

"CHANGE - ONLY UNDER INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE"

INTERVIEW BY AVI KATZMAN

MEIR PAIL is the Chairman of SHELI, a movement of Zionist peace-forces which created the ICIPP, or Council for Israel-Palestine Peace — a body that talks regularly with PLO representatives. Pail was a Member of the Knesset in the past and is considered to have good chances of becoming one again. Together with Ran Cohen heads one of SHELI's three wings, less open to the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and more concerned with social affairs.

I&P: What are Sheli's chances in the forthcoming elections? Are you optimistic?

Meir PAIL: No. But I know we have an irreducible number of voters and this will allow us to pass the "minimum percentage" of votes and to get into the Knesset according to law.

Even should they decide to raise the "minimum percentage" to two, or two-and-a-half per cent of the voting electorate — Sheli will be able to get into the Knesset with the slogan "let the true peace-fighters into the House". The alternative is: we'll get three Knesset Members or not a single one. So, we shall tell the voters: "instead of wasting your vote on Peres or on the Change List, give it to Sheli". That's what we shall say or write, if they raise the percentage.

As for now, if you ask me, we would get into the Knesset, but barely. Enough Israelis believe in Sheli's views to get five, perhaps six Knesset Members elected. The trouble is, they do not have the ideological guts to get out and vote for us. So, they throw away their vote on MAPAM, the Labor Party and their like. Karl Marx calls this "the misery of philosophy".

I&P: Did you consider starting an electoral campaign jointly with other political forces?

PAIL: I am sorry to have to declare that no negotiations are ongoing — with anyone. I estimate that, if such negotiations should get under way, this would not occur before the Histadrut elections; as the Trade Union is, for lists such as ours, a kind of litmus paper that allows us to see "how many we are, and how much we are worth".

I estimate no agreements or pacts will be sealed towards the Histadrut elections. Afterwards, perhaps, taking into consideration the Trade Union's electoral results, some renewal or change is possible. Even if the Knesset raises the "minimum voters' percentage". If this occurs we shall have to reevaluate.

At this stage, I don't consider all joint lists positive. To give only one, generally accepted, example: MAPAM, inside the Labor Alignment. I am convinced MAPAM and the Labor Party will get less votes jointly than they would get if they went to the electoral campaign separately.

A respectable list of socialist and humanist peaceniks could get, in my opinion, about half the votes which, in 1977 went to the Change movement.

MAPAM can't get these votes since the party's leadership is really depressive, quite buried in its own mediocrity.

They have no dream, no message, nothing they could tell either the State or the



DR. MEIR PAIL

Workers' Movement; nothing, even, to tell the Palestinian Arabs. Not a word concerning the relationship between Israel and Ismael.

MAPAM has institutions: the Party, the United Kibbutz Movement and so on; and this drags down their leadership. It is much easier for MAPAM to keep what it has by leeching the body of the Labor Party's battle-horse; Labor, at least, fights for the minds of the people, the public, by trying to become a centrist party.

The Labor Party is evolving towards the point where it will try to become an American-style Democratic Party, along the lines of Jimmy Carter's own — and this is OK with MAPAM, it saves MAPAM the effort of an outwards-oriented struggle, and of internal turmoil as well. Only thus can MAPAM sit on the Labor Party's backsides, enjoying in all serenity its internal existence and even showing a noble face to its public.

A Socialist Party can go on like that only as long as the Labor Party is willing to carry it on its back. But a message it hasn't.

I&P: What happens if a parliamentary majority raises the minimum voters' percentage, a move you, Meir Pail, are said to favor? Will Sheli then fight the electoral campaign together with other leftwing forces?

PAIL: Ideologically, I am against raising the voters' minimum percentage. As a matter of ideology and principle, I believe such a move would be a scandal. I am for proportional voting inside the Knesset, I am for the parties' controlling their representatives when they sit in the Knesset; you know my views on this subject. I am for a Law that would regularize

these things.

This, I believe, is the best way to bring about a change; parliamentary decision and not brute force.

Yet should they do that to us, and saddle us with a minimum voting percentage of two to two-and-a-half-percent, I consider this to be a good thing, tactically speaking, as it allows a Machiavellian response. Because I believe such a move would set a barrier in Sheli's path — but not too steep a barrier. Since it would also create a challenge that can be taken in our stride. Two-and-a-half-percent can be overcome.

I&P: In such a case, wouldn't you consider adhering, for tactical reasons, to a leftwing electoral bloc?

PAIL: In such a case we must weigh the pros and the cons. Mind you, I don't reject a bloc.

The main consideration for joining an electoral bloc is whether such a step will kill the minimum percentage barrier, allow us to jump over it in order to survive.

