars in loan guarantees, over the coming five years. Nevertheless some tough, all-night negotiations did take place before Bush and Rabin appeared smiling

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on the veranda of the President's summer home. It turned out that Rabin had accepted Bush's demand to install a "cutoff switch" in the guarantees machinery; the bill presented to Congress gives the president discretionary power to suspend or stop the guarantees, should he feel that Israel has not fulfilled its obligations.

The Arab partners to the Washington talks reacted with anger to the granting of the guarantees, some Palestinians calling for the negotiations to be broken off, since "Bush is no longer an honest broker".

Israeli annexationists, for their part, still feel great apprehension at the thought of a second Bush term, where the President will no longer be hampered by any considerations of re-election. Likud spokesperson Gil Samsonov declared his support for Bill Clinton, whose election "may save Eretz Yisrael". Also Israeli settlers in the Occupied Territories who hold American citizenship – of whom there are several thousands – overwhelmingly declared their support for the Democrat candidate. Some of them are impressed with the wild promises Clinton made to Jewish audiences, while others hope that he would concentrate on internal American issues, leaving the Middle East diplomatic process to collapse.

Such right-wing hopes may, however, be premature. According to his aides, quoted in *Ha'aretz* (21.9.1992), Clinton is already making practical preparations so that – if elected – he would immediately be able to take a hand in the Middle East negotiations, even before the January inauguration.

The change of government in Israel brought about no change in daily life throughout the Occupied Territories. The Israeli army's "Special Units" are just as before hounding "wanted" Palestinians, and as before make no special effort to catch them alive. More and more of the hunted turn at bay, providing the Israeli newspapers with dramatic accounts of prolonged gun battles – culminating in death for the Palestinian fighters, for some of their Israeli counterparts and for Palestinian civilians who happened to be near.

Education Minister Shulamit Aloni openly spoke out against the role of the Special Units, stating on Israeli television: *I cannot help feeling deeply concerned at the idea of 18-year old boys required to act as judges and executioners.* But Yitzchak Rabin – in his dual role as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence – responded by giving his full backing to the Special Units: personally visiting one of their bases, exalting their fallen as "heroes who died to defend us" and calling upon youths who enter the army to volunteer for these units (many do).

In the struggle against deportations the cabinet doves were more successful. Justice Minister David Liba'i called upon Rabin to cancel the deportation orders against eleven Palestinian activists, issued by the Likud government – but Rabin was reluctant to do so. He preferred to reach a compromise whereby the Palestinians would leave the country "voluntarily" and be allowed to come back after two or three years. The Palestinians, however, refused to make such a

deal. Knowing that implementation of the deportations may derail the peace talks and entail a condemnation from the U.N. Security Council, Rabin then fell in with Liba'i's position. The deportation orders were canceled. Still, the eleven were not sent home: they were placed under six months' Administrative Detention (without trial).

The cancellation of the deportation orders was one of the "confidence-building measures" announced by Rabin, as the Washington talks resumed at the end of August. Reactions to these measures were mixed: the release of eight hundred Palestinian prisoners sent the Israeli right into paroxysms of rage – but many Palestinians had their beloved ones among the 11,000 prisoners left incarcerated. While the inhabitants of Bethlehem were rather pleased that the army-erected barrier separating Manger Square from the neighboring streets went down, for most Palestinians nothing so much changed in the daily humiliations and degradations of life under occupation.

Shoot first – ask questions later!

It was the death in June of Israeli soldier Eli Aysha which exposed to public view details of how the Special Units operate. Aisha had been so successful in disguising himself as a masked Palestinian that even his comrades were deceived – with fatal consequences.

His father told Hadashot:

My son was not accidentally killed, but murdered by his own comrades. Soldiers who were at the spot told me exactly what happened. They had gone disguised into an Arab village. Suddenly an officer of the unit saw my son from quite close, without realising that he was a soldier. The officer started shooting with his automatic rifle. A sergeant saw the shooting and joined the "party". They shot down my son. And what really drives me crazy is that when Eli was already lying on his face they came near and shot a few more bullets, to make sure he was dead. Only then they turned him around – to find that he was one of them.

(Hadashot, 21.8.92)

The Washington talks opened in an optimistic mood, with Israeli and Arab negotiators shaking hands and smiling in front of the cameras – as was never seen at the previous rounds.

However, when detailed Israeli proposals were presented to the Palestinians, they seemed rather pale after Rabin's promising public statements. Elyakim Rubinstein – the same man who had negotiated on behalf of the Likud government – presented a 37 pages-long document setting out the proposed powers of the elected Palestinian Council. But in all these pages there was no mention of land ownership and the use of water sources, nor was there any reference to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from most parts of the Occupied Territories and their re-deployment in specific areas only – as already stipulated in the Camp David Accords, signed by Israel in 1978.

Moreover, the Israeli negotiations insisted that the elected Palestinian body would have only administrative authority, not legislative. This implies that the

Palestinian Council would not have the power to abolish or change any of the 1300 decrees enacted by successive Israeli military governors since 1967. Indeed, the elected Palestinians would be legally bound to enforce the Israeli decrees, as well as a host of Jordanian, Egyptian, British and Ottoman laws still in force – many of them repressive and/or outdated.

The Palestinians' chagrin was all the stronger because, in the parallel negotiations going on between Israel and Syria, there were both a new Israeli negotiator and a new Israeli position. Rabin had sacked chief negotiator Yosef Ben-Aharon – a hardliner even by Likud standards – replacing him with Professor Ithamar Rabinovitch, an Orientalist specialising in Syrian Studies. (In a recently published book, Rabinovitch defends the thesis that Israel could have achieved peace with Syria already in the 1950s, were it not for the inflexibility of then Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion.)

On his first meeting with the Syrian delegation, Rabinovitch announced that the State of Israel recognizes the applicability to Syria of U.N. Resolution 242, with its stipulation of Israeli withdrawal from Occupied Territories. This inevitably implied Israeli willingness to negotiate withdrawal from at least part of the Golan Heights, seized from Syria in 1967.

