



A baby, killed by Israeli bombing in Lebanon, is carried by her father. What will the new government do to the peace process?

Israel under Netanyahu

Adam Keller, an Israeli socialist and peace activist, spoke to *Workers' Liberty* on 30 August.

Is Netanyahu trying to stall the peace process, or reverse it? I am not sure that even Netanyahu himself knows. He is a weak person, pushed in different

directions, not only on the Palestinian question but also on others, for example privatisation, where he has retreated after the trade unions' one-day strike.

He does not want to break with the extremist hard-line settlers — he does not want a confrontation with them — but nor does he want to have a con-

frontation with the whole Arab world and with the Israeli business community, which wants the peace process to continue. Most of Israel's industrialists, bankers, and so on, openly supported Peres for prime minister. So Netanyahu shifts back and forth.

One of the ideas going round in Netanyahu's circle is to try to get the Jordanians back into the picture as a replacement for independent representatives of the Palestinians, but I don't think that it can succeed.

There is much frustration among the Palestinians. Their economic situation is terrible, with enormous unemployment, and now we see the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the demolition of Palestinian houses. There is a drive, which went on under the previous Labour government, too, to clear out Palestinians from the areas which are still under complete Israeli rule in the West Bank.

Arafat moved very strongly against Hamas after the terrorist bombings in March. He imprisoned many Hamas people. There was also some popular anger against Hamas, because Palestinians felt that the closure of the border and the resulting economic hardships were a result of the actions of Hamas.

"Likud are freezing the process"

WALID Salem, a Palestinian journalist and writer working at the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem, spoke to *Workers' Liberty* on 29 August.

The Palestinian Authority has to be seen to achieve something for the Palestinian people.

However the Netanyahu government is refusing to cooperate. The Palestinian Authority wants a peaceful mass mobilisation, of limited duration and under its control, to put international pressure on the Israeli government.

There is an idea among the Authority that the current Israeli government has some weaknesses. They want to press the centre of this

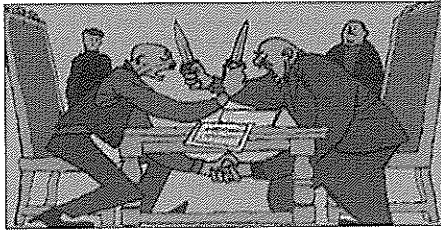
government and play them against the genuine far right in Likud — people like Ariel Sharon.

Unfortunately there is no genuine, real left amongst the Palestinians. We have institutions for elites not the Palestinian masses.

The Israeli authorities are beginning to close off Jerusalem. I have just come here from Bethlehem, and the road from there has been closed behind me. All West Bankers are refused entry, including those who have Israeli entry permits.

In my opinion Likud want to freeze the peace process. They want to return to the Madrid formula, rather than the Oslo agreement. In other words they want to tie the Palestinians to Jordan.

INSIDE THE UNIONS



Why can't Johnson score?

THE latest developments in the postal dispute leave the partisan observer puzzled and frustrated.

How much worse for postal workers, losing pay and rooting to win and wondering why, oh why, can't Johnson score?

It's like playing football with a centre-forward determined to draw. Johnson gets good service from the mid-field — the ball is at his feet again. Run with it, Johnson!

Nought betwixt him and goal but a quaking keeper, Johnson turns round and knocks the ball back to his mid-field.

Sooner or later, you think, they must take him off. Trouble is, he leads the negotiating team.

Trouble is, he thinks you have to give management something or they will take the ball away.

He will bring back the same deal — a pay deal agreed *before* the strikes, and team working — until his side gives in.

He spoke recently to the *Financial Times* about the dispute and his frustration with the postal executive.

They keep turning down the crappy "deal" he has negotiated, and sending him back to try again.

He must be frustrated the strikes are so well supported: scabbing would strengthen his hand.

He's not frustrated with Royal Mail, who want to scrap the second delivery, and make his members part-time workers car-

"Johnson knocks the ball back to his mid-field."

rying heavier sacks.

What motivates this lizard?

Johnson enjoys his position as leader of the single union in a monopoly company in the state sector. The strikes are ammunition to those who would privatise the post office, so he wants to settle. If not, "we could end up losing everything we have fought for."

Johnson takes cred for the government backing down on plans to privatise the post, and for popular campaigns against the closure of Crown Post

Offices. Why can't he sell the strike to save the second delivery to the public?