For me the real challenge is to revive the Zionist Left. If Zionism will not get back its left wing — and nowadays Zionism has no Left at all left — this Movement is condemned to perish. A national movement shorn of its national, integral left wing, a Left with a message of its own is condemned to perish. Such a movement is on its way down.

This, then, is the challenge Sheli has to face: to try and create such a Left. As of now, we were unable to establish it in a significant way.

If you ask me in what direction I'll address my efforts I will answer: I'll work towards the left of the Zionist spectrum. But I don't know whether we shall be successful.

I&P: You don't reject, a priori, KHADASH?*

PAIL: I don't reject KHADASH — or anybody else. A pact, now, today, would not be such a bright idea. For the Jewish electorate it may set the final stamp on us, allow them to brand us as real lepers.

I&P: That's what Shulamit Alony** says when asked about her joining Sheli.

PAIL: That's what she used to say. Not what she says now.

Alony used to say this about Moked, the leftwing component of Sheli, because she was afraid of the Communist Party, from which it issued. This trauma, the fear of so many people inside Israel, is interesting. But it doesn't make any difference, for the sake of this argument, whether they are right or wrong. As for myself, I feel that Rakakh, the Israeli Communist Party, isn't basically a democratic party. In this it is much like the

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*KHADASH — The Front for Democracy and Equality, formed in 1977 by the Israeli Communist Party Rakakh, representatives of Arab Local Councils in Israel, the Marxist Israeli Leftwing Socialists SHASSI and the BLACK PATHERS.

** Shulamit Alony is the lone Knesset representative of the CITIZENS' RIGHTS Party.

I&P: You don't expect any Generals to get the tanks moving?

PAIL: No. The tanks won't move, for the time being. I don't know any General who would be followed, should he try to initiate such a move. Sharon, the man Begin is afraid of — no tank would start its engine to follow Sharon. He may call upon them to follow him until the day after tomorrow, nothing will happen.

Arik Sharon is a charismatic person but he is unable to mobilize those who really know him.

I&P: Do you expect, after Peres takes over, a significant change of mind towards the Palestinian problem?

PAIL: No. Ideological changes — surely not. They are, however, capable of pragmatism, of giving up a lot of land, but only subject to tremendous pressure from international forces. This means, first, the United States; then, the European powers, through various channels, such as the Socialist International, Europe's various governments...this is most important.

Also, should the Soviet Union renew diplomatic relations with Israel this also will help.

Parallel to such international pressure it would help if the other side, the Arabs, make some kind of significant sign.

They want to keep the problem alive, to forestall the working out of solutions which may be constructive by themselves.

I say that Israel's interest, the Zionist interest, is precisely the opposite. The Palestinian People, which is part of the Arab Nation, resembles in this respect the people that now dwells in Zion, which is part of the Jewish People.

In a certain measure, the Zionist Project created, through friction, the complementary and parallel Palestinian Problem. Which is our twin brother, born from the other side of the womb.

As a matter of true principle, it is our deepest interest to offer them self-determination, to suggest they should create a state besides our own, even if the whole Arab world stands on its head.

Now, since the Arab World, for reasons of its own which concern Arab unity, has developed an identification with the Palestinian Problem, an Israeli initiative of the kind I propose would be an excellent way to maneuver the Arab States into agreeing. In fact, they would be unable to refuse.

Provided the situation is baited enough and provided we break the ice ourselves, and do not play the zealots.

To resume: if the world should be able to obtain from Palestinian elements more mo-

be possible to bend the Palestinian Problem if something is done, somehow, on the Jordanian side. But nothing will bend in Jordan if Israel does not propose a Jerusalem solution, i.e., Arab sovereignty over Eastern Jerusalem. A kind of tit for tat.

I&P: And your conclusions?

PAIL: It is quite possible that tremendous international pressure could be applied on Israel, but not yet on Jordan and the Palestinians; specifically, over Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley.

Then the Jordanian Government may get up and say: "OK, to this we may agree, and now we only hope that the PLO — or most of the Palestinian forces including the PLO, or rather together with the PLO — shall initiate a project jointly with Jordan in order to create here a State of their own, or an Autonomous Republic, a kind of federation".

This might bring about a constructive solution.

Without very strong outside pressure, however, really tremendous pressure from abroad, I cannot see any change coming.

I&P: When everything else has frozen, do you expect some kind of Leftwing formation to appear, something on the lines of PEACE NOW, but press for a just Palestinian solution?

PAIL: Such a protest movement, along the lines of PEACE NOW, may erupt once more very strongly, and this time against a Labor Government.

But only if the people see another peace project on the horizon, and find there are now real developments and possibilities.

Let me give you an example: suppose truly tremendous Western pressure is applied, and suppose it also squeezes something out of the Arab World — for instance a joint Jordanian-PLO project, even one which demands all of Eastern Jerusalem.

