**REPORT FROM ISRAEL, Mike Miller. (December, 1990)**

**PREFACE**

The following is a brief report on my trip of August, 1990 to Israel. The trip was made possible by the Koret Israel Prize Committee which, in 1989, named me as one of a dozen Bay Area Prize winners. Our only responsibility as Prize winners is to share, in ways we find appropriate, what we learn on our respective trips. This report is, in part, a discharge of that responsibility. I left New York City July 25, 1990 on an El Al flight non-stop to Israel's Ben Gurion Airport. On August 24, a month later, I headed home.

This was a reverse Murphy's law trip: almost everything that could go right did. I left the US with a fistful of contacts, most with Jewish Israelis, and some with Palestinians. Once there, almost everything ran on time; I saw almost everyone and everything I wanted to see; I didn't miss a connection, got on stand-by flights when I wanted to, made it through customs in record times; the food was great; even Tel Aviv's muggy, hot weather was bearable. Most of all, the people I met were wonderful.

I'd like to thank the many people who made this trip possible, including: Bill Russell Shapiro, Chair, and Members of the Koret Israel Prize Committee; for their introductions to people in Israel and Ramallah: Lily Rivlin; MAPAM's US representative, Gary Brenner; Emily Shihadeh; Jimmy Torczyner; Janet Tom; Liana Schatz; Hannah Kronfeld; Meyer Baylin; Art Pulaski; Linda Remy; Janice Perlman; Mary Ann Stein; David Cohen; Alan Madian, and Herman Stein; for her pre-trip briefing, Miriam Levy; for his help with lots of details, San Francisco Jewish Welfare Federation's Associate Director, Dan Asher. And on the Israel side: MAPAM's Shoshana Mueller who made extraordinary arrangements for me and was a well informed hostess; Jerusalem AIPAC (American-Israel Public Affairs Committee) staffers Lenny Davis, Minette Warnick and Nancy Shekter, and the American AIPAC regional reps and other staff whom I met in Israel, especially Sam Witkin who encouraged and lined up details for my side trip to Sharm El Sheikh, and Debby Cohn who made me part of her Israel family; guide extraordinaire Hillel Kessler with whom I spent three great days traveling around the country in the footsteps of Jesus and others; Natan Golan, SF Federation's 'man in Jerusalem', and; MAPAM Haifa activist Sara Doran.

The following people generously gave me their time, shared their thoughts and made me feel at home in Israel: Janet Aviad, Dr. Wahib Dajani, Linda Epstein, Michael & Mimi Kovner, Dan Spitzer & Ora Jaffe, Judi Widetsky, Rafi Israeli, Sari Rifkin, Clinton Bailey, Shoshi Herber, Alice Shalvi, Reddy Swartz, Roni Kaufman, Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom, Dede Ben Shitrit, Chaya Brill, Chaim Shur, Dov Puder, Eliazer Granot, Arieh Jafeh, Ephraim Jiloni, Alex Spinrad, Jay Hurvitz, Avshalom Vilan, Avner Amiel, Susan Bellos, Benjamin Golan, Rev. Samuel Fanous, Rev. Suheil Dawani, Ellen Mansur, May Mansur, Don Hutchison, Rachel Ostrowitz and many others whose names will unfortunately be unmentioned here.

And a special thanks to my adopted sister, an extraordinary person and a dear friend, Naomi Lauter who, in more ways than one, made it all happen.

Needless to say, what follows are my own observations, questions and reflections. They are solely my responsibility.

**INTRODUCTION**

One doesn't become knowledgeable, let alone an expert, in one trip or with the reading of some books and articles. What I brought to this trip was my fairly extensive experience in the United States in movements and organizations working to create a more just society. It is through the eyes of an American community organizer that I looked at the things I saw, read pamphlets, books and articles and listened to the arguments, stories and reflections of Jewish Israelis, Arabs and Palestinians.

I went to Israel primarily interested in its labor movement (Histadrut), its collective and cooperative communities (kibbutzim and moshavim), the way it integrated new immigrants into society, and some of its education work -- particularly that of Reuven Feuerstein. My only disappointment was that I wasn't able to connect with Feuerstein or any of his associates. Something to do next time!

By disposition, I don't much like issues which divide my friends, and I tend to stay clear of them. So I avoided the bitter Middle East debates and discussions in the Bay Area within the Jewish community, the peace movement and more generally among liberals and radicals. When I left I was about as informed as a casual reader of the newspapers might be on Middle East and Israel politics. I knew next to nothing about the divisions among the Arab states, or the relationship of any of them to the Palestinians. About all I knew of the Intifada was that it was an uprising; nor did I know much about the PLO, its make-up, its policies or, for that matter, whether it spoke for the Palestinians or not.

These are very hard times in the Middle East. I was in Israel when: Iraq invaded Kuwait; two Israeli teen-agers were found with their throats slit; Jews subsequently rioted, stoned Palestinian cars and beat to death one driver. I had the privilege of talking with people on both sides of the conflict as well as the agony of trying to imagine how this might all end with justice and peace. I became less and less optimistic about the prospects for peace the longer I was in the region. Then came Iraq's march into Kuwait. After that, with few exceptions even the most optimistic Israelis could only see doom and gloom in the near future. Yet even in these dark days some found signs of hope. I report them, though I don't share them. One person thought that the very toughness of the Intifada (uprising) would bring about respect from the Moroccan (Sephardic) Jews, making it easier for them to support negotiations with the Palestinians. Another hoped that Iraq's invasion would so shake things up the Middle East that a new configuration would emerge, and that somehow in it Israel could make peace with at least some of its Arab neighbors and that they, together, would find a way to make peace with the Palestinians.

No conversation omits reference to the conflict. It is ever present: Army personnel are every place in the country. Hitch-hiking, once a common means of transportation, is now dangerous. Jews are afraid to walk in Palestinian areas at night, as Palestinians similarly fear to walk in Jewish areas. Half a mile from the sea where I swam, and at about the same time, a bomb exploded on a Tel Aviv beach killing a visiting Canadian. Every time you fly in Israel there is an intense security check as well as a detailed interview by security personnel. Israel license plate cars travel in the West Bank at the risk of stoning. When I rented an Avis car I was given special warning about where and where not to drive, and told by the agent that every day they got a car back with damage from a stoning. In Jerusalem, a walk down Jaffa Road was stopped by a road block: the Police were checking a bomb report. Tourism is dramatically down. And so it goes.

Israel is particularly vulnerable now. Any attack on Iraq by the US or its allied forces would probably lead to an attack by Iraq on what it considers America's proxy in the area, Israel. Israel is surrounded by hostile people and nations who believe that the Jews have taken the land of Palestinians and, therefore, have no right to be there. And, I believe this vulnerability is, in part, of Israel's own making, and is related to how Israel deals with Palestinians and Arab States. I'll report more about that when I report on the many conversations I had with Israelis and Palestinians on the prospects for peace with justice.

These are mostly notes for friends, associates and anyone else who might be interested in how things looked to an American community organizer, a kind of innocent abroad, who was parachuted into one of the most complicated situations in the world today.

**MY JOURNEY.**

What a vibrant, cacaphonous people. Israel is filled with argument. Everyone has an opinion about everything. I loved every minute of it! And I carried the sadness of the turmoil of the region.

I traveled Israel from its northern borders with Syria and Lebanon to its southernmost city, Eilat. From Eilat I took a four day side trip to Egypt's Sharm El Sheikh, at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula, where I snorkeled and did my third ever SCUBA dive. Most of my time was in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Haifa, Tiberias, four kibbutzim (collectives) and two moshavim (cooperatives) were part of my travels. Near Tiberius, I wandered through ancient Roman ruins and walked and rode where Jesus began his ministry in the Galilee. Nothing was more compelling than the Old City of Jerusalem. Thousands of years of history are under each step you take: here was Solomon's Temple; there Jesus was crucified; here is the Holy Rock, revered by Muslims as the site of Mohammed's ascent into heaven. Abraham is said to have almost sacrificed his son Isaac here. And David built his temple in Jerusalem. In San Francisco, hundred year old Victorians are city landmarks!

Israel is a small place, and there are only about 4.5 million people in it. I quickly discovered that even naming of peoples, places, ideas and events is a subject of controversy.

**WORDS, WORDS.**

Is the West Bank "occupied" or is it "administered"? It all depends on your point of view.

Is it "Jerusalem" or "al-Duds"?

Are either the Jews or Palestinians a single people? Are they a people at all? "Who is a Jew?" is a hot political potato in Israel, with the religious parties raising a real ruckus around it. The official requirement is that your mother be a Jew or that you converted to Judaism. What of some of the Russians whose identification papers indicate they are Jews but whose mother might not be? The Orthodox also question the Jewishness of Reform and Conservative traditions. Ethiopian Jews who recently converted to the Muslim faith to avoid persecution now face troubles with the ultra Orthodox when they seek to reconvert. The very legitimacy of Ethiopian Judiasm is also challenged by some of the ultra Orthodox Jews.

Zionism and the Jewish State are also subject to contention. In the early Zionist zeal, anyone who called him or herself a "Zionist" had not only to believe in the Jews' right to a homeland but once that land was identified (after a brief flirtation by some with the idea of colonizing a portion of Uganda) one had to immigrate there. Thus the tremendous emphasis on "aliyah"--the ingathering of the Jews to Israel. Today, Zionists are torn by the subject. It is obvious that many American Jews who call themselves "Zionists" are not going to move to Israel, nor do they want their children to. Yet they are a large source of direct financial support for Israel as well as an important and effective lobby in the US in its behalf. Purists argue, but Zionism is becoming more flexible in its application.

As there are Irish-Americans who support the IRA so, the emerging definition goes, there can be Americans who have a dual loyalty -- one to Israel, the other to the United States. In the presently unlikely event of a military conflict between Israel and the US, American Jews would face the problem faced by Japanese and German Americans in World War II. In the more likely event of political conflict, Jews are like any American group who had dual loyalties: American Communists and the Soviet Union, Nicaraguan-Americans who support the Sandanistas, Chinese Nationalists of the Kuomintang who opposed recognition of the Peoples Republic, and so on.

Zionism, I came to conclude, is in part another ideology of national liberation. It has identified its homeland with the homeland of another people, and therein lies the source of today's conflict. I asked a PLO-supporting Palestinian why the Jews didn't have a right to a national liberation ideology and a homeland. "Because," he said, "they are taking our home. They are an occupier, not an already settled people throwing off the yoke of colonialism." The PLO and Arab States think Zionism is an ideology of colonialism. This is one of the major reasons people are against the State of Israel. More fundamentally, they don't want a Jewish state in their midst. Israelis are suspicious of current PLO acknowledgments of the fact of Israel's existence because there is, as yet, no accompanying recognition of the right of Israel to exist and of Zionism as the ideological expression of this right.

