

September '87

Israel at the crossroads

A growing number of Israeli citizens face a status quo which they feel is untenable. Palestinian opposition to the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is on the rise; violent demonstrations take place daily; Israeli soldiers and settlers are attacked in various parts of the occupied territories; an Israeli army officer was shot to death, in broad daylight, on Gaza's main street (and Israeli officials admitted the action to have been "daring" and "audacious").

In Israel itself, the Arab citizens outspokenly express their unwillingness to remain second-class citizens. On June 24, declared to be "Equality Day", practically the entire Arab population of Israel participated in a general strike, demanding the redress of several pressing abuses. The strike call was endorsed by the entire Arab political leadership, ranging from the Progressive List for Peace and the Communist Party to the Arab members of the Israeli Labor Party.

Despite the government's attempts to stop the strike, the number of strike-breakers was negligible. (In the government's favour, it must be mentioned that, unlike during the "Day of the Land" strike in 1976, no army units were sent into Arab villages, and thus, violence and bloodshed were avoided.)

Confronted with this upsurge the State of Israel finds itself faced with the urgent necessity of coming to terms with its situation in the Middle East, with its Arab neighbours, with its own Arab citizens. Not all Israelis are, as yet, ready for this; some, unwilling to face the implications of this process, seek refuge in extremism.

For many years, Rabbi Meir Kahane held the dubious distinction of being the only Israeli politician to openly advocate the expulsion of the Arabs from Israel and the occupied territories. Other political leaders, even those of the extreme right, shied away from publicly endorsing such ideas.

In July 1987, this situation changed drastically; two respectable members of the Israeli establishment openly voiced their support for the "transfer" of the Arabs. One of them was Major-General (res) Rehavam Ze-evi, a veteran of the prestigious pre-state "Palmach" militia, a personal friend of many of Israel's political and economic leaders, and the curator of the Tel-Aviv municipal museum. The second new champion of "transfer" is Michael Dekel, Deputy Defence Minister in the National Unity Government, a member in good standing of the Likud block, and a close associate of Prime Minister Shamir.

The racist statements of Ze-evi and

As well as the Israeli government which shoots and bludgeons Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza, there is another Israel. We reproduce excerpts from 'The Other Israel', produced by the Israeli Committee for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Dekel aroused angry reactions in the press; a demonstration was held in front of Dekel's house; several motions of no confidence in the government were presented in the Knesset. However, the Israeli Labor Party — which, in the past has precipitated cabinet crises over trifles — chose to make no more than token protests against Dekel's statement. Defence Minister Rabin, who has the legal right to fire his deputy, refrained from doing so.

Dekel's own party contented itself by stating that the "transfer" is "Dekel's private idea".

Simultaneously with these developments, in various places local racists have made attempts to implement the "transfer" in practice: in Ramat-Amidar, a suburb of Tel-Aviv, a mob broke into an apartment, wounded the Arab inhabitants and set the apartment on fire; in Petach-Tikva, the slogan "Arabs Out" was painted on a car belonging to an Arab inhabitant of the town; in the resort of Netanyah, thugs assaulted the members of an Oriental Jewish family who spoke Arabic...

Clearly the racists have no chance for long-term success; in the second half of the twentieth century, their course can on-

ly lead Israel to national suicide. More and more Israelis come to realise that their future can only be safeguarded through peace and coexistence. Anti-racist demonstrators take to the streets of the Israeli cities. The Anti-Peace Law, forbidding Israelis to meet PLO representatives is again and again openly defied. A group of Labor doves met PLO officials with the party leadership turning a blind eye. Even the Likud is no longer monolithic.

While Michael Dekel made his infamous proposal, his Likud colleague, Minister Moshe Arens, placed in charge of Arab Affairs, startled the Israeli public in quite a different way: Arens declared his support for returning the villagers of Iqrit and Bir'am, in the Galilee, to the villages from which they were uprooted nearly forty years ago. Though hedged with various unpalatable conditions, Arens' proposal was more than any previous government offered to these villagers.

The struggle for Israel's future is on. At all levels, Israeli society is becoming divided and polarised. In the coming period, the vital forces of this society will be put to the test.

Adam Keller

No peace till independent Arab state

On November 29, 1987 the executive of the Progressive List for Peace met in the Arab village of Ara (in the Galilee) and adopted the following resolution:

Forty years ago on this day the UN General Assembly decided upon the establishment of two states, a Jewish one and an Arab one, in this land.