Now suppose they say: "We are ready to make peace with Israel for good, to enter specific arrangements and so on".

Furthermore, suppose they say: "Yet, if there shall be no response from your side, an explosion may occur".

Now suppose the West engineers an initiative by the Syrian President (or perhaps the Syrian President will engineer it by himself); an initiative along the lines of Sadat's. Suppose, furthermore, that there would be no Israeli response to such an offer.

What would happen? The Israeli settlements on the Golan Heights will start lobbying; and we suddenly may have new protest movements.

A new Israeli protest movement may erupt if and when it possesses a cause strong enough to motivate its efforts; something that appears clearly on the horizon, like a rainbow, a thunderclap or a fork of lightning.

As for the present, if no break occurs inside the Labor Alignment itself — such as all MAPAM members saying suddenly they have had it and want to move — I do not foresee developments which, by themselves, will allow the emergence of a strong peace-oriented Left. Or even the strengthening of the present peace movement.

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SETTLER'S DEMONSTRATION IN HEBRON

I&P: Do you foresee significant changes in the attitude of the Palestinian leadership towards Israel?

PAIL: Only if pressure is applied on them. I do not know of a single force in the Arab world interested in the creation of a truly independent Palestinian State.

A consensus exists in the Arab world on the possibility to mobilize forces around Palestinian suffering, and on the Palestinian viewpoint, in order to obtain Arab unity elsewhere.

Yet, they will not initiate too clear-cut efforts that might bring about the creation of an independent Palestinian State.

The conclusion is that this Arab consensus, which includes all Arab States except Egypt just now, that all the Arab States will only apply pressure on the Palestinians — if at all — to move them towards greater fanaticism.

derate positions, this would enable to "sell" such a change to the Labor Party in Israel and even more important, would help Labor sell these changes to the Israeli public. Why? Because the Labor Party will find it easier than Begin to bow to international pressure.

Although, it must be said, for Begin it is easier to deliver the goods to the Jews and therefore to bend Labor's will through international pressure.

This is one side of the problem. But in order to "sell" this to the Jews without bringing about an internal explosion, it will be necessary for international forces to bend the Palestinians, after they present their positions; because, I think, it will be extremely difficult for the West (and for the Soviet Union, too) to bend the Palestinians *per se*, particularly since the Soviets do not want, just now, that the Palestinians should bend.

I estimate that nowadays it will only

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Israeli Labor Party. More so than most people realize. In fact, in the Arab sector it fulfills precisely the role fulfilled by Labor in the Jewish one.

I disagree with Rakakh as to the socialist model they have taken for their own, a model, incidentally, which is not that of the Soviet Union. They criticize the Soviet model quite a lot. As myself, they are very worried about Poland, afraid that one of the two sides should go too far.

On the other hand, I am not at ease about their sitting too close to their Soviet Rabbi...

I&P: Let's talk about democracy. Under present circumstances, aren't you afraid of growing fascist tendencies? Would you believe a putsch in Israel?

PAIL: We still live in a country where nationalism is the dominant ideology, and this, for two reasons: firstly, the ongoing conflict; this country is at war — and this is felt in the Arab sector but much more strongly in the Jewish sector. Secondly, the Zionist Movement is a new national movement, the State is a new state and people are still astonished and say: "look at that! After two thousand years we have a Jewish State! We never had one before".

This process was legitimized by the last generation, in which mass-immigration arrived from the Islamic countries, people with a deep religious culture. Take all this into consideration and you have several good reasons for prevalent nationalism.

In such an atmosphere Rabbi Kahane is the decisive voice. Among the religious politicians, Kahane frightens Geula Cohen of the Renaissance Party; Geula Cohen frightens extremists elements in the National-Religious Movement; on one side, Gush Emunim and on the other, in the MAFDAL, Druckman's boys.

Druckman's faction frightens the rest of MAFDAL, the National-Religious Party, and this party then draws to it the workers of Poalei Agudat Israel, the religious splinter list, because of the National-Religious Party's nationalist ideology. Now, the Poalei Agudat Israel men frighten the extremist religious Agudat Israel party.

On the secular side of our political spectrum, Kahane frightens the Renaissance Party, which in turn frightens HERUT, then forced to act even more jingoistically and thus frightening its Liberal Party coalition partners.

And then you can hear Minister Modai mouthing nationalist slogans and immediately after Minister Pat, also a Liberal, starts acting up and says he will take the Arabs in taxis, to Jordan. And of course, HERUT, together with the Liberals, leans on the Change movement and their like, and this keeps Change from becoming too moderate, and all this dead weight bears down on Peres and his friends in the Labor Party which, in turn, drags MAPAM along.

It all reminds you of **Had Gadia**, the Bible's little lamb legend.