Last year Johnson helped Blair to win the battle against Clause IV, the Labour Party's commitment to public ownership.

He wants Royal Mail to stay in the state sector. He doesn't want it sold off, or broken up. But rail, telecoms, gas, electricity, water — no need to get Labour to commit to bringing them back into public ownership.

Johnson is a big fan of Tony Blair.

And he likes team working. He buys into workers selling their souls to save their jobs.

If his prime joy in life is an efficient postal service, why doesn't Johnson join Royal Mail management? Why doesn't he become a Labour MP and vote to keep all the Tories' anti-union legislation?

He just might! He is looking forward to giving up the General Secretaryship in 1998. So are we.

By Sleeper

In Hamas, the the more pragmatic leadership within the territories is at odds with the external leadership, in Jordan, Sudan, and Iran, which is much more intransigent and fanatical. It has some supporters inside the territories, which it manipulates against the internal leadership.

There is also a growing opposition, not yet organised, to Arafat from Fatah activists. They say Arafat is making too many concessions to Israel and that the Oslo agreement has turned out to be a failure, and they accuse the Arafat leadership of corruption, inefficiency, violations of human rights, and arbitrary behaviour. The fact that there is now a Palestinian parliament which has a considerable element of, if not opposition, then dissidence, creates tensions with Arafat's wish to have the administration centred round himself, for example, the fact that he has several different police forces, all competing with each other, and accountable only to him.

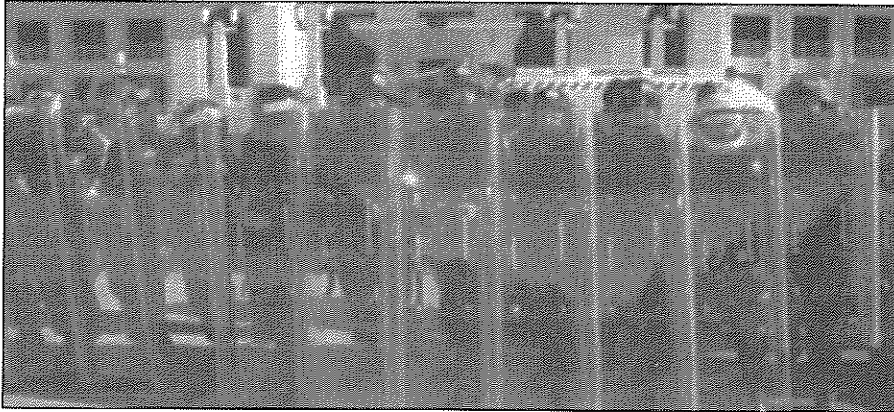
I do not know of any forces among the Palestinians offering a concrete programme on unemployment and the economic situation. The problem is that the Palestinians are not allowed to go to work in Israel, the sale of Palestinian products in Israel is restricted, and the Israeli army checks on the crossing points from the Palestinian territories into Israel, Jordan and Egypt lead to agricultural produce, for example, very often being spoiled. It is difficult to sell products from Gaza in the West Bank or vice versa because they have to go through Israel. Many of the places of employment in the territories are closing down or losing work.

There have been quite a lot of small-scale activities by the peace movement in Israel, involving dozens or hundreds of people. Peace Now has become more active. On 28 August Gush Shalom had a demonstration for a Bedouin tribe under threat of being evicted for a Jewish settlement to be built.

As yet we have not been able to mobilise big demonstrations of tens of thousands. I think we will be able to, within a month or two, the way things are going now, but the people who make up the broad support for the peace movement are still in a state of shock and confused after the election. For example, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Hebron has been a big issue, and the government says "yes...", then "but...", then "perhaps...". And there is the question of when Netanyahu will meet with Arafat.

We are already in a crisis. It is going to develop, and at some point bring tens of thousands of Israelis onto the streets.

Australia's Tories face the workers



"MARITIME Union [dockers and seafarers] rank and file say: don't tinker with Industrial Relations." "Maritime Union tug crews say: Industrial Relations are a right." Slogans on handmade banners in Brisbane, on the 19 August cross-Australia trade-union day of action against the new Liberal government, struck a note not heard in Britain for more than ten years: workers feeling that they have and can hold institutionalised industrial strength.