The Syrian gambit was a significant departure from Yitzchak Rabin's previous policies. Rabin has a long record of giving precedence to talks with the Palestinians over those with Syria. It goes back to Rabin's enthusiastic support, in 1989-90, for the abortive initiative to hold peace talks in Cairo – to which only the Palestinians, not the Arab states, would have been invited.

Rabin's first statements after assuming power still followed the same pattern. At some point, however, Rabin must have reached the conclusion that Syria is too powerful and influential to be ignored – and that raising the specter of a separate agreement with the Syrians would enable him to put more pressure on the Palestinians.

For many years, Israeli settlers on the Golan basked in a public acceptance whose like the settlers in the West Bank and Gaza could not dream of.

There is no Intifada in the Golan – of whose original Arab inhabitants only four Druze villages, isolated in the Northeastern corner of the Golan, remained after the Six Day War. Though stubbornly maintaining their Syrian identity, this small community could never become more than a minor headache for the Israeli authorities.

In the general Israeli public, possession of the Golan seemed justified by the memory of the Syrian artillery bombardments launched from there, prior to 1967, to devastate Israeli villages. Even the Israeli peace movement never devoted much of its energy to the Golan issue, and there were no prolonged protest actions when the Golan was formally annexed to Israel in 1981. Syria was regarded as an extremist Arab state ruled by a dictatorial regime, with which peace was a very distant and hypothetical option.

A few days before the elections, Rabin made a

powerful speech at a rally on the Golan; more than half of the settlers voted for him. Also after the elections, the settlers drew reassurance from Rabin's support of "strategic settlements", of which theirs were the prime example.

Thus, the news from Washington caught the Golan settlers totally unprepared. Alarmed, the settler leaders asked for an urgent meeting with the Prime Minister. It was granted – but this time Rabin gave them no reassurance. On the contrary: when the "strategic" issue came up, Rabin bluntly told the settlers: "As far as Israel's security is concerned, it doesn't matter whether there are 31 settlements on the Golan – or only 13."

Inside the Labor Party, Rabin's shift of position aroused far less opposition than could have been expected. Of the many Labor hawks who in the past joined "The Golan Lobby", only a single KM was found to support the settlers against Rabin; and the Labor-affiliated Kibbutz movement – which had established many of the Golan settlements – wavered and took a completely incoherent position.

Meanwhile, Rabin's new stance got unexpected support from Rabbi Shlomo Goren, former Chief Rabbi of Israel. Hitherto known as a rabid annexationist, Rabbi Goren brought evidence from the Scriptures and the Talmud to prove that the Golan is a piece of "unclean land" which it is quite permissible – as far as God is concerned – to trade for peace.

Press reports of the mood among the Golan settlers show a mixed picture. A considerable number of settlers joined the right-wing opposition in holding excited demonstrations, where the slogan *Rabin is a traitor* was heard. But many others seem resigned and demoralized, feeling that – once negotiations with Syria started – the end is a foregone conclusion. Quite a few of the Golan settlers used to live in the Sinai, previous to the peace with Egypt, and have already gone once through the whole process. And some settlers openly declared themselves in support of peace, even at the cost of losing their homes; articles to that effect were published in *Eretz Hagolan*, the Golan settlers' monthly.

In the beginning of September, Rabin stated on the Knesset floor his support for territorial concessions on the Golan, without flinching from the furious heckling of right-wing Knesset Members. On the following day, in what seemed to be a coordinated move, President Assad delivered a speech in Damascus, calling for a "Peace of the Brave" between Israel and the Arabs. (The term was taken from a speech by Charles de Gaulle, at the concluding stages of the Algerian War.)

A few days later, the diplomats met again in Washington. The media expected rapid progress; instead, the Israeli-Syrian talks got stuck and nearly broke off. It turned out that, while Rabin proclaimed himself in favor of giving back to Syria a part only of the Golan, he demanded in return full peace – including diplomatic relations, economic relations, open borders, and a Tel Aviv-Damascus bus line. Syrian Foreign Minister Faruk A-Shara replied: *We*

are ready to give total peace in return for total withdrawal.

Meanwhile, Rabin made a few concessions to mollify the neglected Palestinians. His negotiators proposed the creation of joint Israeli-Palestinian committees, which would oversee the public lands and the water sources in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the interim period. They also offered to recognize that the elected Palestinian Council would be accountable to its own voters, not to Israel – which seemed to imply that the military government's decrees could, after all, be superseded.

But the Palestinians met a total refusal when they asked for an assurance, similar to that given the Syrians, that resolution 242 applies to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This, the Israelis replied, belongs to the discussions on the definite solution, which will open only in three years.

The Washington talks recessed at the end of September, leaving many questions unanswered. Israeli and Arab diplomats talked in cautiously optimistic tones of "some progress made, though no breakthrough achieved as yet." The next month-long round of talks was set for the period from the end of October to the end of November – spanning the U.S. elections, on whose outcome a lot may depend.

Commentators made many speculations about the possibility of higher-level discussions, and about crucial decisions which Rabin, Assad and Arafat will have to take in the near future. Rabin himself, in his public appearances, seemed quite sure that Palestinian elections will be held in April or May 1993 – and that an agreement with the Syrians will be reached in the later part of the same year.

Standing on the State Department steps, chief Syrian negotiator Muafak Alaf gave the television cameras a few parting words: *Peace is now possible between Israel and the Arab World. This historic opportunity should not be wasted.*

Peace seekers can find little to add to these words.

The Editor

The dialogue gains momentum

On the last week of July, Uri Avnery (ICIPP) visited PLO headquarters in Tunis and conducted an extensive interview with Yasser Arafat. In the interview, which was prominently featured in *Ha'aretz's* weekend edition, Arafat expressed his willingness to come immediately to Jerusalem and hold personal talks with Rabin. This was more than a hint to Rabin's inauguration speech, delivered at the Knesset a week earlier. In it Rabin called upon Jordan's King Hussein and Syria's President Assad to come to Jerusalem – but conspicuously omitted to issue a similar invitation to the Palestinian leader.