Zionism is nourished by another deep source: Christian anti-Semitism. In its crudest expression, the Jews are the killers of Christ. There are more subtle expressions as well. Jesus is the Messiah promised by Yahweh to the Jews. Christians recognize Him; Jews don't. They are, thus, yet another of the unenlightened to be converted. Having spent last year in Brazil, and being impressed by some of the thinking of liberation theologians I met there, I was struck by a totally different perspective held by some modern Jewish theologians. Liberation theology, they say, repeats the Christian view of Judaism as an obstacle to the completion of God's project for humanity. Deeply imbedded in Europe's Christianity was, and perhaps still is, this contempt for the Jews. How else could so many allow the Nazi persecution that was to be the great impetus for Zionism? The religious dimension of the return to the promised land is another aspect of Zionism. Exile led to the holocaust; exodus is the return to Israel.

Prior to Nazism and the holocaust, there were both assimilationist liberal and class conscious socialist Jews who opposed Zionism, the former wanting to become identified with their country of residence, the latter wanting to participate in an international class struggle which united all workers. By the end of World War II, few were not Zionists. Every place I went there are reminders of the 6 million Jews killed in Nazi concentration camps, as well as of the fact that the Allies did nothing to intervene. Nothing was more vivid on this score than documentation of the fact that the Allies refused to bomb train tracks to the extermination camps even when it was acknowledged that Hitler was, indeed, implementing "The Final Solution."

At the Yad Vashem Memorial in Jerusalem, the holocaust is permanently remembered. It is dedicated to the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis. The architecture captures the horror of the concentration camps. Pictures, documents and short films remind you of Hitler's terror and the indifference of most of the world to it. Sections on the righteous Gentiles honor the exceptions: individuals who did extraordinary things to save Jews; the Danish people who saved almost all their nation's Jews by loading them in small fishing boats and transporting them in the dead of night to Sweden. Outside the museum are planted trees to honor thousands of these righteous Gentiles. A prominent place is reserved for Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who single handedly saved thousands of Hungarian Jews, sometimes literally snatching them out of the hands of Eichmann's gas oven-bound trains. I left shaken and silenced.

I think historic memory is a tricky thing. To "remember" Biblical times is one thing; to remember the holocaust is another. Claims based on the former are, at least to me, thin. I'm more interested in the living than the dead. The holocaust is in the memory of the living and their children. The phrase "never again" cannot be dismissed as an historic relic. There are times to remember, and times to forget. If historic memory is part of peoplehood, then historic forgetting must be part of statehood. A secure Israel is an historic necessity. It will not be created, however, by dwelling on the past.

At the same time, the Palestinians have current memories as well. They lived in many places taken by Jews even in the more narrowly circumscribed State of Israel. I met Palestinians who know the address of their old homes in Jerusalem, or can show the spot on a map of their old village. When they visit them, they are occupied by Jews. To me, these are the sources of valid and conflicting claims of two peoples. The disruptions and uprootings were like dominoes. Israel displaced about half a million Palestinians; thousands of Jews were displaced from places where they resided in pre-Israel Palestine that didn't become part of the new State; another half million people, this time Jews, were expelled from Arab countries in retaliation for the creation of Israel. Over and over again the same thing occurred to me: there are irreconcilable claims, each of which has legitimacy. These are settled by mutual recognition and negotiation.

Everyone in Israel is a cartographer. Depending on the historic source of boundary lines, you can legitimize different territorial claims. Biblical references vary; those who are most expansionist cite one passage, those less others. It is like "proof-texting", a theologically improper procedure in which one picks his text, ignoring context, to prove a point. I put little stock in these Biblically derived claims.

Should there be a Jewish State? Not only do Arabs say, "no!" For some of the ultra Orthodox Jews, this State is blasphemy. Man has interceded where only God has a right to reign. Until the Messiah, there can be no State. There are ultra Orthodox Jews who think Israel shouldn't exist.

Are the secular Jews Jewish? Depends on whether you have to be religious or not. The majority of Jews are not religious, separating their claim to peoplehood from any religious identification other than an historic one. Some Orthodox dispute the authenticity of their Jewishness.

Then there is the question of the Arabs. Ethnically, one might be Arab. Nationally, in the sense of identification as a people, one might be a Palestinian. At the same time you can be a citizen of Israel.

**THE PEOPLE AND THE COUNTRY.**

"Historically," I was told by one knowledgeable Israeli, "we are all Bedouin. In the land that is generally known as Palestine, beginning ten thousand or more years ago, there were nomadic clans, then tribes, then the beginnings of villages. From these people came Abraham who begat Isaac who begat the Jews and Ishmael who begat the Arabs. Today's illiterate nomadic Bedouin use Biblical words to name things in the desert. Sadly, I was to discover that the Bedouin are not treated very well by Israel. While some want to modernize, others prefer their nomadic ways. They are slowly being forced out of them. An Israeli who worked closely with the Bedouin told me that there are legitimate security and economic questions associated with policy toward the Bedouin: areas in which they once freely moved are now restricted because of security considerations; nomadic grazing habits deplete the supply of plants necessary for retention of scarce water. But he insisted that policies could have been adopted that would have met the legitimate interests of both parties, including the demarcation of specific lands for the Bedouin. They weren't. Government policy is urbanization and integration into the modern world. Those Bedouin who are still nomads live much as they did thousands of years ago. The clan is the basic unit of social organization. Their language is ancient. Many are illiterate, and their culture is transmitted by a rich oral tradition.

What a contrast: you are driving in a modern car on a modern highway and only a stone's throw away you see a small Bedouin encampment. There are several tents, a few people, cattle and goats, a few camels and donkeys. As the area for their grazing becomes increasingly circumscribed, I was told the Bedouin will soon be unable to survive. Their way of life is about to die.

**ALIYAH**

The Jews came, by and large, in waves of "aliyah" -- in gatherings of the Jews of the diaspora. The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish diaspora celebrates the continuity and accomplishments of the Jewish people and mourns the tragedies that anti-Semitism visited upon them. The important waves of return began in the 1880s, though there has been at least a small number of Jews living continuously in the area.

The Ashkenazi, those European Jews who weren't primarily influenced by the Spanish period of the 1300s and 1400s (ending with expulsion in 1492) were the principal founders of the Yishuv -- the pre-statehood formation. But the impetus for the State became irresistable with Hitler and the holocaust. By 1948, there were about 600,000 Israelis in the newly declared State. Almost 800,000 holocaust survivors arrived between 1948 and 1951. Between 1948 and 1956 another 700,000 Sephardic Jews (those who left Spain during the 1492 expulsion) had come from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Turkey, Greece, Egypt and Libya. Yet another over 200,000 "Oriental" Jews (those from Iraq, Iran, India and Yemen) arrived during the same period. Add to this the Jews who had never left, those who began trickling back in the mid 1800s, the Ethiopians who were dramatically brought in by "Operation Moses", the Druze -- an Arab religious group whose roots go way back, a steady though small stream of Americans, Canadians and other diaspora Jews, the Bedouin who preceded everyone and the Russians, who are coming, and you've got quite a place.

The Ethiopians are a special story in themselves, and a focus for controversy in Israel today. They are leaving situations of both poverty and persecution. Many are rural, illiterate or near-illiterate and poor. They were absorbed into Israel in a process that dispersed families and neighbors throughout the country. The ultra Orthodox Jews question the "Jewishness" of some of the Ethiopians because they doubt the purity of their faith. Today, there are many Ethiopians stranded in Addis Ababa. The Ethiopians I met aren't sure whether their plight is the result of Ethiopian or Israeli policy or a little of both. (Since I've returned, it appears that the Ethiopian Government has lifted all obstacles to departure of its Jews; we'll now see what happens.) While theologians argue and politicians negotiate, people are dying in the Addis Ababa camps.

Prior to the massive in-migration of Jews, there were, in 1947, 600,000 Palestinian Arabs in that part of Palestine that became Israel. (Another 600,000 lived in the part of the partition that was Arab. By 1948, there were only 150,000 Palestinian Arabs in Israel. In a relatively brief period of time, the newly arrived Jews created new rural villages, drained swamps, drilled wells, invented drip irrigation, and developed a number of desert suited crops. From urban ghettoes of Western Europe and village shtetls of Poland and Russia, these Jews who had been denied the right to own and cultivate land became extraordinarily successful farmers. They created an ideology that celebrated manual, productive labor -- and they lived it. Industry has been developed. Major cities built. Extraordinary institutions created: the mostly rural kibbutzim (collectives) and moshavim (cooperatives), Histadrut (the labor federation). Democratic institutions are being created, however fragile they may now be. In this small country of 4+ million, there are 8 major symphonies. A people developed a nation and a state. And there is a major problem.

**ISRAELI ARABS**

The Jews displaced about 500,000 Palestinians. Israel is also now the home of 600,000 Arab-Israeli citizens, who are second class citizens in Israel. They have the right to vote, but they are a suspect group. While a compulsory draft applies to other Israelis, it does not to them. The Jewish State said it didn't want its Arab citizens to have to fight against their brethren. Perhaps this was motivated by paternalism; perhaps by the assumption that the Arabs wouldn't be loyal if it came to a fight. I was told by one Israeli (not an Arab), that she resented this favored treatment because the children of Arab Israelis got a head start on their college educations and careers. At the same time, she acknowledged that the Israeli Arabs were second class citizens though, she insisted, "de facto not de jure." But Israeli Arabs pointed out that their suspect status also denies them security clearances, which, in turn, means they cannot work in defense related industry -- where many of the good paying jobs are to be found. These Israeli Arabs increasingly call themselves "Palestinians."

As one of them said to me, "I am a loyal Israeli, Arab, Palestinian." I thought it was a contradiction in terms. That describes much of what I heard in Israel.

Israeli Arabs with whom I spoke have a common list of complaints: their villages get fewer public services; their schools aren't treated as well as the Jewish schools; their town budgets are, on a per capita basis, smaller than those of Jewish towns; zoning, consolidation and taxing powers are used in discriminatory fashion against them. There is a particular twist to a part of this point: since most Jewish land is communally owned individual taxes apply mostly to Arabs. Thus what may appear as an "equal" tax has a differential impact in practice.

One Israeli/Arab/Palestinian showed me a map of Israel, including the West Bank, with black and red dots, red for Arab towns that no longer existed, black for those that did. He said that many of the towns were forcibly closed down by Israeli government policies. "Isn't this the result of modernization, of people wanting to move to the cities?", I asked. He agitatedly-denied this. One of the most bitterly felt practices is the re-routing of roads so that Israeli-Arab villages and towns are more isolated, making them less viable economically, and Israeli settlements are served by modern, paved roads. The same thing is done in the West Bank. Of course the Israelis argue in this case that they must do it for security reasons.