Those of us who cut ourselves loose

from this evolution — I, myself, used to be a member of MAPAM — are being whipped with nettles, we live in a real desert, we do not have that many like-minded people around us. And this trend is gathering even more momentum and, I believe, becomes a most serious danger.

I&P: You expect this danger to increase?

PAIL: It will increase. I dread to tell you what will happen if the Labor Alignment really does come to power after the next elections.

Imagine this bunch of ineffectual old-timers one year later — Shimon Peres and Abba Eban, Victor Shem-Tov and Levinson — guys who have no dream, no ideal, no political concept of their own except Pragmatism.

(Sometimes Pragmatism may be useful in an ad hoc situation, when you must decide overnight). But these men have not even the stature to become true leaders of this people.

The first project I am afraid of, is the evacuation of the Sinai Peninsula. This is due in the spring or the summer of 1982. My hair stands on end when I think what will happen then. They will evacuate Sharm-el-Sheikh, no problem there. But then I see in my mind all kinds of elements belonging to HERUT, and to the Hawks of Rafi***, some of whom will have moved to the Likud's leadership as well as to the Liberal Party's ranks.

Some may join Dayan and others the Labor Alignment, in the ranks of the Cooperative Village Organization, the Tenuat Hamoshavim, for example. And all of them will drive this country crazy, demanding that the Rafah Outreaches should not be evacuated.

They will pretend that compensation to the settlers is not enough and they will take to the area spitting Mazal****, a thousand spitting Mazals will appear from nowhere.

They will say: "Herut signed a peace agreement with Egypt but the Alignment evacuates Sinai"; "Let's not give it back to Sadat, he will break the peace pact", and so on and so over.

At the same time everybody will feel nothing is really being done in the Palestinian direction and, indeed, they will feel that Sadat is quite capable of stopping right there, if no steps are taken to fulfill the second part of the agreement, steps concerning the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

And then a witches' cauldron will boil over in this country. It will be felt in the Knesset, it will be felt in the streets, there will be demonstrations of HERUT, and Bnei-Akiva, and Gush Emunim and the Renaissance Party. Beitar and all kinds of similar things will demonstrate. And you believe big man Shimon Peres will stand fast when all that happens?

Let's say it happens, and they get over it. A second project is then outstanding, the Palestinian Project. What will they do then? Begin's Autonomy does not work, the Labor Party has no conception of its own, so the danger really exists. Sadat could say: "My friends,

***A Hawkish party founded by the late David Ben-Gurion when he left Labor, then taken over by Moshe Dayan and now led by former Finances Minister Yigal Hurwitz.

****Mazal Dayan-Arskin, an extremist settler who spit on then Defense Minister Ezer Weitzman when he went to the Rafah Outreaches to convince Yamit settlers they must leave the town to Egypt, against adequate compensation.



SHELI'S
LOGO

either you do something about the Palestinians or I have to cancel the Peace Agreements".

And then, I foresee Sadat telling Peres, (since he doesn't really want to cancel the Peace Accords): "OK, if you can't do it yourselves, give me the Gaza Strip and I shall institute again Egyptian rule there, and create in Gaza a Palestinian Self-Governing Authority, kind of a model, and then I could tell the Arab World: there you have one Palestinian Self-Governing Authority, now I can go to the West Bankers and tell them to implement one of their own".

This is a far more serious project, it means giving up the Gaza Strip and the Jewish settlements, Katif and all the rest. And I believe it will draw Peres even further.

I am really afraid of those Israelis who live quite submerged in their own nationalist feelings, who don't believe in Labor's silly rulers and who will start asking for Strong Men, for a regime of Law and Order. They won't even need a putsch to take over.

I am sure quite a few of them are prepared to go to the next Knesset's elections under the banner of "Law and Order", saying: "Enough is enough, you are unable to keep your own peace, everybody demonstrates, scandals in the streets, — we need order!"

Add to this that a very difficult economic situation may develop, there will be a lot of jobless workers, and this will go on if the Government does not intervene in this country's economy.

Intervene — how? I say: close down the Stock Exchange! At once!

If I were the Prime Minister I would do two things: close down the Stock Exchange immediately and make a statement on the Palestinian Question. Two statements in one day, on the first day, after creation of the new Cabinet.

So, you'll have a lot of jobless chaps. And then they will call out all the youngsters from Herut, and the youngsters of Rafi, and the youngsters of Renaissance, and the youngsters of the National-Religious Party — all the hundreds of thousands of Zionist-Israeli activists, who have been educated according to this last generation's pattern. And they may march even with the youngsters of Change and some of the youngsters of Peres, those who are left, anyhow, without any moral values of their own.

A most dangerous thing can grow out of all this, and the day may come when we'll sigh for the good old days of Begin, of Ehrlich and Landau. We shall regret those Polacks who ruled over us once upon a time.

And this dangerous thing may come upon us without any violent overthrow, without violence.