In the same week, a group of six Arab Israelis also set out for Tunis, representing the Hadash Communists, the Arab Democratic Party and The Progressive List for Peace – a display of united action as had not been possible before the elections. According to Dr. Ahmed

Tibi, its coordinator, the group's trip was aimed at making a new start and showing that Arabs in Israel, acting as a united community, could play an active role in the peace process. The six were invited by the Tunisian government – the first such invitation ever extended to Israeli citizens. Officially invited to participate in the annual Festival of Culture and Poetry at Carthage, the delegation members met both with the Tunisian Minister of Culture and with PLO leaders, discussing what could be expected from the new Israeli government. Hadash Knesset Member Hashem Mahamid told of his recent talks with Rabin and other Labor leaders, held before Hadash gave its support to the Rabin government.

KM Mahamid, who afterwards informed the Israeli press about the trip, also mentioned a meeting with Naif Hawatmeh, head of the DFLP – a PLO faction opposed to the conditions of the present peace talks – who hitherto refused to meet with Israelis. Hawatmeh was quoted as saying to the group: *We have to be pragmatic and participate in peace making.* He even asked Mahamid to arrange for him meetings with other Knesset Members.

Upon the delegation's return, the Israeli newspapers published on their front pages big photographs of KM Mahamid standing together with Arafat and Hawatmeh. Likud Knesset Member Michael Eytan lodged complaints to the police against Mahamid – as well as against Avnery – and started proceedings in the Knesset House Committee to have KM Mahamid's immunity removed. However, all of Eytan's efforts seemed foredoomed, as the new Justice Minister, David Liba'i, moved to abolish altogether the legal prohibition on meetings with the PLO.

Liba'i has always been an outspoken opponent of that prohibition, and upon entering office he instructed the Justice Ministry staff to prepare a bill removing that stain from the law books. Liba'i added that *a law which makes do-gooders like Abie Nathan or Uri Avnery into terrorists is an intolerable absurd.*

Liba'i's action got the full backing of Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. In an interview to an Italian newspaper, Peres announced that the new bill will be presented immediately when the Knesset re-convenes in October.

Peres' statement made world-wide headlines, catching Prime Minister Rabin in the midst of his talks with President Bush at the American president's summer residence. Rabin was not entirely pleased. According to what his aides told the press, he feared that the new law might give the impression that he is himself willing to talk directly to the PLO, which he is not. Also, it would clearly be more difficult to prevent the U.S. government from resuming its dialogue with the PLO, when ordinary Israeli citizens are no longer forbidden to meet with its leaders.

Under Rabin's pressure, both Liba'i and Peres reiterated that the government – as opposed to some private Israeli citizens – would not engage in direct talks with the PLO, which would continue to be defined in Israeli law as "a terrorist organization".

At the same time, the government made clear that it

has no objection to the Palestinian delegations's regular contacts with PLO headquarters. Also, there was a change in the Foreign Ministry's attitude. In the Likud period the ministry refused to receive any messages from the PLO conveyed through third parties, let alone transmitting messages of its own through such channels. The Israeli press reported that the newly-installed Deputy Minister Yossi Beilin, soon after entering his job, established an exchange of messages with Arafat via third parties. Beilin's recent visit to Cairo seemed also to play a role in that exchange (*Ma'ariv*, 10.9.1992).

At the end of August, another Arab Knesset Member, Abd-El-Wahab Darawshe, met with Yasser Arafat in Geneva during the Conference of NGO's (non-governmental organizations) on the Question of Palestine. However, Darawshe's meeting received little public attention. It was overshadowed by a seven-hour meeting at the Hague, where two newly-elected KMs, Naomi Hazan of Meretz and Yael Dayan of the Labor Party, met with Arafat's political adviser Nabil Sha'at. Other participants in the meeting were well-known Belgian Jewish peace activist Simone Süsskind and PLO representative to Holland Leila Shahid. Also present was Elias Sanbar, the Palestinian representative to the Multilateral Talks on the Refugee Problem, which the Rabin government boycotts because of Sanbar's being a member of the PNC (the PLO's parliament in exile).

During the long session, details of the upcoming Washington talks were discussed, as well as longer-range issues such as the possibility of creating a Middle Eastern economic community. According to Yael Dayan, Sha'at's views on that issue are remarkably similar to those of Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Dayan and Hazan, veteran members of the Women's Peace Network, have both met in the past with Sha'at and other prominent Palestinians. This time, however, they came to the meeting as Knesset Members from government parties – and at that, members of the prestigious Knesset Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee.

The Hague meeting became subject of a week-long controversy. The Likud was quick to include Dayan and Hazan in the proceedings against KM Mahamid, aimed at the lifting of parliamentary immunity. The Labor Party's parliamentary faction announced that it would use its majority to block any such proceedings.

Meanwhile, a new sensation was broadcast into every Israeli living room. Nabil Sha'at took the unprecedented step of convening in Washington – where the peace talks had just resumed – a special press conference for Israeli journalists. Smiling and affable, Sha'at asserted that the Palestinian delegates to the peace talks draw their mandate from Yasser Arafat, from the PLO Central Committee, and from the Palestine National Council. Though all this was well-known since Madrid, it had never been stated that explicitly.

Sha'at complained that the proposals of the Rabin government, presented in that week's talks, had been

disappointing, and fell short of the Labor Party's own election program.

Circles close to Rabin blamed Yael Dayan for the Palestinian disappointment. She was accused of having told Sha'at, at the Hague meeting, about a more generous position paper – which had been considered by the Israeli negotiating team, but which was in the end not presented to the Palestinians. These accusations were apparently part of the pressures which Rabin brought to bear upon Dayan. After several days, Yael Dayan announced that she would not meet again with PLO members, until such meetings become legal.

The terrorist

On August 3, two Likud Knesset Members, Ephraim Gur and Naomi Blumenthal, found themselves face to face with a PLO member incarcerated at Jerusalem's police station. The two right-wingers – members of a parliamentary committee investigating overcrowding at Israel's detention centers – approached a cell in which 'terrorist suspects' were held. Their conversation with one of them, described as "22 years old, suspected of possessing a firearm and openly professing membership in the PLO's Fatah faction," was recorded by Yediot Aharonot (4.8.1992).

KM Gur: Do you believe that peace will come?

The terrorist: When the Likud was in power we did not believe it. Shamir did not seem at all interested.