**THE PALESTINIANS**

This is also the homeland of the Palestinians, another extraordinary people, also in their own diaspora. Several of them told me that "we are the Jews of the Arab world." Indeed, Palestinians are scattered throughout the world. They are the technicians, teachers and other important workers in Kuwait, where 400,000 of them permanently work without any rights. They have a very high percentage of college graduates among them. They live in refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and in occupied territory in Israel.

Some Jewish Israelis and Americans told me that the Palestinians are not a people, they are simply Arab refugees who have not been given citizenship rights (with the exception of Jordan) in the countries where they now reside. Others told me that the Palestinians were not a people until the Israelis had made them one by the occupation of Jordanian, Syrian and Egyptian soil in 1967 (after one of the periodic wars of the region). But the claim is suspect.

I asked Palestinians about this. They deeply resent the idea, and those with whom I spoke had ready responses tracing both their own families as Palestinians and a Palestinian people. How far back? It depends on who it is you ask: from Biblical times to hundreds of years.

In several cities in Israel, in a small moshav and in the town of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, I met Palestinians -- some Israeli citizens, others living in occupied areas. Those I met were Christian, Moslem and secular. Most of them would call themselves "moderates." All of them told me that they supported the "Intifada" (uprising of the Gaza and West Bank) and that the PLO spoke for them. About 15% of the Palestinians are Christians; most of the rest are Moslems; there is a small secular left group as well.

"Is the PLO a legitimate spokesman or does it simply silence any opposition," I asked. My particular reference was to PLO assassinations of Palestinian spokesmen who were considered "traitors" or supporters of Israel. "The Israelis and their allies would like to believe this," said one. "While I may not agree with all the tactics of the PLO," he continued, "it is Israeli wishful thinking to believe that there is some 'silent majority' who really opposes the PLO." If anything, the PLO is   
being outflanked by even more militant groups, particularly in the Gaza where Moslem fundamentalists seem to have established a strong base.

In fact, the truth can never be known. Polls don't tell the story. (As the pre-election polls in Nicaragua showed, there is a tendency in politically uncertain places for respondents to say what they think the pollsters want to hear.) Free elections don't appear to be on the horizon.

**THE INTIFADA**

In December, 1987, in the densely populated and impoverished Gaza Strip, in response to a driving accident in which an Israeli truck hit a car and killed four Palestinian laborers, the Palestinians erupted. Days of rioting ensued; the Intifada (uprising) began. It spread to the West Bank. From this point forward, a new element entered the equation in the Middle East. Prior to the Intifada, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a federation of liberation groups most of whose leaders live outside the occupied areas, claimed to speak for the residents of areas that had once been Jordan, Egypt and Syria and that were now either ceded to Israel (Gaza by Egypt) or occupied and disputed. Within the areas, there was little evidence of a sustained protest against occupation. That has all changed in the post-Intifada period. The PLO claimed all these areas to be the site of a Palestinian homeland.

Over the years various Israelis had many contrary claims:

* The Palestinians ought to make Jordan their homeland

(likely an unwelcome prospect for the Hashemite Kingdom of King Hussein, whose people are outnumbered by the Palestinians).

* The Palestinians aren't a people, and should be absorbed by the respective countries in which they live.
* PLO terrorism and refusal to recognize the right of Israel to exist make negotiations impossible.
* The PLO doesn't represent the Palestinians.
* The PLO is merely a pawn of the Arab countries which, in turn, seek to eliminate Israel.
* There shouldn't be a separate State, but "autonomy" should be granted to the Palestinians, with local elections to take place. (Many unanswered questions accompany this formulation: Who can vote? Who can run for office? -- Israel has banished leaders it finds unacceptable. Will expelled people be able to return? Who will administer the elections? What authority will the "autonomous" zone have? What if it decides it wants Statehood? With whom will all of these questions be negotiated?)

Until the Intifada, the will of the Palestinians living in these areas could be disputed. With the Intifada it is clear that.the Palestinians are not simply a pawn of Arab States and that any settlement of the dispute must involve negotiations with leaders designated by the Palestinians themselves, not those hand picked by Israel. For a period, Israel tried to set up their own Palestinian organizations. It sounded like "company unionism" to me. At the same time, Israel systematically denies the right of organization to the Palestinians. In Ramallah, I visited the internationally respected Al Haq Human Rights Organization. In a 1987-88 publication,"Punishing A Nation", Al Haq documents what I was told by Palestinians with whom I spoke.

During twenty-one years of military rule (1967-88), the Israeli authorities have made few efforts to provide needed services to the population in the West Bank and Gaza...In response, Palestinians in the 1970s began expanding existing charitable organizations, reviving trade unions whose activities had been frozen in 1967, and building new institutions to close the gap between the demands of a growing and diversifying population and the few services provided by Israeli government installations...Although the (Israeli) authorities could not prevent the emergence of this organizational infrastructure, they have consistently attempted to break it and prevent it from becoming an alternative to their own administration.

On the other hand, Israelis point to schools, universities, a higher standard of living and other services that they provided. Defense Minister, Moshe Dayan thought material well-being would win political support. His view ignores the national aspirations of the Palestinians.

I was told of administrative detentions (jailing without charges or trial), deportations, closing of union offices, suspension of the right to meet, harassment of individuals, jailing, closing and banning of other organizations and so on. The Israelis claim that these organizations are fronts for the illegal activity of the PLO. Maybe; maybe not. In any case, when you deny groups of people the right to form their own voluntary associations and, through them, pursue their values, rights and interests you invite an uprising. That's what Israel got. Israel faces what the British faced in Colonial America and, almost two hundred years later, what they faced in India.

Add to the suppression of organizations the following: beatings, killing and wounding of young people whose form of protest is stone-throwing, closing of schools and universities, destruction of homes and personal property of Palestinians suspected of "illegal" activities, uprooting of olive and citrus trees and destruction of cottage industries to undermine efforts at economic self-sufficiency.

To all this, some Israelis point to the suppression and brutality of Arab States, their denial of rights to Palestinians, and any number of other evils. For Palestinians with whom I spoke, however, it is not these States that now occupy the West Bank and Gaza. Nor does the denial of rights in one place justify their denial in another. They equally complain, for example, of their treatment in Kuwait (prior to Iraq's occupation).

The moderate Palestinians I met were singularly unanimous in the following: the PLO speaks for them; they have a new found pride in the Intifada; the vast majority, well over 80%, of Palestinians support the Intifada; the Intifada is a "home grown", not PLO imposed, phenomenon--indeed the Algiers based PLO leadership was surprised by it and had to run to get ahead of it. As one person put it, "The Intifada is in all our hearts." Many think of the Intifada as a long-term struggle, "perhaps ten or more years" one man told me.

The present Israel policy is a never-ending descent into repression. And, as every colonial power has finally found out, it leads to revolts.

I was also told that the "man on the street" hates the Jews and Israel. "What," I asked, "about the security fears of the Israelis? After all, the Arab states, except for Egypt, deny their right to exist and it is unclear what the PLO thinks." Israeli skeptics of PLO's renunciation of terror and acceptance of Israel's right to exist insist that these are simply a ploy to establish a foothold. Once established, what is to prevent it from becoming a base for subsequent invasion of Israel?

Answers I got to these questions weren't reassuring. They largely depend on forgetting a very recent past and trusting to a new future. To the extent that they depend on international guarantees or the United Nations, one ought to be skeptical. Other priorities arise for other nations. Then what happens? In a world where violence is still a common extension of national policy, these seemed insufficient answers to me. I did hear the beginnings of some more satisfactory answers, and I'll say more about them later.

**TWO PEOPLES, ONE HOMELAND**

I went to Israel with general ideas about the justice of the various claims. My basic attitude was that: (a) two peoples had legitimate claims to the same piece of land; (b) they ought to negotiate and work something out; (c) the international "community" ought to do what it can to foster and press for such negotiations. I return with elaborations, but essentially the same view.

**SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

My work as a community organizer in the United States made me interested in how Israel dealt with social problem and, particularly; how those at the base of society organized themselves to deal with their own situations. This interest led me to dozens of interesting meetings with Jewish Israelis and Palestinians as I traversed the country and traveled into the occupied zone to the town of Ramallah. What follows are some of my impressions.

As a country, Israel faces major social problems: discrimination against Arabs is widespread. Homelessness and unemployment are growing. The in-migration of the Russians is putting a squeeze on housing. The military budget creates a permanent strain on the economy. Once rampant inflation (highest in the world in 1981), for a while precariously under control, again is a major problem in housing where prices went up about 30% in the last year. Religious fundamentalism accompanies right wing extremism, threatening any hope for growing tolerance between diverse peoples. Pollution is apparent in the major cities of Tel Aviv and Haifa.

A women's movement opposes sexism in its various manifestations in the country. The peace movement, led principally by Peace Now, was in a crisis while I was there because of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the PLO's subsequent apparent endorsement of it. Overriding everything is the fact that Israel is in a state of permanent preparedness for war, both because of its security concerns and because of its refusal to negotiate with the PLO, and is an occupying power with a rebellious population in two of the three areas it won in the 1967 war: Gaza and the West Bank.

**RACE, ETHNICITY AND NATIONALITY**

The Europeans who created and led the first State were men and women of the Enlightenment and moderate socialists. They created, they thought, a democratic socialist nation. They excluded left socialists from the first governments, and made alliances with center and religious parties. Their incorporation of the "Oriental Jews" into Israeli society led to their political downfall. Over and over again I was told stories of the arrogance, bureaucratic ineptness and general mishandling of this great aliyah. Granted it came at a hard time: independence had just been declared and was immediately followed by war with the surrounding Arab countries; 600,000 people absorbed one and a half to two million; the economy was just getting organized; the country was poor; the Ashkenazi had little previous contact with the Oriental or Sephardic Jews; there was insufficient infrastructure of housing and social institutions.

Those who defend the Labor Government pointed to these things, all of which are no doubt true. But I was also told of the failure to deal effectively with leaders of the Oriental and Sephardic communities, to involve them in the planning for their absorption in Israeli society. People from the same villages were divided into different absorption centers, depending on when they arrived in the country. There was a paternalism toward the "backwardness" of the rural, less educated Jews of Morocco -- the largest single group to arrive in this period. (I was frequently told that the more "sophisticated" Moroccan Jews went to France, not Israel.) Within Labor, I was told of a few voices of dissent, of some absorption leaders who dealt well with their newly arriving brethren, who sought policies and applied practices that involved the newcomers in deciding their own destiny. But these voices were a distinct minority. I was told they tried to convince Israel's Prime Minister Ben Gurion of their approach but failed. In most situations, policy was handed down from the top and European absorption center workers implemented it.

If you were a newly arrived Moroccan, you came to one of these absorption centers. There you were provided with housing, typically designed to fit the needs of nuclear families not the extended clans that sought to fit their social practices in this inadequate physical space. Professional social workers, counselors, teachers, job placement workers, health professionals and others began the work of "absorbing" you into this new land. Clan and other informal leaders were bypassed, except in those few cases noted above. The welfare state was in full gear. Israelis already in the new nation made tremendous sacrifices. It was socialism and the welfare state at their best...and at their worst.