That note is an index of the difference between 17 years of Tory government and 13 years even of such a wretched Labor government as Australia has had. Yet it has an undertone of uncertainty. There is widespread anger, and on 19 August Parliament House was stormed by a section of the Canberra demonstration. Yet one-off protests will not be enough. Trade-unionism in Australia has declined from over 50 per cent of the workforce to 35%. Strikes have decreased drastically. The system of industrial relations has already been "tinkered" with a lot, and with the connivance of left-wing unions such as the Maritime Union.

The Australian labour movement still has great strength readily available. Deploying it will require great political reorientation. Since their big election victory on 2 March, the Liberal-National coalition have been swinging the axe in all directions. Already well-flagged before 2 March were plans to privatise the telecom business, Telstra, and to rewrite industrial relations. The Australian system of "awards" — agreements on wages and conditions covering whole industries, ratified by an arbitration system — is to be lopped down in favour of individual con-

tracts. Legal limits on strikes are to be tightened, solidarity strikes outlawed, and union access to workplaces limited.

Thousands of jobs have been cut in the federal public service. Immigration controls have been tightened, and adjusted to favour better-off English-speaking migrants. The elected representative body of Australia's Aboriginal minority, ATSIC, has had its budget cut by almost half over the next few years, and Aboriginal land rights have been threatened.

Universities' funding has been cut drastically; students have been charged higher fees and required to repay their government-subsidised loans for those fees quicker; eligibility for student grants ("Austudy") has been further restricted, although even at present 60% of university students get no Austudy at all; and from 1998 Austudy is to be subsumed in a general Youth Allowance. Dole claimants are now required to keep a daily diary of their job searches. The Commonwealth Employment Service (analogous to Job Centres) is to be abolished, and the social security system will call on private agencies to get the jobless into work.

Child-care subsidies are to be restricted. The special levy charged as part of income tax for the health insurance system, Medicare, is to be increased for higher earners, with the avowed aim of driving them into private health insurance. At present 34% of Australians rely on private health insurance, and as recently as 1983 it was 63%. The Australian welfare system is already heavily geared to means-testing and to arrangements where public provision for the poor flanks private provision for the bet-

ter-off — more so than the British welfare state, even after 17 years of the Tories.

There has been a spate of protests. Universities were partly shut on 30 May and again on 7 August by lecturers' and staff strikes, with some support from students. Public service unions have called one-day strikes. The actions across Australia on 19 August were called by the ACTU, Australia's TUC. Some of the biggest rallies (60,000 in Sydney, 10,000 in Brisbane), and also the most youthful, have been against the government's cuts in the budget of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

The crack in the bell, the flaw which makes the protests lack confidence and the militant speeches by ACTU president Jennie George ring hollow, is the fact that almost all that the Liberals are doing, even in industrial relations, is a continuation down paths pioneered by the 1983-96 Labor governments, to which the ACTU was tied by the various versions of the Accord.

By 1996, as Australian Labor Party national secretary Gary Gray recently put it: "We couldn't run on policies because they [the voters] thought we were liars on policy. We couldn't run on our record because they thought our record stunk." And since 2 March their major shift has been a move by Victorian ALP leader John Brumby... to "moderate" his opposition to New Right flagbearer Jeff Kennett.

And, as yet, there is no concerted rank-and-file organisation, consistently pushing alternative policies, within the labour movement. The official ALP "Socialist Left" is weak and discredited by a thousand dirty deals with the Labor right. The revolutionary left has turned away from the ALP, and often from the unions too, to various single-issue campaigns.

The elements for a fightback are there, in the still formidable strength of Australia's trade unions and the many thousands of activists wanting a left-wing alternative to ALP politics. The job of bringing them together is yet to be done.

Martin Thomas

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Labour and Scotland

THE Scottish Labour Party has been thrown into a state of chaos by the new Blairite line on the creation of a Scottish Assembly.

Throughout the twentieth century the labour movement in Scotland has generally advocated some form or other of Scottish self-government, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War (supposedly a war fought for the "rights of small nations") for example, the labour movement campaigned vigorously for the "small nation of Scotland" to have its own parliament.

Within a decade, however, it had become a virtually forgotten demand. Economic planning at a national level, rather than the devolution of economic powers, was seen as the solution to Scotland's economic problems.

Similar ebbs and flows in the level of support for a Scottish parliament followed in subsequent decades. But since the Tories came to power in 1979 there has been a fundamental change in the situation.