KM Blumenthal: If you believe in peace, what did you need a firearm for?

The terrorist: Because your soldiers are killing our children.

KM Gur: If you get autonomy, will you still have a weapon?

The terrorist: I tell you, from the depth of my heart, that I want peace. But I will continue to fight, with all my strength, until there are two states in this land – a state for us and a state for you. Is it not true that you Jews also fought hard to get your state?

Two weeks later, Naomi Hazan and Labor KM Avraham Burg received invitations to a UN-sponsored journalists' conference in Portugal – where Hisham Mustafa and Jamil Hilal of the PLO were also to appear. Hazan and Burg approached Deputy Minister Yossi Beilin, who announced that the Foreign Ministry has no objection to the two KMs' participation in that conference. *It is futile to try to prevent such meetings, said Beilin. It is much better to make use of them. I asked Hazan and Burg to take with them some material explaining the government position.*

At the conference, Burg spoke indeed as a government representative, calling upon the Palestinians to accept what is offered them.

As this issue goes into print, the fate of the Liba'i bill is still not clear. Rabin makes an effort to block its passage by having the matter debated in the Ministerial Defence Committee. Liba'i, however, does not give up, and bases himself upon the resolutions of the Labor Party Conference. And Meretz announced to bring such a bill to a vote on its

own, should the government fail to do so.

Between September 19 and 22, Israeli and Palestinian women held a three-day conference in Belgium, under European Community auspices. The twenty Israeli participants included three Knesset Members – Anat Ma'or and Naomi Hazan of Meretz, and Tamar Gozanski of Hadash – as well as several members of the Labor Party Bureau. Among the Palestinians were Leila Sha'id of the PLO, as well as prominent leaders of women's organizations in the Occupied Territories.

At the conclusion, it was decided to create two centers in Jerusalem – with EC funding – to work on issues of education, human rights and women's rights, and organise further meetings.

At the beginning of October, KM Abd-El-Wahab Darawshe is to head a large delegation, which will go to Tunis, to meet Yasser Arafat.

Meanwhile, the veteran Abie Nathan shifted his efforts to a different field of dialogue. In an effort to establish contact with the Islamic Hamas movement, hitherto the most intransigent of the Palestinian factions, Nathan asked for permission to meet with Sheikh Abdullah Yassin, charismatic leader of the Hamas, who is serving a term of life imprisonment in an Israeli jail. The Prisons Authority was reluctant to permit such a visit, relenting only after Nathan threatened to appeal to the Supreme Court.

After the meeting, Nathan told *Ha'aretz*: 'Of course I did not succeed, during one meeting, in changing the basic Hamas position which opposes the existence of Israel. But I made a start of talking in a reasonable way.'

In the meeting Nathan raised the issue of Israeli soldier Ilan Sa'adun, killed in 1988 by two Hamas members who ambushed him in southern Israel. The two hid the soldier's body and then fled the country, and the Israeli authorities never found his burial place. Nathan told the Sheikh of the Sa'adun family's suffering. Sheikh Yassin promised to use his influence – which is considerable, even behind bars – since 'Islamic Law commands that a family – even the family of an enemy – be told the burial place of their son.'

■ On July 6, the *Sovlanut* (Tolerance) movement held its annual award-giving ceremony at the Jerusalem Municipal Theatre. This year's award went to forty-year old Bella Freund, an ultra-Orthodox mother of eight, who two months previously saved a Palestinian from being lynched at the West Jerusalem marketplace.

A representative of the *Sovlanut* board described the circumstances:

On May 14 Adnan Alfandi, a 21-year old construction worker, attacked a group of Israeli highschool pupils – in order "to avenge the Palestinians killed in the 1990 Temple Mount massacre", as he later told the police. He stabbed and wounded one with a knife, the boys started screaming, and Alfandi was surrounded by an

angry crowd. Someone succeeded to take his knife from him, he was thrown to the ground and repeatedly kicked and beaten. Bella Freund, who passed on the scene, threw herself across him and defended him with her body, receiving some of the kicks and blows intended for him – until the police arrived.

Invited to speak at the *Sovlanut* ceremony, Bella Freund stated shortly: *I could not see a helpless man killed by a mob, whatever he had done. That's not the way I was brought up.*

The human being inside the uniform by Marylene Schultz

The French-born Marylene Schultz spent 25 years working in a Palestinian orphanage near Jerusalem and as such is involved in many of the intricacies of the life of the Palestinians.

The following part of Marylene Schultz' diary is translated from German.

(...) One of those all too common "exceptional situations" is related to the obtaining of proper documents. Already more than two years we try to let Mervett's Gazan identity card be substituted for a West Bank one. Without the assistance of an Israeli human rights organisation it may have been altogether impossible; now we have at least the formal promise that *she will soon receive it*.

In one way or another, the authorities introduced a wrong number which in a certain computer system is non-existent. Therefore Mervett does not exist either – at least according to several of the bureaucrats.

The non-existing Mervett, who studies in Ramallah and will soon be twenty – 60 kilos of sparkling lust for life and energy – has already drawn frequent attention to herself at checkpoints. Her answer – that she is not yet 16 and is therefore not entitled to have an identity card – is becoming less and less credible. What keeps her from being arrested then is just her charm, the good-heartedness of the soldier – or his stupidity.

About those obligatory visits to the military authorities in Abu Dis or Bethlehem, one could write volumes. Mostly they cost a huge lot of time, since often one is informed after hours of waiting that one should come back the following day, or the following week. However, it is an opportunity to feel what the people feel, to know what it feels like to be a Nobody. A Nobody confronted with an Almighty in uniform, who, with his scepter, his gun, has the power to deny – or to be generous and allow.

No, not all soldiers are arrogant, superior and unfriendly. Many only do this job because they have to, and would prefer to drive the cows into the stables at home in the kibbutz, instead of herding people into a queue in order to let them receive at the right desk their fodder – sorry, the requested stamps and unidentifiable signatures.

All those quibbles, which are invented in the oppressive system, which make those documents so precious – do they exist in order to let the powerless feel how powerless and dependent they are? Or

are they designed to help the lower ranks of the system, the soldiers on duty – those who demand to see these documents – have their share in the glory of power?