What is true for the Moroccans is also true for the Ethiopians. "Is there racism in Israel?" I asked. Some Jewish Israelis unhesitatingly said, "yes." Some Jewish Europeans, Moroccans and Ethiopians qualified their answers. "There is discrimination, insensitivity and ignorance, but…". I came away not knowing. In some ways I had the feeling that attitudes toward non-European Jews held by the European Jews might be more like a sophisticated New Yorker's toward poor Southern whites. Someone who would never say "nigger" would say "redneck" without a second thought.

In relation to Arabs it is another matter. There appeared to me a widespread attitude toward them that is racist in character. I was told that this is a relatively recent development in Israel, but most Israelis I met acknowledge it. I was routinely told, "you can't trust the Arabs, they’ll stab you in the back", or "an Arab will tell you one thing to your face and as soon as you leave say another...or do the opposite." And this came from Jews from whom I wouldn't have expected it. Jewish Israelis who have worked for mutual respect between the two peoples have a tone of desperation when they speak of the growing hatred of Arabs in their nation.

(I had a curious experience in Egypt which made me think a lot about this. I was trying to get a taxi from Sharm El Sheikh to the Israel border. I already had a bus ticket, and it was about twenty minutes prior to the departure of the day's only bus. It looked like I wasn't going to be able to get the taxi. I was talking with one of the hotel staff to see if there was any last hope. He thought there wasn't (especially because I wanted a Bedouin cab and was willing to pay only a certain price). "Anyway," he told me, "the bus will get you there just as quickly and it will be safe." "Just as quickly," I asked? He assured me that would be the case. A few minutes later, lo and behold, a Bedouin cab appeared and offered the ride at my rate. We were at the border two hours sooner than the bus would have gotten me there. Why did the hotel man tell me "the bus will get you there just as quickly?" I puzzled a good deal about this. My only conclusion thus far is that there is something in the culture that says you should tell people what you think they want to hear. The hotel man had no conceivable interest, other than making me feel good, that would be served by telling me what was obviously not true.)

When the Yom Kippur War provided a crisis, Menachem Begin was able to capitalize on it. The nationalist/conservative parties had early on begun building on a politics of resentment. Labor had given them fertile ground to toil. In 1977 Begin formed Israel's first non-Labor led government.

Likud's hold on the Moroccan Jews has been solid ever since. They are Israel's lower working class. Just below them are the Israeli Arabs. At the bottom of the social structure are the commuting Palestinians, who come from the occupied territories into Israel and return home at night. Labor, ironically, finds its base in the upper strata of the working class and in the middle class. The best organized, and therefore best paid sectors of the Histadrut, are predominantly Ashkenazi and other European in origin. Thus a great irony in Israel's politics: the Party of the welfare state is supported by those who least need it. The economically insecure are led by the Party that is now most hawkish, and which opposes key elements of the welfare state.

**THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING**

One $64 question is what impact on all this is to be expected from the Russians. I met with a couple of Muskovites, one of whom had been in Israel for a couple of weeks, the other for several months. A million of them are expected. They will change the face of this nation. How they are absorbed will tell the political tale for years, and perhaps decades, to come -- assuming that a major war doesn't change everything.

The Russians I met were well educated, articulate and energetic. I was told they are typical of this most recent aliyah. A new wave of professionals, scientists, intellectuals, artists, and people of similar backgrounds is arriving. The hope is that they will provide the human capital for new economic expansion in high tech and computer sciences, relieving the international competitive low wage pressures that are now, for example, experienced by Israel's export agriculture. The fear is that in an economy that spends 1/3 of its GNP on military, that already has a 10% unemployment rate and that operates in a world economy that may be sliding into recession this new bite is just too big to digest.

Needless to say, I was interested in both why they left the Soviet Union and what they thought about their new home in Israel. Regarding the former, it boiled down to the anti-semitism "on the street" and their fear that the Soviet government will not stand up to it. "This isn't official anti-semitism," one of them said, "but in some ways it is even worse. It hits you when you least expect it. It is informal and unpleasant; you hear it on the street or at work or in the local stores." Others told me of officially sanctioned anti-semitism, but at least in the case of the people I spoke with neither they nor the people they knew felt that upper Party and Government levels were either directly or even indirectly supporting it.

The other reason I was given for leaving is the state of the economy. "Things are slowly getting worse, and I don't think they will get better for a long time. The problem is not the leadership or the laws. It is the popular culture and the average people. For so long they have been told what to do, been fearful of taking initiatives and led to believe that the Party knows best that now there isn't a capacity to use peristroika and glasnost to create a new society from the bottom up. The workers are reacting defensively; so are the middle bureaucrats. There's no one to implement the new direction. It can't all come from above and there's no will for it at the bottom."

I asked the Russian women about their politics -- a great subject of speculation among Israelis. From my sample of two, and I was told that their attitudes are relatively common among the Russians, they could go either way. On the one hand, anything having "socialism" in its name or collectivist in character is somewhere between suspect and anathema. On the other hand, in response to my question, "How would you design the ideal society?", my fluent English speaking informant told me there would be two main elements: first, freedom of speech, of enterprise, of movement—opportunities for the self realization of the individual person; second, provision by the government of a basic standard of life -- employment or income, health care, education and other social services. "Where do you find this most closely approximated?", I asked. The immediate answer: Sweden. A friend who works with Russian Jews in New York City told me a similar story.

This time the new aliyah is in the hands of Likud. It is another major absorption. Lessons have been learned from the past. Has Likud learned them? Only time will tell.

The current approach is to give each newly arriving household $11,000 (US) for one year; three hundred a month is calculated as the housing allowance. The new arrival finds housing on the private market. This avoids institutionalizing the housing and leaves newcomers to the marketplace. Their housing allotment is a generous one and rents are going up to meet it. Most Israelis own their own apartments (if urban) in cooperative or condominium fashion or homes (if rural). The rental market is a small one. Minister of Housing Ariel Sharon is pursuing a program on two fronts: the rapid building of mobile or prefabricated homes and encouraging Israelis to rent rooms to the new arrivals. Already the presence of the Russians is squeezing lower income, typically Likud voting, residents out of the relatively small rental housing market. They, as a matter of fact, are a majority of the tent city residents I encountered.

So which way will the Russians go politically and what will happen politically to those they dislocate if, indeed, there is major dislocation? Those who favor Likud and further right point to the first part of my informant's tale. Those oriented to Labor and further left point to the latter part of the tale. They add that the Russians are socially and intellectually more likely to be at home with Labor's leadership and base.

Perhaps more important than any of this will be the experience the Russians have with the absorbtion process itself and the economic circumstances they find themselves in as a result of it. As to the first, Sharon appears to be making some smart moves. He and Likud are appealing to Israeli's communal values and traditions, still strong here, to make space for the Russians. Older families whose children have left home are asked to rent their rooms; others are asked if they can create space. And, in his strong man fashion, Sharon is bulldozing a housing program through the Likud government. At the same time, I was told that the Government is dealing with emerging immigrant leadership and voluntary associational structures. These seem to be proliferating. There are Russian-Jewish clubs of various kinds developing among the new immigrants: home town clubs (Moscow, Odessa and Kiev were mentioned), interest group organizations and so forth. It appears that a communal infrastructure of social support and mutual aid is already developing in the Russian-Jewish aliyah. Will Likud deal with the right leaders? Frequently the visible "leaders" of immigrant communities, those with more education or those who arrived earlier, are not necessarily the real leaders of these communities. With whom will the absorption process bureaucracy deal if anyone?

Many Israelis are volunteering to teach Hebrew, serve as tutors for young children and guides to the bureaucracy for parents and other adults. One could imagine that if the Russians experience their absorption as a sincere and sacrificial effort on the part of the Israelis that even under arduous economic circumstances they still might remain loyal to Likud.

And yet another factor: if most of those who are the volunteers are from Labor and the Left, will they become the personal influentials who affect the new Russian voters when they cast their ballots? It seems to me that there are far too many imponderables to know outcomes. But if I were in one of the Parties, I would try to apply a lesson from Italy's Northern tier Communist Party: volunteer Party members met Sicilian immigrants as they got off the trains in Milan, Bologna and Turin. They helped the immigrants in their adjustment to their new homes. At election time, they sought the support of those they had befriended. I was told begrudgingly by an Italian Catholic priest that it worked.

Will the economy withstand this new shock? Will the jobs be created? Will inflation be contained? These imponderables may well provide the final tilt to the direction in which the Russians will move. And what if the economy and the housing market don't expand sufficiently to absorb the Russians without a major inflationary spiral? This failure would, I expect, tilt the Russians against the incumbent party. Sharon's arrogance in power makes him an unlikely candidate to democratically incorporate the Russians into the absorption process. A poor absorption process and/or a resistant economy are likely to open the door for Labor or the Left, on the one hand, or for the far Right, on the other, to the Russians. And, if dislocation extends substantially to the poorer Sephardim, Likud's heretofore solid base among them might also be jeopardized. Thus two very distinct constituencies could be "up for grabs" in the not too distant future. The more alienated either becomes, the more volatile it will be politically. If its primary injury is of nationality pride, it is likely to go to the right; if of a sense of economic injustice, it is likely to go to the left.

There is yet another wrinkle to the coming of the Russians. They will tilt things demographically toward the European Jews. They also provide a new Jewish constituency in a society whose higher birth rates are among the ultra Orthodox Jews and the Arabs. The Palestinians fear they will be settled in the West Bank. I don't think so. More likely is that they will   
displace other Jews who may be settled in the West Bank as a means of both relieving the domestic pressure of the tent cities and housing crisis and of further expanding Jewish claims in the West Bank. These Jews, not the Russians, are more likely to move for another reason as well. If the spirit of idealism once rested with the left, it has now shifted to the right. The commitment to expand Israel to the Jordan River comes from the ultra Orthodox religious and the political right. The spirit of pioneerism has shifted from the left to the right. I suspect it is these Jews who will move to new settlements, with the added economic impetus of housing pressures at home.

The whole thing is a tinderbox waiting to explode!

**WELFARE STATE PROGRAMS**

My own growing skepticism of traditional welfare programs gained new support as I listened to the stories of bureaucracy, paternalism, and arrogance that seemed to accompany absorption. So did my conviction that my principal value in politics is democracy. If the free market will further that, fine; if socialism will, fine. Each, however, is the "dependent variable." By "democracy," I mean majority rule and minority rights. With Jefferson, I believe that you can't have a democratic society with vast discrepancies in wealth, so I'm an egalitarian as well. Nor can you have a democratic society with uniformity of thought or social life, so I'm a libertarian too. I wondered also to what extent those socialists who were Marxists added another ingredient to the welfare mix. Did they think that they were using the State to create the "new man?" Were they the vanguard who had to bring these rural, uneducated Moroccans out of their backwardness? I raised some of these questions when I talked about my own work as a community organizer. I'll report on the responses later.