The state of Israel was created. The Palestinian state, whose creation was decided upon as well, did not yet arise. It left a gaping void; a void which is filled by wars, bloodshed, hatred and racism. Therefore, this day was declared to be the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and as such

it is commemorated by many people around the world.

We say; no peace or quiet are possible, nor will we have any future in this land, until the Arab Palestinian people is allowed to exercise its right to self-determination and to create its own independent state beside the state of Israel.

We, members of the PLP executive, call upon all those who oppose occupation and annexation, racism and discrimination; upon the leaderships of Mapam, Ratz and Hadash; and upon all peace movements and peace seekers, organised and unorganised — to cooperate in an uncompromising struggle for Israeli-Palestinian peace and for full equality to all citizens of Israel. This struggle must be carried out at all levels and in all places, in the Knesset and in the street, in each and every part of Israeli society.

November '87

From Amman to Gaza

On November 8, the leaders of the Arab states met in Amman, capital of Jordan. The summit's most important result was a definite warming up of the Arab world's relations with Egypt.

This was expressed in a resolution permitting Arab states to renew their diplomatic relations with Cairo, broken off after Camp David. By November 19, the tenth anniversary of President Sadat's memorable visit to Israel, many Arab states have already taken advantage of this possibility.

The renewal of diplomatic ties constitutes a de facto recognition of the Israeli-Egyptian peace; countries like Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia have sent their ambassadors to Cairo, knowing full well that, in the same city, the Israeli flag flies above the Israeli embassy.

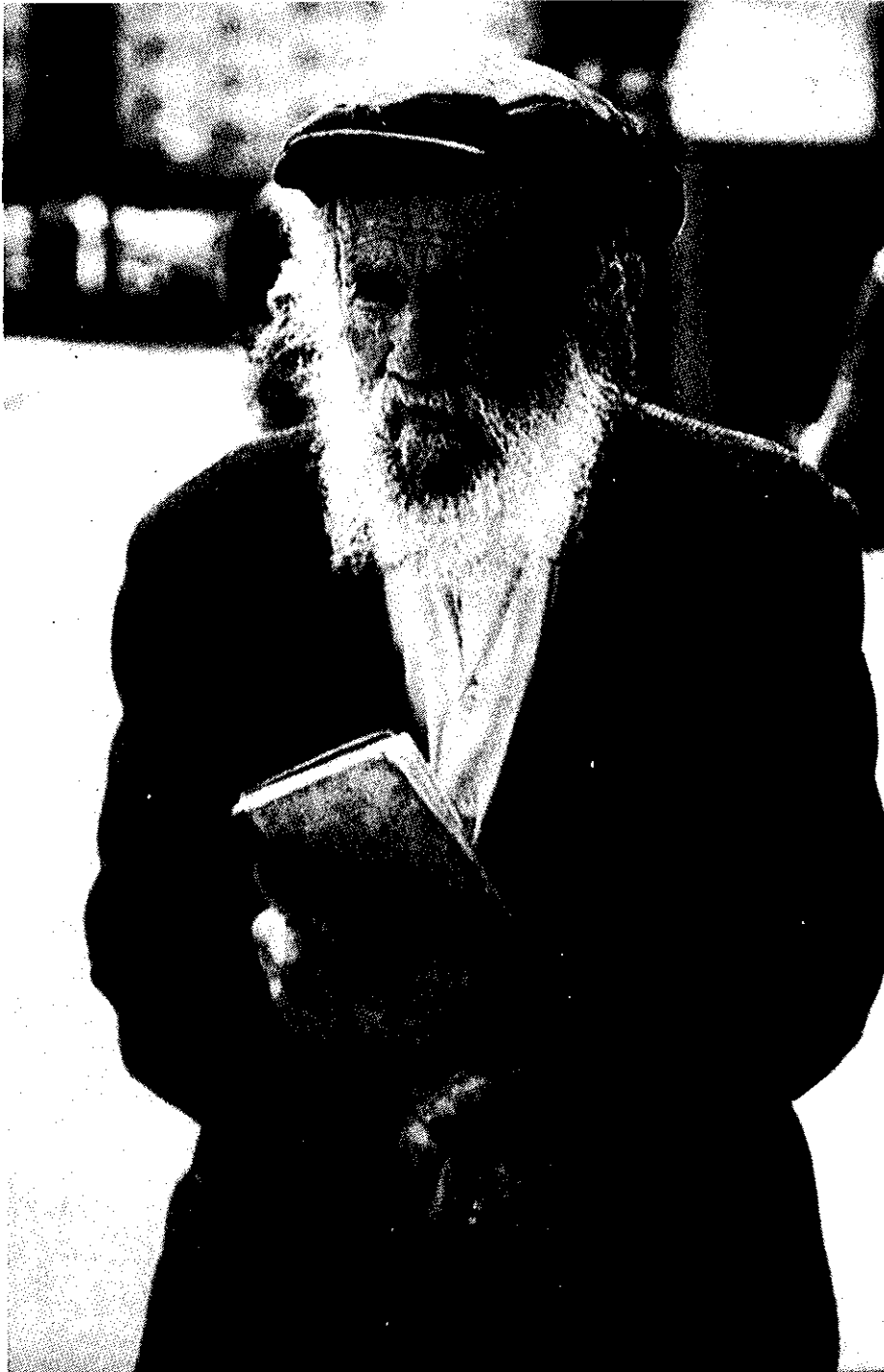
Both the outcome of the Amman summit and Yasser Arafat's statements at Geneva and Moscow clearly show that Israel can now achieve peace with the Arab world, and in particular with the Palestinians; but no lasting peace is possible as long as Israel maintains its military rule over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Neither Israel's existing peace with Egypt, nor any incipient relations with other Arab states, can long endure while a million and a half Palestinians stay under Israeli occupation and while the Palestinian refugees stay in their camps, with no hope for the future.