What are all these permits needed for? Were there less prohibitions, there would be less need for permits. Is it the contrast between dark and light – as in a chiaroscuro – which should give the right effect? The more humiliating the powerlessness of the one, the more absolute the power of the other.

Unfortunately, it is not a play at whose end the curtain drops, the light turns on, and the audience concludes: it was interesting and fascinating; let's now go back to daily life. This is daily life, a catastrophic daily life for the powerful and the powerless alike. Whoever can exercise uncontrolled power over other people is always in danger of abuse.

I must not generalize. In order to do justice to those who resist the temptation of power, I want to mention A., who is an officer with whom we had to deal during the past years again and again. How does this young man succeed in not conforming to the others, in continuing to meet every applicant in a friendly and respectful manner? Mervett is asking him questions as if they went to school together, and he seems to enjoy that.

The fact that such exceptions do exist does not make the occupation, and the accompanying oppressive system, less unjust. But at least it gives a glimmer of hope that dialogue is possible, if only a political solution can be found and the people will become equals.

Perhaps the secret of A. is that he sees in everybody first the human being, whom he respects as an equal. I hope to learn from his example when I have to deal with soldiers, with their uniforms and their rifles. I should learn that uniforms are not more important than those who are wearing them. Perhaps we owe it to the human being in those who have power not to be intimidated by this power. Power already loses some of its glory and its absoluteness when it is denied uncritical, subservient recognition.

These soldiers are different

During the Intifada years, a special link has been formed between the West Bank town of Beit Sahur – renowned for its inhabitants' refusal to pay taxes to the military government – and the Israeli peace movement.

The Beit Sahurians felt a particular affinity to the Yesh Gvul movement, whose members also practice a kind of civil disobedience. The Israeli reservists, members of Yesh Gvul, refuse to enter the Occupied Territories in uniform; but earlier this year, dozens of them came to Beit Sahur as civilians, at the invitation of the Municipal Council. At a ceremony held at the Town Hall, they received the honorary citizenship of Beit Sahur.

At the conclusion of that ceremony, a return visit was agreed upon, which took place on August 29.

Though Beit Sahur is but an hour's traveling from Tel-Aviv, organising the Beit Sahurians' trip was not simple. Palestinian men up to the age of fifty need a special permit to enter Israel. Permits are available only to those whose names appear on no black lists and can show that they work for an Israeli employer. Not all Beit Sahur activists fulfill both conditions. And even holders of a permit are not necessarily allowed to enter Israel during the weekend. Several approaches to the military government, asking for a one-time permit, were rejected.

In the end, the Palestinians decided to take a chance; traveling without a permit on a bus with Israeli licence plates, and going through side roads to circumvent the army roadblocks, they arrived at Tel-Aviv without incident – a busload of Beit Sahur political activists with their families, including children and grandparents.

Yesh Gvul was hardly in a position to organise a reciprocal ceremony at the Tel-Aviv Town Hall. Instead, the Tel-Aviv visit concentrated on the social aspect of letting Israelis and Palestinians know each other better. There was a joint excursion to the sea shore, where some of the formally-dressed Palestinians felt rather shy – until one of the grandmothers plunged into the water, dressed in her Sunday best.

On another part of the day, each Palestinian family was hosted by an Israeli one. Some of the visiting children felt apprehensive at the thought of entering the homes of Israeli soldiers, even after being told by their parents that "these soldiers are different". But the Israeli children quickly won them over to come and play.

■ A reserve officer at the rank of captain was called in early September to participate in guarding Israeli settlers on the West Bank. Upon his refusal to do so, the captain was sent home, rather than being tried. This seems to be part of an IDF policy of "isolating the refuser virus", operative mainly towards reservists. *Ma'ariv* journalists Immanuel Rosen and Gabby Omer, who wrote about the subject and who in general have good sources in the army, confirmed this new low profile policy. They also got evidence from several unnamed refusers who have been exempted from service in the Territories, provided that they keep it out of the press.

On September 13, however, when the 18-year old private Yonathan Ben-Efrat informed his commanding officer of his refusal to participate in the unit's tour of duty on the West Bank, he was brought before the colonel, who engaged in a long debate with him. Ben-Efrat remained adamant, stating *the values upon which I was brought up make it impossible for me to take part in acts of oppression*. The colonel tried him on the spot, and found him guilty of disobeying an order, for which he got 28 days. But that was not all. Since Ben-Efrat's kit-bag had been loaded on the truck together with those of the other soldiers, who were already on their way to the unit's new base on the West Bank, Ben-Efrat was sentenced to an additional 28 days for "failing to safeguard the military equipment entrusted to him".

On September 29, members of the Yesh Gvul

movement climbed the mountain overlooking the Athlit Military Prison, where Ben-Efrat is held, to hold a demonstration which was seen and heard in the prison compound. The Ben-Efrat case was also taken up by Amnesty International, which called upon the Israeli government to release him.

Letters of solidarity to:

Private Yonathan Ben-Efrat, Military Postal Code 03734, Israeli Defence Forces, Israel.

Letters of protest to: Defence Minister Yitzchak Rabin, Ministry of Defence, Hakirya, Tel-Aviv; fax: 972.3.217915

Copies to: Yesh Gvul, POB 6953, Jerusalem 91068.

■ In June, the Habimah Theatre in Tel-Aviv held the première of "Yehu", a play based on a Biblical theme. Yehu, who is placed by historians in the Eighth Century B.C., was a warrior in the army of the ancient Kingdom of Israel, who distinguished himself in a war with the Arameans – and in the massacre of Aramean villagers. Later, the Book of Kings recounts, Yehu – in close cooperation with the fanatic prophet Elisha – staged a coup d'état, proclaimed himself king, and butchered the former royal family with all its supporters.

In modern Israel, the play became the center of an intense political controversy. Right-wing playgoers complained that the character of Yehu was representing the Likud hardliner, former General Ariel Sharon. The Israeli television intended to screen extensive portions of the play, but this was forbidden by the Israeli Broadcasting Authority's board of governors, since *such screening would interfere in the election campaign*.