**ATTITUDES TOWARD DEMOCRACY**

Another cause for concern among Israelis is the attitude of their fellow countrymen toward democracy. Educators with whom I met told me of disturbing signs of intolerance among Jewish students toward Arabs. Polls indicate a growing impatience with Parliament and a desire for a strong leader to bring Israel out of its current stalemate. Many told me that if there was a Presidential election now they expected that Ariel Sharon might win it. He is the strong man who led Israel's Army into Lebanon, violating civil control of the military in the course of his brutal occupation there. Many report that Begin went into a deep depression after this, and that his present isolation from the public is a result. Nations threatened with economic insecurity or war often turn to the strong man for salvation. Israel faces both. Will its democratic values and institutions survive? Many people I questioned have strong doubts. But polls and institutions are two different things. The Bill of Rights doesn't fare so well when Americans are asked about their support of it in specific situations such as criminal rights.

Complicating the matter further is the fact that most Israelis do not come from places with a democratic tradition. Western democratic institutions have been superimposed on a people the majority of whom come from third world, rural, non-democratic backgrounds!

**DEMOCRACY**

Israelis point with pride to their maintenance of democratic government in an atmosphere of continuous threats to national security. There is a multi-party system, free speech and press (though a state monopoly on radio and television news coverage), the right of assembly (demonstrations regularly occur on a variety of subjects), a Supreme Court that has defended individual and minority rights against governmental encroachment.

There is, at least it seems to me, a deeper question about democracy in Israel. There is a contradiction between there being a Jewish State and a democratic state. I think there are only two solutions to this contradiction. The first, an unlikely one, is that Israel become a state with no special privileges for Jews. No one seriously believes this option will be adopted. The other is that the Palestinians have their own State. Otherwise one people must hold another in second-class status (as the Israeli Arabs now are) or as prisoners in an occupied land (as the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are).

Further, the democratic fiber of the country is continuously eroded by the occupation. You cannot depersonalize a people, as the occupying police and soldiers must to maintain control, without it taking a toll on those doing it. Either of two things follow: (a) you give up control of people who want independence, or (b) you lose your democracy. The former, of course, flies in the face of legitimate concerns for security that are paramount in the minds of most Israelis and that have been politically exploited most effectively by the Likud bloc. I'll return to this subject when I talk about the conflict.

**HISTADRUT**

A bulwark of democracy in any society is a free, strong, autonomous labor movement. One of Israel's most extraordinary institutions is the Histadrut -- the nation's principal federation of unions, labor owned business enterprises and financial institutions (the "labor sector"), health and welfare services, media, sport, cultural and educational organizations. The socialist initiated kibbutzim and moshavim also belong to Histadrut. One of my major interests in going to Israel was to learn more about the Histadrut.

The labor movement operates in an economy that is facing severe strains: 1/3 of its resources in military preparedness; a 10% unemployment rate; major past bouts with triple digit inflation; housing inflation now running at 30+%; growing income inequality (I was told that after taxes, and adding in all benefits, the income ratio of the top tenth of the population to the bottom tenth is 8:1, compared with 4:1 in some Western European countries.); growing pressures of international low-wage competition; steady privatization of enterprises by the Likud government; Likud hostility to Histadrut, kibbutzim and moshavim; serious debt problems facing most of the kibbutzim; bad kibbutzim investments; and more.

The Histadrut was founded in late 1920 as the workers' organization of the leftist socialist parties. From its inception, it was much more than a labor union narrowly interested in "bread and butter" issues. It was a major part of the organizational and ideological creation of the State of Israel. It now includes about 60% of all Israel's population (families are   
members). Housewives can join, as can small employers (with fewer than five workers).

An individual joins Histadrut directly and then is assigned to one of its roughly 50 unions. Within the Histadrut as a whole, as well as each of its unions, the political parties run slates just as they do for the Knesset (parliament). Members vote for the Party. Depending on its proportion of the vote, people from its slate are seated on the governing bodies of the Histadrut and, in their elections, the individual unions.

The Kupat Holim, the Histadrut run health system, is a giant health maintenance organization (HMO) which sounded to me something like Kaiser (a large California based HMO). I was told that 80% of Israel's population is covered by Kupat Holim. Religious and other labor organizations not a part of Histadrut contract with the Kupat Holim for its services, though some of them have recently begun their own HMOs. Histadrut also administers the country's largest pension fund. I was told that Kupat Holim took health coverage to remote villages and believed it had a responsibility to provide health care to all Israelis. Their success is measured by the fact that only 4% of Israel's population is without health coverage.

Critics told me stories of woe. Again it reminded me of the Kaiser system in the US. At the present time, roughly 15% of the population is in four alternative HMOs, described by members as more responsive, offering better quality and more expensive. Four percent of a worker's wage goes to Histadrut in dues; of that, roughly 65% goes to medical coverage in Kupat Holim.

One third of Israel's economy is in its "labor sector." It includes the majority of the kibbutzim and moshavim (all those except for the ones formed by the religious sector), banks, major industries and public services, a newspaper and other enterprises.

Depending on whom I asked, Histadrut is either a pioneering force for social change, now working through some of its problems of success or a hopelessly corrupt and bureaucratized dinosaur that will soon collapse of its own weight. Everyone with whom I spoke, whether major officials of the Histadrut or critics, agreed on the need for change.

I asked why a labor organization owned enterprises, and how it negotiated with itself when it did. Referring to the first part of the question, a wonderful middle-aged Histadrut leader used his favorite phrase, "it's a problem." But, he was quick to add, not a problem he'd walk away from. Histadrut got into business for several reasons: it   
wanted to create "yardsticks" against which it could measure the performance of privately owned enterprises; it wanted to know from its own experience what was involved in the successful, efficient, running of major businesses; it got into areas that no private enterprise would get into, at least at the time it got into them; it used its experience owning businesses to help it in formulating collective bargaining positions with private and government owned enterprises. But are the labor sector enterprises efficient?

Critics of the labor sector like to say that if you can't get a job in the private sector or in government, you get a job at Histadrut or one of its enterprises. There's reason to believe there's truth in the charge.

The Histadrut and Labor Party are interlocked in intricate ways. During the long period of Labor monopoly of the Government, it is easy to imagine how Party, Government and Histadrut formed a cozy, mutually reinforcing patronage mechanism. In a backhanded way, the Histadrut leaders I met with all but acknowledged this. "We are," one of them said, "adopting a multi-pronged approach to the solution of our problems: worker representation on Boards of Directors; shop floor participation in design and implementation of the work process; incentives for increased productivity and cost saving ideas, and; decentralization of management." To have a real impact, my Histadrut informant said, all these approaches need to be implemented simultaneously. Representation of Boards, by itself, is relatively meaningless both because worker members rotate, and because they lack the overview of management and more experienced Board members. But in combination with other approaches, it is one of the tools for greater efficiency. "Shop floor participation is most important," he said.

Worker-manager conflict is also a problem in Histadrut owned enterprises, "and," one of the critics said, "you can't go on strike or fight militantly against yourself." The Histadrut leaders claim that the unions will fight if the individual union or Histadrut leadership is from one of the more progressive socialist parties or from the more progressive wing of the Labor Party. And they had specific stories to support their case. In one recent case, where management's behavior left little to distinguish it from an anti-union/anti-worker private company, Histadrut organized a strike.

The collective bargaining agreements in the Labor sector call for mediation and arbitration. This, in turn, is administered by an official who may, depending on his politics and the politics of the Party that appointed him, be pro-worker or pro-management in his basic orientation. In the Histadrut, politics is central.

I left these discussions without enough evidence either way to know. The fact that one of the left parties, MAPAM, recently received 9% of the vote in Histadrut's internal elections while only receiving 2 1/2% of the national parliamentary vote suggests member discontent. But the Labor Party received 55% of the vote, and Likud, a party of the right, received more than MAPAM, the party of the left. "Renewal from above," I was told by a critic, "will not work. There isn't the will to make it happen." For this critic, renewal would only take place as part of a more general left-democratic-socialist renewal of Israel's whole social fabric. He hopes that MAPAM will take the lead in bringing that renewal about. That is not an immediate prospect. If anything, Israel's drift is toward the right -- just as it is in most capitalist countries.

**GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS**

Government, we hope, is the tool of modern society to address some of these problems. Israel's parliamentary system is in a crisis. Parties present the voters with national slates of candidates. The voters vote for a Party (not a candidate). Depending on the percentage of votes the Party obtains, it will have candidates, in the order they appear on the ticket, seated in the Parliament. A minimum one percent (1%) of the vote is needed to get one candidate seated. Needless to say, there is intense Party politics involved in the ordering of the slates. The President of the country asks the Party obtaining the largest number of seats in the Parliament to form a government. If no Party obtains a simple majority, a coalition government is in order. This means that either of the two major political formations -- Likud (a conservative coalition) or the Labor Party (social democrat) -- invites the other to form a national unity government or turns to the smaller parties to form a conservative or Labor led government. In the recent stand-off, both Labor and Likud offered deals to the religious parties to join them to create majorities in the Knesset (parliament). The religious Jews control marriage, divorce and other "issues of personal status". They wanted more, including control of certain government ministries and a key voice in defining who is a Jew. The horse-trading by the major political blocs with these small but now crucially important Parties so angered many Israelis that over 300,000 of them demonstrated for a new Constitution earlier this year.

Until 1977, Labor coalitions led the country. They were defeated, I was told, because of the Yom Kippur War -- the surprise attack by Egypt, Syria and Jordan in which 2,500 Israelis were killed in 18 days of fighting and because of the accumulation of grievances against Labor governments that had been building over the years, especially those in the largely Moroccan "Oriental" constituency. In this situation, in 1973 Menachem Begin was able to form a new center-right coalition, which became the Likud. In 1977 there was the Begin-led Likud Government. Since then there have been uneasy alliances at the helm of Israel's governments, with the Likud bloc dominating the period.

Many of the people with whom I spoke participated in the demonstration for a new constitution and believe that a system of constituent elected representatives combined with a stronger Presidency is necessary. They think a written Constitution is needed to assure civil liberties and democratic government. There is a distinguished Supreme Court in Israel, but its powers are limited to individual cases and they do not set precedents, nor can they overrule the parliament. There was great interest in the British and American systems, and in some combination of them as a solution to Israel's political impasse. I wasn't persuaded. While revisions in government form may solve some problems, most of what I saw in Israel was familiar to me from the US. A Bill of Rights is important, but it didn't resist McCarthyism. A two party system didn't prevent a take-over of one of the Parties by its conservative wing and our own religious right. Constituency elections lend themselves to their own kinds of corruption, as the tremendous influence of money in American politics amply shows. The fact that only about 1/3 of Americans participate in non-Presidential year national elections and sometimes less that 20% in local elections ought to point Israelis in another direction!

**CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT**

What is going on within civil society is, to me, more important than the form the government takes. Here there are many conflicting signs. Americans are used to a major role being played by voluntary associations. The Frenchman, Alexis DeToqueville, in his observations of America in the 1830s, marveled at the capacity of Americans to form voluntary associations to meet social needs. These associations were the underlying fabric of society. Whether religious, economic or social in character, they involved people at the local level in defining and managing their own affairs. They created, the French nobleman thought, a democratic citizen -- one who felt and indeed was competent to deal with larger matters because he knew how to deal with the small ones. In Israel there is a very different tradition.   
 The political parties are the organizing instruments of society. Their vitality or lack thereof, their ability to involve people or their efforts to exclude them, their clarity or ambiguity of commitment to democracy are the major determinants of the state of the citizenry.

**THE PARTIES**

Israel was organized by Zionist political parties, which were either "bourgeois nationalist", socialist or religious. The political parties remain central institutions in the society. They bear little resemblance to American Parties. They look more like the parties of Europe, but this similarity ignores their central role in the founding of a recent new nation. Roughly speaking, there are two major party groupings, Labor and Likud. Each is, itself, an amalgam of earlier parties who formed coalitions with one another to create a bloc, which would be more effective against its opposition. There are some small middle class parties, one of which is "liberal" in the sense that it is for a totally free marketplace economy. Religious parties represent a segment of the ultra Orthodox population, but they are not easily placed on a right-left spectrum either in their economics or their views on dealing with the Palestinians and the Arab world. There are some small right-wing parties and some left wing parties, of which MAPAM is the most important. MAPAM's international secretariat was a most gracious host for an important part of my trip and I had the opportunity and privilege of meeting some of the Party's major leaders.

Party power is maintained by the role of the Party in creating the slates that are presented by the Parties to the electorate. This is a function of Party Central Committees. For the member of Knesset who ignores Party discipline, there is always the possibility of being eliminated from or placed low on the list. But the lines between Party and Government become merged by the many patronage positions available to Parties if they are in power -- either as a governing Party or as part of a governing coalition. Cabinet and key Ministry positions, in coalition governments, are negotiated between the coalition partners with parties ultimately naming their people to the agreed upon Cabinet slots.

The more I talked with Israelis the more I became persuaded that this web of patronage, Party, government and state is largely responsible for the increasing alienation of Israelis from their political institutions. It is not that there are major scandals. These are rare. Rather, there is an imperceptible corruption of the spirit of the parties. This extends to a corruption in the relationship of parties to their members and constituents. Party activists get jobs in the government and, for the left parties, in the Histadrut. The jobs have "perks": cars, time to do political work, travel, expense accounts. It is all very subtle. Add to this the fact that, despite some reforms, formation of Party slates remains rather centralized within Party apparatuses and you have the makings of an increasingly alienated electorate. More and more Israelis call themselves "independent", and there appears to be great voter fluctuation and diminishing party loyalty.

**MAPAM**

I spent a fair amount of time with MAPAM, a feisty, relatively small, left socialist Party. Until 1951, MAPAM supported the Soviet Union. From its beginning, MAPAM argued for civil rights for Arabs, and Arabs today play important leadership roles in the Party. The Prague trials of Jewish Communists and Stalin's "Jewish doctor's plot" jarred MAPAM out of the pro-Soviet camp, leaving the field to Israel's small Communist Party.

After isolation on the left, MAPAM did join the Labor "alignment" to be part of a governing coalition in 1969. MAPAM decided to bite the bullet and left the Labor bloc in 1984; but even here there was a hedge since many MAPAM activists are full timers in the Histadrut.

Since then MAPAM has successfully built contacts and membership among younger political activists, renewed its strength in Histadrut, winning 9% in recent Histadrut elections, and begun to articulate a democratic socialist vision for Israel's economy. With socialism in disrepair around the world, I was interested in how MAPAM would try to restore its egalitarian, democratic promise. They have no pat answers. Decentralization, emphasis on 'd' democracy, worker participation, grassroots membership involvement in the Party itself, greater reliance on market as opposed to central planning mechanisms, deep concern for growing economic inequality in Israel, a strong peace plank and a spirit of international solidarity are all part of their vision and plans. In conversations with non-Party people, I was told several times that, "I don't always agree with MAPAM but it's one of the few Parties I really respect."

But MAPAM's new directions themselves raise new problems. They still see themselves as a party that does things for the people. I was not surprised that they could win votes in the Histadrut from national Likud voters. Workers throughout the world select radicals as shop stewards and union representatives while voting for much more moderate politicians in governmental elections. MAPAM is also becoming intrigued by mass media as a means for electoral campaigning. In and of itself, it is simply another campaign method. Question: what happens when the electorate is treated as a market, the voters as buyers and the party as a product you buy?

MAPAM, I was told by one of its activists, is not yet patient enough to work with people on the small issues that concern them in their daily lives. The Party's view is that these are problems for the municipality to solve. The top people in the Party, this new left activist told me, are interested in the big picture. They would rather be in a delegation going to visit heads of state in a Western European capital or Beijing than be thinking about Party building through local community work. Indeed MAPAM is proud of its internationalism, and Party leaders with whom I spoke think this is a strength of their history.

One of MAPAM's younger leaders plays a key role in one of the tent cities in Jerusalem. I visited with him at its site. In many ways he is the organizer there. He is at the center of a leadership group in the tent city, and an invaluable link for the tent city dwellers to the local government on whose city council he sits and on which the residents rely to set up water and other services. But, and I will return to this distinction later, he is in other ways a broker and not an organizer. Unlike the organizing tradition that I come from in the States, he is not accountable to the people in whose behalf he is working. His sincerity and the continuity of his work with them have by this time credentialed him. At the same time, they must also understand that he has an agenda of building MAPAM. Even if this is not his agenda, it would be hard to imagine the residents not thinking it to be so. Ironically, his expectation that his work will translate into votes is minimal. "If this leads to votes for MAPAM," he told me, "it will be over a long period of time. Most of the people with whom I'm working are Sephardim; they are Likud supporters."

**PARTICIPATION VERSUS REPRESENTATION**

Representative institutions and organizations involve one group of people serving in behalf of another. Thus parties "represent" those who vote for them. To the extent that their voters are a "market", the political party has to sell itself to the people in its market. To the question, "What are you going to do for me?" or, "What are you going to do about this?", the party answers with its platform, promises, slogans and candidates.

Participatory institutions are those in which members act collectively in their own behalf. While they may have full-time personnel who work for them, the central task of the full time staff is to assist the members in the pursuit of their aims. In a participatory organization, the question asked is, "What are we going to do about this?" The participatory organization is not a market; rather it is a "public" -- that is a body characterized by continuing conversation, debate and discussion among and between members as they make decisions about how they will act on their interests and values.

The tendency in unions, neighborhood groups, and similar organizations is for the participatory quality of these organizations to erode in the face of full-timers becoming advocates. How often, for example, do we hear trade unionists ask, "What's the union going to do for me?" Implicit is the idea that "The Union" is something other than those asking the question. What they usually mean is the full-time people who operate out of the union's headquarters. They are "The Union."

While modern society requires representative institutions, it also requires participatory institutions. Their absence is characterized by increasing control of social and political life by a relative handful of professionals who act for others. Marginalized from the rights, responsibilities and joys of significant citizenship, most people abandon the public arena for a private one. One's humanity now is expressed as a consumer of goods and services rather than as a co-creator of communal life.

This process is rapidly at work in Israel.

**THE LIMITS OF POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL PARTIES**

Whatever the many differences between the United States, Brazil (the place of a trip I took last year) and Israel, one of the common themes in all of these places is disillusionment with politicians and political parties. We expect, I believe, too much and too little from both.

Political parties are organizations of men (there are few women in key positions in any of them) who want to run the government. They are surrounded by people who have ideas they want implemented, contracts or grants they want to receive, status or appointments they want conferred or a desire to be part of the rough and tumble of the political world. In the course of things, since it is the professional politicians with most at stake in the outcome of the political game these professionals are the ones who, over time, dominate the parties. Indeed in the United States, there   
are places where the Parties are little more than shells, which provide the umbrella under which candidates organize their campaigns.

To get elected, politicians make promises. They tell the voters what they hope (and think) the voters want to hear. To the extent that the voters are independently organized, there can be a two-way conversation: politicians listen to organized groups of constituents and state a program, which they hope will appeal to the groups. The more fragmented the groups (single issue politics), the more the politician is likely to say different things to different groups. The less organized the electorate is as a whole, the more likely the politician is going to rely on one-way communication to reach it. Since this is increasingly the case in modern societies, politicians increasingly rely on polls and mass media: they use the poll to find out what people want to hear; they buy time in mass media to tell the people what the polls indicated they want to hear. The rub, of course, is that it takes a lot of money to do the polls and get the message into the mass media. The politicians become indebted to those who pay their way. In the absence of any other kind of organization, we shouldn't be surprised.

What is surprising is that reformers think that by tinkering with political party structures much different is going to happen. The reformers think that by limiting expenditures, by limiting the number of terms of incumbents, by having constituency parties instead of national slates, by presidential rather than parliamentary forms and by any of an endless number of other proposals, something fundamental is going to change. I think not. The problem is deeper. The politicians and the parties are only as good as the civil society in which they operate and for whom they seek to speak and govern.

**COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION: THE EXPRESSION OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

In Brazil, the progressive wing of the Catholic Church, Base Christian Communities, a number of movements (rural and urban landless, women, Afro-Brazilians, Indian, favella dwellers and so on) emerged during the military period to give expression to the demands of the dispossessed and disenfranchised. Many of these forces, with the "opening" to democracy, are now expressed in the Workers Party. And a conflict is emerging between the Party and the base groups from which it sprang. Will the Party lead or will the organizations of the base lead?

In Poland, Solidarity emerged in the heart of a totalitarian society, based in the working class and the Catholic Church as the voice of almost the entire society against the Party elite and apparatus. Prior to his own entry into the political fray, Lech Walesa said it was a mistake for Solidarity to have ever entered the government. That he decided against his own advice only tells us of the temptations of the electoral process. As Solidarity becomes confused about its role (is it the voice of civil society in relation to the government, or is it a Party seeking to become the government), it splinters into political parties (whether so named or not).

In the Basque Region of Spain, Mondragon is one of the world's most elaborate systems of worker owned enterprises. They are unaffiliated with any of the Region's political parties. When they deliberated over the question of such affiliation, they discovered and decided that to affiliate was so divisive internally that they could not figure out how to do it without destroying what they had so carefully built.

In the United States there is an emerging community organizing movement. These organizations are broadly based, multi-issue, democratic and committed to functioning as a voice of their constituents in relation to institutions of business and government. They are not interested in being the government. Rather, they want to make such fundamental values as equality, liberty, justice and solidarity important to the decision makers in government; they want to hold politicians accountable to these values and policy decisions that derive from them. These organizations are rooted in a specific concept of "community" -- "a group of people, sharing a common tradition, who support and challenge each other to act powerfully to affirm, defend and advance their values and interests."