Until due consideration is given to the national rights and aspirations of the Palestinians, they will remain a focus of discontent and rebellion throughout the Middle East, threatening any status quo which disinherits them.

In recent weeks, public attention centred, in particular, on the Gaza Strip — an area which provides an extreme example of the Palestinian plight. It is a narrow strip of land, hemmed in between Israel and Egypt, between the desert and the sea. In 1948 hundreds of thousands of refugees, uprooted from their homes in what became the State of Israel, were added to Gaza's original population. Due also to a high birth-rate, the Gaza Strip

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Demands of the Arab general strike

The demands were formulated in a meeting held at the town of Sefaram in the Gallilee, on June 6, in which practically the entire leadership of citizens participated: Arab Knesset Members, Mayors, trade unionists, and many others. They included the cessation of the destruction of Arab houses declared "illegal" by the government; the granting of official recognition to several Arab villages which, at present are not recognised by the government and thus receive no water or electricity; the building of new schools in the Arab sec-

tor, where no less than 1400 new classrooms are needed to create adequate conditions for study; the re-definition of the curriculum in the Arab schools, to reflect the Arab population's national and cultural identity; emergency funding for the Arab municipalities, whose debts now reach 50 million Israeli Shekels (about \$30 million), and equalisation, within a reasonable time, between the budgets granted to Arab municipalities and those given to Jewish municipalities of comparable size.

A message from Yassir Arafat

"We insist on convening this International Conference under the auspices of the United Nations and on the basis of international legality as well as of the international resolutions approved by the United Nations relevant to the Palestinian cause on the Middle East Crisis, and the resolutions of the Security Council including resolutions 242 and 338, in order to put an end to the Israeli occupation in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and other occupied Arab territories (...) (thus placing) the Palestinian reality (...) in positive interaction with contemporary international reality." (Quoted from the UN's English translation of the speech which Arafat delivered at the NGO meeting on September 7).

On November 7 Arafat met in Moscow with a delegation of the Israeli Com-

munist Party, through whom he passed on the following message to the people of Israel:

"The people of Israel must be made to know that you can't simply eliminate five million Palestinians and ignore their national rights, just like you can't get rid of Israel. We must strive for a just solution, for the good of both peoples, and live in peace.

I am striving for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Failure to find such a solution could lead to a local war, which could well escalate into a world war and a nuclear holocaust that would wipe out the human race.