Shortly after the inauguration of the Labor government, the prohibition was lifted. The television showed scenes from the play, and it must be said: the similarity seen by Sharon's supporters was not a flattering one.

There was also an interview with the playwright, Gilead Evron: *I did not especially write about Sharon. I wrote about power; about what people do with it; about what it does to people. This theme is not tied to a particular person or period.*

■ On July 12, the day on which the new government assumed office, soldiers in Nablus arrested 41-year old Ghada Abdulhadi, a mother of five who is active in a local women's center, on suspicion of being a member of the PLO. She was kept imprisoned for a whole month, without being allowed to see a lawyer.

As could be heard from her only afterwards, during this month she was interrogated by the Shabak (Security Service), in what has become the routine way for Palestinian prisoners: again and again having to sit for long hours, a stinking sack covering the head, hands tied behind the back; being put under mental pressure – she was (falsely) told that her mother, who suffers from a severe heart disease, had died from heart attack upon hearing about her arrest.

For several days, the authorities left the Abdulhadi family without any information about where Ghada was held. The Tel Aviv-based WOFPP (Women for Political Prisoners) took up the case, succeeded in locating her and demanded that she be allowed to see a lawyer. Other human rights organizations in Israel

and abroad were mobilized and made the same demand. Hadash Knesset Member Tamar Gozanski repeatedly called upon the new Minister of Police in order to arrange a visit to Ghada Abdulhadi in the prison. The prisoner herself – totally cut off from the outside world and unaware of the campaign on her behalf – held a hunger strike in her cell.

All these efforts seemed of no avail, and Ghada remained incommunicado. On August 10 – as WOFPP already started preparing an appeal to the Supreme Court – Ghada Abdulhadi was suddenly released, no charges being brought against her.

Contact: WOFPP, PB 31811 Tel-Aviv; ph/fax: (0)3.5286050

■ On the night of July 13, following the inauguration of the Rabin government, unknown persons entered the "Peace Compound" at Kibbutz Nahal-Oz, near the Gaza Strip. The intruders took away several of the site's three-meter long banners – designed to be visible from the nearby highway – with slogans calling for Israeli-Palestinian peace and for a political solution to the Intifada. Gezi Shavit, the kibbutz's sculptor who had built the Peace Monument and was now busy with restoration work, told the press: *It is not the first time that this site was vandalized. I understand very well that some people feel frustrated these days.*

Contact: Gezi Shavit, Kibbutz Nahal Oz, Doar Na Negev.

■ On August 11, about a thousand Jews and Arabs gathered at a public park in the Arab town of Tira, in central Israel, to hold together a protest rally against the horrors of the war in Bosnia. The list of speakers included a uniquely wide spectrum: Jewish and Arab mayors, Knesset speaker Shevach Weiss, Knesset Members of both the right and the left; renowned peace activist Abie Nathan as well as Nathan's personal enemy Likud KM Michael Eytan, and the Israeli section of Muslim Fundamentalism.

From different angles the speakers reached the same conclusion: they all called for determined international action to stop the bloodbath in Bosnia. On the following days, several demonstrations – organized by different groups – were held in the center of Nazareth and in front of the "New Yugoslav" Embassy in Tel-Aviv.

■ On August 15, some forty members of **Women in Black** visited the Gaza Strip, where they held a meeting with Gazan women. The women's organizations in the Gaza Strip – some of which have sharp political disagreements with each other – united to host the Israeli women. After a meeting in which the current situation in the Strip was discussed, the Israeli and Palestinian women divided into small groups. Some went to visit families who had lost a beloved one during the Intifada. Others went to the women's cultural centers in different Gaza Strip towns and villages.

■ As the new school year opened on September 1, seventeen-year old Lior Kay did not resume his studies at Tel-Aviv's prestigious Herzlia Highschool. Kay, an activist of **Peace Now Youth and Young Mapam**, has long been in conflict with the school administration, and things came to a head in April

1992, when then Housing Minister Ariel Sharon visited the school. As right-wing pupils cheered Sharon, Lior Kay shouted: *War criminals are not wanted here!* The principal demanded that he apologise to Sharon. When Kay refused, the principal offered that he apologise instead to the school administration, for having insulted its guest of honour. Kay refused that too, telling the principal: *If Sharon comes again, I will repeat what I said, word for word. He is a war criminal, and it should be said out loud.* Thereupon, he was expelled from the school.

The case got much press coverage, and Lior Kay was invited to speak at a popular radio program. He refused, however, offers by Knesset Members to try to get him back into Herzlia Highschool. *It is better this way. Actually, for a long time already I hated the atmosphere in that school.*

■ On September 3, poet Shafik Habib appealed to the Haifa District Court, asking it to overturn the verdict of the Acre Magistrate's Court – which condemned Habib to eight months' suspended imprisonment for the content of certain poems in Habib's book "Back to the future". According to the verdict, the poems, which express identification with the Intifada stone-throwers, constitute an infringement of the "Anti-Terrorism Act" (see TOI-42, p.9).

Habib received the support of the main Israeli writers, among them Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua and David Grossman, who called his trial and conviction "a threat to the freedom of speech and of artistic creation".

Habib told the press: "The fact that the Acre Court sentenced me to suspended – not actual – imprisonment does not solve the problem. The verdict states that the imprisonment may be implemented, should I repeat the offence within the next three years. That means that I have to consider every line I write and decide whether or not a policeman or judge will consider my writing to be an act of terrorism. How can a poet work under such conditions?"

Habib's lawyer, Avigdor Feldman, brought Supreme Court precedents to show that limitations on the freedom of speech are acceptable only in cases where "a clear and present danger to public order was proved" – which was not at all the case where the poems of Habib are concerned.

■ On the weekend of September 11-12, some 120 Peace Now youths participated in a seminar at Kibbutz Giv'at Haviva. There were about one third Arabs and two thirds Jews, coming from different parts of the country – among them supporters of the Labour, Meretz and Communist parties, who were divided most of the time in workshops in order to let the youths mix – and exchange opinions.