In these community organizations, members ask about particular issues, "What are we going to do about it?" In relation to politicians and parties, people ask, "What are they going to do about it?"

In Israel, a society that was largely organized by political parties, everyone complains about the failure of the parties but expects that the parties are the sources of solutions. I don't think so. I was struck by the absence of community organizations, as I know them. I think Israel is ripe for the kind of organizing that I know in the US and that is emerging throughout the world. In Haifa, I ran across one exception to my general experience. At the Leo Beck Community Center, people in neighborhoods are organized to act in their own behalf. My impression is that the organizers are just beginning to probe the potentials of this kind of organizing. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to actually go out into the neighborhood and see what they were doing.

**COMMUNITY**

I was deeply impressed with the sense of social solidarity that remains in Israel. It is supported by ideological factors, particularly the ancient sense of peoplehood that is renewed by Zionism; the memory of the holocaust; the recent period of nation building; the national sense of seige; the fact that most people own apartments in cooperative or condominium manner and have to work together to manage their buildings; the ties of extended family, clan and village that have yet to be broken by modern society; the shared sense of pain that exists for almost all Israelis who either lost a family member or friend in one of the wars and the major role played by collectives and cooperatives in shaping the State of Israel.

I was told by an American woman who made aliyah and who had married a Sabra (Israeli born) that when she and her husband were separated and going through a two year divorce there wasn't a shabat (Friday night) meal in which she wasn't invited by neighbors to join them. This seemed typical of the neighborliness I was again and again told about.

And there is a crisis in community. Many people with whom I spoke are deeply disturbed by the growth of consumerism, the impact of advertising and the decline of social solidarity, the penetration of Israel's economy by multi-nationals which have little concern for local affiliations, sentiment or control. For example, an international businessman offered to buy two Israeli soccer teams, each in economic trouble, if they agreed to merge -- this despite the fact that each had a strong separate identity and strong fan loyalty. Civic participation appears to be declining though there seems also to be still strong commitments to help integrate new immigrants into the society. Growing economic inequality is also eroding the egalitarian basis for Israel's strong sense of social solidarity.

In a sense, there never was one community. There were, and are, many: Ashkenazi, Yemenites, Sephardim, new Russians, Arabs; the secular, conservative, liberal and Orthodox religious; socialists, nationalists and liberals. On the surface, the many communities look like the interest groups and pluralism of Western countries. But beneath this, I was told over and over again about the deeper commonalities that Israelis share...and of the fear that these are being lost.

I was told by a thoughtful MAPAM activist that he thought the Likud bloc was better able to capture the Israeli desire for patriotism, nationhood and community. "The Left," he said, "is still captured by the universalism of the Enlightenment. It does not know how to treasure the particular traditions, culture and special histories of the different sub-groups who make up Israel." Shades of Ronald Reagen and his cultural themes...and the inability of liberals and radicals in America to understand let alone recapture them. He continued by telling me that he thought the themes of patriotism, nation, family, clan, village and pride in all of these had to be given a new content by the left if it was ever to build the Israel he was committed to.

I believe that the universal values of liberty, equality justice and fraternity can be combined with the particular values of family, religion, place, ethnic and cultural group. That is the challenge of our time in the world...and it is the challenge in Israel. Without it, I think the country will continue to drift to the right. People who are unconnected to the universal values by major, culturally specific, mediating institutions, such as unions, religious groups and voluntary associations are susceptible to the appeals of demagogues -- either from the left or the right.

**KIBBUTZIM**

Nothing tried more than the kibbutz movement to consciously create community -- a group of people, sharing a common tradition, who support and challenge each other to act effectively to affirm, defend and advance their values and interests.

The kibbutzim are collectives. They were started by one of three political groupings: religious Zionists, social democrats or moderate socialists, and left socialists. Originally they were all rural, and most of them still are. Many began is desert areas that the kibbutz founders reclaimed for agricultural development. They began as a group of people working together to create, almost literally, something out of nothing. The pioneers would settle on a piece of land, drain swamps if they needed to, build houses, prepare the land, irrigate and fertilize it, plant and harvest it, sell their products, share the income and reinvest what they could to diversify and expand their crops. Initial capital was provided by the political grouping that sponsored them, and it was typically minimal.

(There was, however, an unacknowledged problem: some of the land on which the kibbutz were developed had been Palestinian land. And some of it was not barren when the kibbutz founders claimed it.)

Today most kibbutzim are no longer solely agricultural. Some of them have comfortable guest houses for tourists. They own and operate assembly plants or industrial enterprises. Because of some bad borrowing and investment decisions made by many of them when inflation rates were moving faster than interest rates, and markets seemed endless, a substantial number of them now face serous debt servicing problems—much like Third World countries servicing their debts to international banks.

The typical kibbutz has a couple or few hundred family members. That makes 800 to 1,200 individuals. In addition, there may be volunteers who com from other countries to spend some time on the kibbutz. They work to earn their keep. In the beginning, everyone worked on the kibbutz. This is no longer the case, with some members commuting to city jobs, though their income goes into the general kitty, and those working on the kibbutz receive no cash income. Work is rotated, so no one is supposed to be stuck in the worst jobs. Men and women were to share equally in the jobs, but many (though not all) of the women with whom I spoke indicated that women ended up more often than not doing what was traditionally “women’s work”. Elected leaders also do manual labor, which is highly valued by the movement. All basic needs (housing, health, clothing, communal eating, education, social, athletic and cultural activity) are organized and paid for by the kibbutz. Individual special talents are recognized, and time and support given to their cultivation. For example, if one could paint or play music he or she could work in the studio as well as in the field. And it was all too close, confining and rigid for many of the members. From this arose many of the issues that continue to be debated in the movement.

“What if someone wanted to paint but someone else didn’t think he was serious about it?”, I asked. “It goes to a committee.” In part, there are semi-objective standards. For example, if your work is shown in galleries, or is sold. Or, if you are certified by the artist’s guild. “But what about the innovator?” That’s where it gets tricky. You have to convince a committee. I wasn’t sure that the young Chagall could have. Despite my reservations, there is ample evidence that the kibbutzim seek to nourish artistic talent among their young. Kibbutz people with whom I spoke make a sharp distinction between individuality and individualism. The former, they say, is nourished in the kibbutz. “We are attentive to individual talents, interests and needs,” one of them said, “but we draw a line at a private individualism which is pursued with no regard for the collective. This private individualism is mass media induced; it is marketed to produce consumers. You can be a painter here, but you also should participate in the General Assembly.” They acknowledge mistakes of the past in which any pursuit of individual interest was viewed as a negative departure from the communal norms. “But we have learned from these mistakes. We now struggle to find the proper balance between the individual and the group.”

The kibbutz founders believed that the realization of the individual was achieved in his or her interaction with the group. The newer members and the younger generation, with exceptions of course, favor diminished group control no matter how democratic it is. For the collectivists, individuality is achieved in the give and take of group life, with democratic decisions being the final arbiter. For their sharpest critics, individuality is realized in the private pursuit of one’s interests. The arbiter is the marketplace which is at once more isolateing from group intervention and less forgiving for those unable or unwilling to master it.

Kibbutz members acknowledge other errors as well. In their emphasis on equality, for example, it was thought that anyone could do anything. At one kibbutz, I was told in all seriousness, a member was nominated to be the kibbutz sculptor. “But,” he protested, “I have no artistic ability.” The response? “Anyone can do anything if he puts his mind to it.” This kind of rigidity is now gone from most kibbutzim, I was told. Further, each kibbutz has its own character. No two of them are alike.

In its ideal, the kibbutz was an egalitarian extended family “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need,” was its slogan. And t least the four kibbutzim I visited all struggled to realize this ideal. In their struggles, the kibbutzim dealt with issues of power, privacy vs. communalism, the individual vs. the group, sexism, ideology and practice, equality vs. freedom, family vs collective, and on and on. They were, and in some ways remain, laboratories for social experimentation. And there are positives and negatives.

For example, in this egalitarian micro-society what is to be done by families who receive extras from friends or relatives who aren’t on the kibbutz? If I have a stereo provided by my uncle, and no one else has one, what does that do? Consumption opportunities offered by outside income was a big issue in the early days of the kibbutz movement. In those times, each member received a small and equal amount for “spending money” which was to incude vacation, special tings for around the house, and any other extras. Today’s allotments, at least in some of the kibbutzim, are in the $5,000 - $8,000 range per person.

I asked one kibbutz member what would happen with an elderly person who no longer was able to work or live alone. Would that person be sent to a nursing home if she or he didn’t want to go? There was no questions in this member’s mind. The people of the kibbutz would take care of this member, and there would be no pressure to go to a nursing home. “She made her contribution to us,” I was told, “and we have our responsibility to her.”

“What’s the biggest problem for you in kibbutz life,” I asked. “Gossip,” she said without pausing a moment. Despite their sophistication, these are little villages. Everyone knows everyone’s business, and talk about it!

In an earlier time, if you wanted to eat in your own apartment rather than in the communal dining hall you were considered anti-social. It was talked about. There was social pressure to eat with everyone. At the same time, you were never alone. If you were looking for a discussion, there was always one to be had. If you wanted to hang out with friends, they were always there. You could go to a game room or a library. At first, TVs were just in the common areas.

Positives and negatives.

**KIBBUTZ AND CHILDREN**

Children are highly valued in the kibbutz. One of the hottest questions was how they would be raised and educated. In the earlier days, children went to nurseries shortly after birth. They were reared by “trained and caring” kibbutz members. Again, there was work rotation, though in the schools teachers were assigned—generally kibbutz members. Parents might visit their child in the nursery. Mothers would get work breaks to nurse their infants. When the children got a little older, they would go to their parents’ house at 4:00 p.m., share the communal dinner with them, then return to the “children’s house” to sleep. The center of life was their cohort group and those whose job it was to raise and educate them.

I was told by one 35 year old that his cohort group from nursery and early school days was the most important group in his life. His best friends were and are in this group. They were like “brothers and sisters”. Though now scattered, they were regularly in touch. He is a throw-back to the first kibbutz generation who opposed the idea of children living at home. He has a carefully thought out position on this. “The group of peers was very close. We cared for each other; we challenged and supported each other. We were raised and educated by caring and loving kibbutz members whose mission in life was to raise and educate children. They were trained. How many kids do you know whose parents just sit them in front of the TV? We didn’t have any of that. Ours was the richest childhood you could imagine. Being raised in this setting created strong character. Children in the cohort groups learned leadership and interdependence. The kibbutz produced a socially integrated personality.” This experience, he told me, was repeated in many of the kibbutzim. “That’s why,” he said, “kibbutzim provide such a high percentage of leaders in government, in the Army, in other positions. You weren’t just taught subjects; you were taught to be a person.” Unlike many of his generation, he is a traditionalist regarding the debate over the future of the kibbutz movement. He finally left the kibbutz when, he said, “it got to be too much like the rest of society. If it was going to be like that, I decided I might as well leave it.” He is now a successful businessman, living on a moshav just outside Tel Aviv.