At UK level the Tories have won all the General Elections since 1979. In Scotland, however, the Tories have won only a minority of seats, and a steadily dwindling minority at that. Support for the Tories in Scotland is currently around the 12% mark.

The imposition of Tory legislation and public spending cuts on a Scotland which repeatedly rejected Tory policies at the ballot box created the problem of the "democratic deficit". The majority of Scots voted anti-Tory, only to find themselves the victims of Tory policies.

The Scottish Assembly was the solution to this "democratic deficit". Scotland would be governed, within the framework of the UK, by a parliament of its own, one which implemented the wishes of the majority of the Scottish electorate rather than the policies of the majority party at Westminster.

Rather less good motives have also given impetus to the demand for a Scottish Assembly.

For the Scottish Labour Party leadership, calling on the next Labour government to create a Scottish Assembly was essentially a coup out.

Rather than fight the Tories in the here and now, they advocated passivity. A future Scottish Assembly, not class struggle, would put the world (or Scot-

land at least) to rights.

For others in the labour movement, calling for a Scottish Assembly flowed out of an accommodation to Scottish nationalism, or meshed in with their own careerist designs — unable to get selected for Westminster, they saw a seat in the Assembly as the next best thing.

Out of this mixture of often conflicting motives, the creation of a Scottish Assembly had become by the end of the 1980s a touchstone of mainstream Scottish politics. It had become the centrepiece of the Scottish Labour Party's political programme.

Once Blair took control of the Party, it quickly became the Scottish Labour Party's "only piece". As Blair ditched one policy after another, remorselessly driving the Party to the right, the Scottish Labour Party's promise of an Assembly became virtually its own vote winner.

Moreover, insofar as the Scottish Labour Party had anything left by way of even a semi-coherent set of economic and social policies, the vehicle for their implementation was to be a Scottish Assembly.

Now all this has effectively been tossed aside by Blair.

The Scottish Labour Party was committed to the creation of an Assembly without a referendum — the mandate gained at a General Election would suffice — and the Assembly would have the powers to vary national rates of income tax by plus or minus 3p in the pound.

Blair and his hangers-on have now decided that the creation of an Assembly and its possible tax-raising powers will be the subject of separate questions in a referendum.

This has made a laughing stock of the Scottish Labour Party. It promised an Assembly so that Scottish people could run their own affairs. But now the Scottish Labour Party looks like a tame poodle of the national leader in London.

The centrality of a Scottish Assembly to the Scottish Labour Party's policies, combined with the autocratic London-based re-writing of party policy on the issue, accounts for the fury which greeted the new Blairite line.

Blair managed to win a majority on the Scottish Executive for his new line. But the shock waves continue.

Stan Crooke

Indonesia

The workers resurgent

DITA Sari, president of Indonesia's independent trade union centre PPBI, and some 19 other leaders of the radical People's Democratic Party are in jail, together with Muchtar Pakpahan, the leader of another independent trade union organisation, the SBSI. All face charges of "subversion" which carry the death penalty. There is evidence that they are being tortured.

Dita Sari and some other activists were arrested when 20,000 factory workers in Surabaya, east Java on 8 July marched to demand wage rises. The other arrests have come in a military clampdown after up to 200,000 people took to the streets in Indonesia's capital Jakarta on 27 July, rioting and clashing with police and army in the country's biggest street protests since the 1965 coup which brought in the current military regime. Maybe 100 people were killed in the riots.

In the 1965 coup, the biggest non-ruling Communist Party in the world, with some two million members and 300,000 activists, was wiped out. Over half a million people were slaughtered. Half a million more were jailed in the following years, without charge or trial, and 1.4 million more were kept under surveillance by the military, on suspicion of PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) sympathies.

Since then Indonesia, a nation of nearly 200 million people, has been kept under tight control by the military regime of General Suharto. Cities and manufacturing industry have grown. Jakarta now has 12 million people. While oil was by far Indonesia's main export in the 1970s and early '80s, about half of its exports now are manufactured goods. But in the hundreds of new factories, wages and conditions are poor relative even to other Third World countries. Average wages are about 28 US cents (40p) an hour, lower even than China (34 cents), and much lower than Malaysia (\$1.80) or South Korea (\$4.93).

Conditions in a working-class suburb of Jakarta are described by an Australian socialist. "In front of the houses ran open