There was also a plenary discussion with the Peace Now National Secretariat about Peace Now's policies. Many of the youths criticized the Peace Now leadership for lack of activity since the elections – and were not convinced by arguments such as: *The time is not ripe. Let us wait and see what will come out of the peace negotiations.* Many young activists demanded that Peace Now start mobilizing its supporters to counter the actions of the settlers and

the right-wing. The leadership position remained, however, that *not every right-wing action must be countered*, especially where the right is on the defensive, and its demonstrations are quite small.

There were also several youthful critics of Peace Now's position towards Military Disobedience. Peace Now condemns refusal to serve in the Occupied Territories, since "soldiers must obey legal orders".

Two Knesset Members came to Giv'at Haviva: Anat Ma'or of Meretz and Hashem Mahamid of Hadash. The latter was asked many questions about his recent visit to PLO headquarters in Tunis, with youths still clustering around him after the formal session was over.

Contact: Peace Now Youth, c/o Lior Kay, PB 6733, Tel-Aviv 61066.

■ In the past two years, the Kav Adom (Red Line) movement developed the custom of regular visits to the West Bank. At least once a month, Kav Adom members – Jews and Arabs from Northern Israel – visit a town, village or refugee camp.

On September 19, a group of twenty set out for the northern part of the West Bank, to Kabatya – a town with some 15,000 inhabitants.

The Israelis first arrived at Jenin, where they met contact persons from Kabatya. On the Jenin-Kabatya road, they were turned back at an army roadblock, where the soldiers informed them that "Kabatya had just been declared a Closed Military Zone".

Traveling some 25 kilometres by side roads, the Israelis arrived at the centre of Kabatya, where they delivered a consignment of clothes, baby food and bandages, in all of which there were shortages. In the meeting Kabatya activists noted that, thus far, the peace negotiations had little effect upon the situation on the ground. At Kabatya, the army is conducting a hunt for nine "wanted" inhabitants of the town; every few days, military forces and Special Units arrive, impose curfews, and conduct house-to-house searches. The nine "wanted", of whom the inhabitants spoke with respect and affection, have so far avoided capture.

Another kind of raid is that of the tax-collectors, who arrive with the army, assess quite arbitrary sums upon the inhabitants, and confiscate every piece of property they can lay hands on.

The inhabitants, however, also noted that the army withdrew the unit which, in previous years, used to be permanently quartered in Kabatya, and whose soldiers liked to humiliate and mistreat bypassers.

After the meeting, the Israelis went to the house of 29-year old Rafik Saba'aneh, who was wounded in November 1991 during a procession held in favor of Palestinian participation in the Madrid Peace Conference – but which was nevertheless dispersed by the Israeli army. Saba'aneh was hit by a bullet in the spine, and since that day has not been able to move his legs.

He tried to get a specialist treatment at Hakarmel Hospital in Haifa. However, the hospital official with whom he had to register made a phone call to the Kabatya military administration, and then refused to admit him. Kav Adom, in cooperation with The Association of Israeli and Palestinian Doctors for

Human Rights (AIPPHR), has undertaken action to change that decision.

Letters of protest to: Haim Ramon, Minister of Health, POB 1176, Jerusalem 91010, FAX: 972.2.251431.

Copies to: Kav Adom c/o Udi Kurianski, Kibbutz Dafna, Doar Na Galil Elyon 12235; or: c/o Seif Raleb, Yanoach Village, Doar Na Ma'aleh Hagalil 25145; and to: AIPPHR, POB 10235, Tel-Aviv 61101.

■ On September 17, the Supreme Court issued an injunction preventing the military government from demolishing some 80 houses in the Hebron area, neighboring the Kiryat Arba settlement.

In the last ten years, the Israeli authorities altogether stopped granting building permits to Palestinians in this area – thus making illegal all houses erected by the growing Palestinian population. Five homes were already destroyed a year ago.

Six of the petitioners let themselves be represented at the court by the Israeli Advocate Jack Goldberg, who himself lives in a West Bank settlement – in 'Efrat', one of the Gutz-Etzion growths. Goldberg told the Israeli radio: *The Arab residents of the territories and the Jewish residents of the territories are neighbors. Ownership of this land is not disputed. The Arabs own the land. It is registered in their names and they pay taxes on it. I don't see any reason not to give them the building permits which they have applied for* (Jerusalem Post, 18.9.1992).

■ Between July 24 and 31, the tenth Jaffa International Workcamp took place at the initiative of Al-Rabita, the League for the Arabs of Jaffa. Participation was lower than in previous years. There were some 50 volunteers altogether: Jaffa inhabitants, Jewish and Arab Israelis from elsewhere, and foreign volunteers. Still, several tasks neglected by the Tel-Aviv-Jaffa municipality were performed, such as clearing huge garbage piles out of the local parks, and propping up some half-collapsing buildings. (The municipality did provide tools.)

On the evenings of the workcamp there were a variety of events. Several hundred people came to a symposium with the participation of three members of the Palestinian negotiating team; there was also an art exposition with exhibits by local artists – many of them Intifada-related.

The workcamp ended with a procession against drugs. The procession passed several places where drugs are sold almost openly (only the police seems never to notice!). Hundreds of participants chanted: *Pushers, go home! Addicts, kick the habit!*

At Al-Rabita's Cultural Center, a self-help group of drug addicts is active, which has registered some notable successes; recently, the group has drawn the attention of Jewish drug addicts from neighboring slums, who came to the center in the hope of setting up similar groups themselves.

□ Al-Rabita's next task is to mobilize the fragmented and atomised Arab population of Jaffa to participate in elections scheduled for October 3. So far, the Tel-Aviv-Jaffa municipality refuses to recognise Al-Rabita as the representative of the Arab population.

Instead, the municipality regards the Arabs as being represented by the Jaffa Muslim Community Committee. That committee was appointed by the government in 1990; since no Jaffa inhabitant was willing to sit on it, it is composed entirely of non-Jaffans, and – though its function is to administer the property of the Muslim religious community – its chairman and several of its members are Jewish.

□ Still another struggle waged by the Jaffa Arabs concerns the Muslim cemetery at Kfar Shalem. In the 1960s, a previous Muslim Community Committee sold the cemetery to the municipal construction company, and the committee members pocketed the proceeds. The company now intends to build housing on the site. Several demonstrations took place, with the participation of Jaffa Arabs and Jewish supporters. But the Supreme Court ruled that the sale is legal, and that construction may go ahead. The Jaffa Muslims hope, however, that the new government, which needs the support of Arab Knesset Members, would intervene to halt desecration of the cemetery.