The PLO accepts all the decisions of the UN concerning the conflict, including Resolution 242, an acceptance which we have announced publicly at international conferences. The PLO perceives all these conditions as part of an all-inclusive package, which it accepts in toto, as opposed to the government of Israel which accepts only one decision and rejects all the others. That is a deception." (Quoted from the Jerusalem Post, 9 November 1987).

became the world's most densely populated area, a concentration of poverty and misery. Since being occupied by Israel in 1967, the Gaza Strip turned into a reservoir of cheap labour for the Israeli economy, tens of thousands of its inhabitants commuting each morning to work in the Israeli cities.

A growing number of the Gaza inhabitants turn, in their misery, to Muslim fundamentalism. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the Israeli authorities encouraged this trend, hoping that a clash between religious zealots and secular nationalists would weaken the Palestinian cause. But in recent years, the religious movement grew and its members started to carry out attacks on Israelis. Belatedly, the Israeli army made strong efforts to suppress it. The Islamic university of Gaza was invaded by soldiers; deportation orders were issued against religious leaders; dozens of Muslim activists were rounded up and imprisoned.

In June, six Muslim fundamentalists succeeded in escaping from the Gaza prison, which was rather embarrassing for the authorities. On October 1, one of the escapees was caught at an army check point; he and two other Palestinians were shot to death. The official statement claimed that the Palestinians were "killed while trying to escape"; detailed research by Israeli journalists exposed contradictions in the government's line, pointing to the possibility that they were shot down in cold blood (Koteret Rashit, October 14, 1987).

Another incident occurred a week later, on October 8. As described in the official communique, Israeli security forces encountered a suspicious car on a Gaza street; there ensued a battle in which were killed two escaped prisoners, one other Palestinian, and an Israeli security service

(Shabak) agent. The other Shabak agents then chased a fourth Palestinian, who — as in the previous incident — was "killed while trying to escape".

Following these two incidents, there was a debate among factions in the military government, regarding whether or not the dead Palestinians' homes should be demolished. Such demolitions, decreed by a military governor without trial, are a normal procedure against "terrorists". Some officials argued that in this case death was punishment enough, and that demolition of the houses would cause riots. At last, however, the hard-liners won. At the end of October the houses were destroyed, leaving the families homeless. Several days of widespread rioting did follow.

Despite all this, the Islamic movement continues to spread among the Gazans, its members drawing inspiration from the newly-created martyrs.

The situation in the overcrowded Gaza Strip became exacerbated through the introduction of Israeli settlers; a third of the meagre Gaza Strip was declared "State Lands", set aside for the use of present and future Jewish settlers. Small in numbers, but well organised, armed and financed by the Israeli government, the settlers have set up vigilante groups. On November 9, settler vigilantes assaulted a demonstration of schoolgirls at Dir-el-Balah, south of Gaza; 17-year old Intisar al-Atar was shot dead. The settlers' leadership immediately started mobilising its considerable political lobby, in order to stop investigation of the girl's killing.

These events gave rise to a public controversy in Israel; a heated debate took place in the Knesset, and in Tel-Aviv's main street peace demonstrators had a violent confrontation with racist hoodlums.

Taken together, the killing in Gaza and the summit in Amman point out the two courses which are open to the citizens of Israel; the road of occupation and oppression, leading to an endless cycle of fear and hate, violence and bloodshed — or the renunciation of territorial aggrandisement, clearing the way for peaceful coexistence between Israel and its neighbours. Adam Keller

P.S. After the above was written, events seemed to underline the sharpness of the dilemma.

On November 26, a single Palestinian fighter, riding a primitive glider, succeeded in penetrating the ground and air defences of Israel's northern border; he carried out a one-man raid on an Israeli army camp, and killed six Israeli soldiers before being killed himself.

The attack created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty along Israel's northern border, where previously the inhabitants were led to believe that the Lebanon War had insured "Peace for the Galilee". On the other side of the border, Palestinian refugees tensely prepared for retaliatory air raids.

Tension was increased by the cruel murder of two workers in a Jerusalem supermarket. The police immediately announced that "the murder was probably committed by nationalist Arabs", and all Arab workers of the supermarket were detained, apparently on no other grounds than their nationality.

These were far from propitious conditions for peace activities. Nevertheless, the "Stop the Occupation" movement did hold a long-planned demonstration. On November 29, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, several kilometres of the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem highway were lined by Israeli and Palestinian demonstrators, all united behind the slogan "Israel and Palestine — two states for two peoples."

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