Letters of protest to: Shlomo Lahat, Mayor of Tel-Aviv-Jaffa, Town Hall, Kikar Malchei Yisrael, Tel-Aviv.

Copies to: Al-Rabita, 73 Yefet St., POB 41087, Jaffa; phone: 972-3-812290.

■ On the morning of August 25, several dozen Hadash supporters picketed the Knesset building in Jerusalem, inside which a stormy debate on the settlements was taking place. They held signs calling for a total halt to all construction in the settlements. The activists then traveled to Silwan Village and to the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, where they visited the Palestinian homes recently taken over by settlers. At the entrance to one of the Silwan houses, armed settlers attempted to bar the Hadash activists' way, and also tried to confiscate a camera from one of them. After successfully passing the settlers, the demonstrators entered the back side of the house, still held by the original Palestinian tenants. They heard from the tenants and their lawyers of the difficulties of life near the settlers, and of the tenants' legal struggle to regain full possession of their home.

Continuation from p.12.

A few days later, after the Holon television's broadcast and the local magazines' more lengthy reports, it several times happened that people in the streets of Holon recognized the editor of *The Other Israel*, and stopped him in order to express support.

Altogether, in Holon the initiative had been taken back from the right wing, especially since another action – by Holon high school students – was initiated at the same time. The Meretz Youth – who did not take part in the flower giving, because of school hours – had started their own campaign: against racist graffiti on the Holon walls. Their campaign – which also got a good media coverage – consisted of the application of white paint upon walls where "Death to the Arabs" and the like had been scrawled – and where the Holon municipality had been slow to take efficient cleansing action.



Holoners against racism

by Beate Zilversmidt

Holon is one of the bigger suburban growths around Tel-Aviv, with its 120,000 inhabitants. After decades of having been a Labor Party stronghold – with a Labor mayor – in 1989 the Likud candidate was elected to head the town.

At that time, peace activists had only just started to discover that such a place as Holon exists. Even those living there because “who can afford an apartment in Tel-Aviv”, were oriented towards Tel-Aviv. For a long time it seemed easier to travel from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem in order to take part in events organised there, than to think of Holon as a place where anything relevant could ever happen. In the meantime, the extreme right was building up a position on the ground.

During the last few years, however, right wing agitation in Holon no longer goes on uncontested. The years of the Intifada resulted in an awakened awareness of more and more people that one must confront one's environment – however uninfluencable it seems to be. The **Holon Peace Now Branch** gradually became part of the scene, with its smaller or bigger meetings, its distribution of leaflets, and the special bus on the Sabbath, coming to enable Holoners to participate in nationwide organised events.

There were those who expected that the election results were going to make the peace movement more self-assured in its attitude and performance. Things turned out to be a little bit more complicated.

Shortly after the elections, Holon supporters of former Chief of Staff Rafael Eytan's extreme right wing Tzomet Party started a campaign against Arab workers. Holon has a large industrial area – and every morning at six Palestinians from Hebron arrive to a place, known as “the slave market”, hoping to find a day's work. One such morning, a Tzomet group appeared there at the same early hour, with slogans telling the government that *Arab workers are a threat and should be thrown out*. They were accompanied by a crew of the local cable television, as well as photographers from the local printed press – part of which maintains a free house to house distribution.

As a matter of fact, we from the TOI-staff tried to convince the **Peace Now** branch to do something about it. The idea was developed of going there on another day, at six in the morning, and bringing the Palestinians flowers, as a gesture of peace making on the ground. However, Peace Now was hesitant: *Isn't it too risky? What, if – God forbid – on the next day somebody will be stabbed? Everybody will point his finger in our direction!* Meanwhile, Tzomet continued to agitate. A local “press conference” was held about the danger of the Arab workers. Again with the television crew. It was the local television who warned the local “leftists” about it. An effort to organise individual Holon peace activists to stand

with banners, in front of the Tzomet building, was defeated by some of the years-long devoted Peace Nowers. They appeared on the spot and succeeded in persuading most of the activists who came to go home: *It is absolutely wrong! It will only help them to get publicity! Nobody will publish about them as long as we don't give the extra flavour by provoking them.*

But even without “a provocation” from our side that week's Holon local magazines and papers all did pay attention to the Tzomet event. Photographs showing their leaders sitting behind tables made their hatred campaign seem respectable.

A few days later, in the early morning of September 6, fifteen Holoners – with some support of Tel-Avivian Tze'irey Hadash (a new group of young Communist Party affiliates) – arrived at the *slave market*.

The activists stood with slogans **Holoners against racism and Arabs, too, have to earn a living and if you don't want Palestinians here, give them a state of their own**. Soon Tzomet people also arrived (possibly warned, in turn, by the local teevee), and tried to confront the Palestinians and the Israelis standing at their side.

In front of the camera, flowers were distributed by the peace activists among the embarrassed Palestinian men. One of the activists spoke to them in Arabic; then they faintly smiled about the whole thing. But they had come to find work; no employers had arrived so far; in fact, they preferred not to attract any political attention.

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Soon their hesitance became more understandable: a police car arrived. The desolated street offered a surrealistic scene. The Palestinians had to stand in line and were searched by the policemen. The opposing Holon groups stood by. As well as the photographers. In the pocket of one of the workers a policeman discovered a rather big stone. After a few words, the policeman **put the stone back**. Meanwhile two other Palestinians were put in the police car. We asked why; they didn't do anything wrong! The police were first unwilling to give an explanation, but eventually said: *This is just daily routine; we found something wrong with their papers.*

There was not very much of an euphoria among the anti-racist Holoners and their Hadash friends on the way home. However, when on the following day Ma'ariv (7.9.1992) published a big photograph in a prominent place with the headline: *Holoners give flowers to workers from Gaza*, the mood – at least among the Holoners – improved considerably.

True, the paper did not publish a long article, but the text below the photo did include the quote: *the peace process is not only the concern of the diplomats in Washington.*

(Cont. p.11)