While the kibbutzim account for about 3.5 percent of Israel’s population, they account for two or three times that percent of leaders in parliament, the military, and other positions of social responsibility. Their impact far exceeds their numbers.

Upon completion of high school at the kibbutz, children go on to do a compulsory three-year stint in the military. Then, if they want and have the talent, they can go on to college. The kibbutz will support them in higher education. In exchange, it is expected that the student will return to the kibbutz, but many kibbutzim insist that the college graduate (or person returning from military service) spend a y ear traveling (expenses paid by the kibbutz) and working elsewhere before making the commitment to apply for membership in the kibbutz. While one of the big problems for the kibbutzim is retaining their youth, they also know that the commitment must be an informed and voluntary one.

Critics think of children’s houses and communal education as if it were turning over the raising of children to some distant institution, like the state. From the point of view of the kibbutz member, the children were being raised in an extended family, whether this was a biological family or not. Nothing could be more different from the image of an uncaring professional for whom this was a job that ended when the bell rang.

But this system has, by and large, been abandoned. One of the sources of pressure against it was mothers who had not themselves grown up on a kibbutz. Raised in traditional families, they expected to provide the same for their children. Typically now children spend from 4;00 p.m. on at home. This, of course, raised big economic problems for the kibbutz because they had to re-design houses that were built for two or at most a few adults (one bedroom or two) so that children could have sleeping space as well. Only a few of the more radical kibbutz have maintained the old system.

**KIBBUTZ GOVERNANCE**

The membership as a whole of the kibbutz is organized in a General Assembly (GA). In most kibbutzim, this GA meets weekly. The Assembly makes all policy decisions. Anything can be brought up to the Assembly. As the initial communal spirit has eroded, with more emphasis on the personal and private, participation in the Assemblies has also declined. In some, attendance is as sparse as35 or 50 people at the regular meetings. In some, when a major issue is being discussed the meeting is video-taped and people can watch the meeting on their screens. Voting is over a two- or three day period, so you just pick up a ballot and cast it.

The GA chooses leaders for committee work and general leadership. Since leaders are often the object of sharp criticism after putting in lots of volunteer hours, people sometimes have to be drafted. Social pressure is used to get a reluctant person to serve. On the other hand, there appear to be some perks associated with leadership positions. For example, kibbutz residents don’t own cars; there are communal cars, and you have to sign up for them. Kibbutz officers have organizational reasons to drive the cars—and they an piggy-back personal uses on business trips. In a small glass house everything is seen. It is these small things that are one of the major sources of gossip, jealousy and envy. Those I met who had left a kibbutz and not returned raised these issues when they described reasons for leaving.

Each kibbutz is related to an association which was organized by the political grouping sponsoring the kibbutz. These associations have full-time professional staffs which provide all kinds of technical assistance, educational programs, lobbying services, research, product marketing and otherwise support their member units. The three associations are loosely tied together in a national federation.

**KIBBUTZ AND THE ‘NEW MAN’**

The socialist promise was that with the creation of a new society there would also emerge a “new man”. He was to be more social and less individualistic; more cooperative and less competitive; more developed as a full person and less a “mass man”. I was interested in how the “new man” fared in the kibbutz movement for here, unlike in socialist or communist societies of the West or East there was no vast bureaucracy. Answers to this question shared some commonalities. “You will know a kibbutznik if you spent time with an Israeli who is one,” I was told. He is more direct, honest, perhaps blunt and, at the same time, is likely to be lacking in social graces. He is more socially responsible, likely to volunteer when something needs to be done, willing to share with others. He is also more private and introverted. One person told me he has a strong superego but a weak ego.

Because kibbutz people tend to hang out together they are sometimes characterized as snobbish or arrogant. This, I was told, is really a defense because of their insecurity in the presence of city people. But it makes them vulnerable to attack as elitists. And this is evidently one of the Likud ploys against the left. The Likud, I was told, hates the kibbutzim. Whether the feeling is that deep or not, it is a fact that the current government is unwilling to bail the kibbutzim out of their economic distress while Labor governments were willing to provide support to the movement.

**KIBBUTZ AND THE FUTURE**

Kibbutzim see themselves as making an historic and continuing contribution to Israel’s development in two major areas: (1) they were and remain important economic units in the country; (2) their disproportionate contribution of leadership in many aspects of the nation’s life.

The factors, I was told, contributing to kibbutz success are small size, careful recruiting, participatory democracy, economic viability, strong sense of community and a conscious living of values.

The single most difficult problem facing the kibbutzim is their economic plight. When Labor’s Shimon Peres was Finance Minister during the national unity government, a deal was negotiated in which some debt was forgiven, interest halved on the remainder, and the time for payment extended. It was a pretty good deal, but not good enough for many of the collectives. Their debt is just too great. Many of them are now struggling. Individual discretionary payments are being reduced. Promised new housing is being postponed. Other improvements are deferred.

The central institutions are in difficulty as well, with staff cutbacks affecting some services they provided to the individual member kibbutzim.

Because of all this, one person said, “some kibbutzim may go under. It will be very painful. These are living, vital organisms and we are all part of a larger living organism. If one dies, all of us will die a little.”

**KIBBUTZ, SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY**

While the kibbutz people feel maligned about the way they were used by Begin as symbols of elitism, I found a distinct strain of something akin to elitism in my conversations with many of the Ashkenazi kibbutzim socialists. Combined with their egalitarianism, commitment to free speech and communal orientation is a contradictory strain. They are missionaries intent on converting the heathen to their way of thinking. And their way of being missionaries bears some resemblance to the worst of Christian missionaries who believed that their mission was to save those who had not yet found their way to The Truth. I think this had a lot to do with the abysmal failure of the Labor Government to integrate the “Oriental Jews” into Israel’s society. Despite a minority view, the policy pursued was one of assimilation: the Oriental Jew was “backward” and was to be incorporated into the socialist project.

Leninism fully rationalizes this view: the vanguard becomes a temporary dictatorship while society is being liberated from its bourgeois remnants. The socialist mentality, in this understanding, is not automatically created by a socialist revolution. The period of dictatorship is one in which a new culture is instilled into the proletariat while, at the same time, the economy is being transformed from one of capitalism to socialism. It logically followed that monopoly over culture to further political aims was entirely justified. Indeed not to do so would be to lead to a return to capitalism. From this perspective, control of the superstructure by the vanguard party was a necessary condition to create the new society.

I’ve come to the conclusion that there are aspects of this view in most varieties of socialism. If socialism comes before democracy there is a belief, it seems to me, that the socialists who know must educate the masses (who don’t know) to the better way. What follows in almost all the socialists I met in Israel, and with almost all those I know at home, is a tremendous emphasis on formal education: pamphlets, speaking, forums, articles, lectures, books, analysis, and so on. Consciousness raising is the central idea. The important thing is to understand what is meant her by education: we have the correct idea; we have to import this to you.

The democratic project is a different one. One of its strains shares most of the basic values of the socialists: liberty, equality, fraternity (or solidarity or community) and justice. But its other central emphasis is on the participation of the people in creating their own history. Thus the democratic emphasis is on the creation of those institutions which maximize the opportunities for all people to decide on the character of their society. From this point of view, the organization of the economic institutions of society is a more pragmatic question. For any given sector of the economy, the question would be asked, “How should this sector be owned and operated in order to maximize the opportunities for citizens to create their own lives and communities? And the answers will vary: private ownership; consumer and producer cooperatives; local, state and national government ownership. Within whatever mechanism of ownership there is there will be free, autonomous trade unions. Further, there will be elaborated means for worker participation in the structure of the work process and the decisions of firms and industries as to marketing, research and investment.

In the democratic project, education is understood as a participatory and situational process. Teachable moments arise as on is in the experience of life. Since most teaching, from this point of view, takes place as a reflection on, and evaluation of, experience, it must take the form of dialog. If the socialist image of teaching is the agitator making an impassioned speech to the masses (as in the Italian film classic, *The Organizer*), the lecturer in a classroom or lecture hall, or the leader presenting a marathon evaluation of the revolution to a crowd of tens of thousands, the democratic image of teaching is a conversation in which, at best, the teacher or leader is engaged in asking critical questions, leading a discussion and is him- or herself also a learner because everyone has a contribution to make. Further the questions are questions “the student” is asking, not those someone else thinks s/he ought to be asking. This approach does not negate the value of abstract or conceptual knowledge, nor of previous experience. It does, however, require that the teacher cannot impose conclusions and must fully recognize the possibility that the students may come to a conclusion different from the teacher’s—and that this doesn’t make them “backward”. Further, it is likely that the outcome of a conversation will be something synthetic: the teacher’s ideas will themselves be elaborated, and might be modified, even if their general contours might be followed.

The collapse of state socialism with its centrally planned economies, along with the troubles of social democratic bureaucracies such as were developed by the Israel Labor governments and the Histadrut, make democracy the central questions for socialists today. The free marketplace answer is simple: the competition of privately owned enterprises is the best means to insure freedom and to produce and distribute goods and services. But the free marketeers fail to deal with the destruction of community and the development of inequality that follow from a system in which the pursuit of maximum profit is the dominant mode of social organization. Thus in post-Communist Hungary one already reads about a new wealthy class emerging, engaging in the worst of conspicuous consumption, while there is growing unemployment as socialist guarantees of jobs are eliminated from the economy. While some compensations may be developed with welfare state programs financed by redistributive taxes, and while these may create a safety net, the welfare state fails to come to grips with the deeper questions of participation, community and equality. It only says that the marginalized shouldn’t suffer. They are, however, not quite fully human, so are stigmatized as those who can’t make it on their own. Democratic citizenship is undermined by a system that so institutionalizes the invidious distinctions of social class.

The marketplace concept of democracy creates its own elitism. Voters are buyers of alternative public policies and personalities. As such, they are to be sold. They are, then, consumers not creators of public life. This, of course, leads to vast abuses when the market is a mass one. Increasingly in western “democracies” we see the phenomenon of polls being taken by parties and issue organizations who then package their candidate or issue to look like what they buyers (voters) want to see or hear. Once in power, however, the candidate and party are constrained by the interests of those who paid for the campaign and the actual realities of governing. The more the intermediary institutions of public life are eroded, for they are places in which people who know one another can have conversations, the greater the effectiveness of the means of mass manipulation. It is precisely this erosion of strong, voluntary institutions that so characterizes American public life today. What is done by business to sell goods is done by parties and candidates to sell themselves. And it is increasingly imitated by unions to sell workers on the benefits of collective bargaining, and by churches to sell God. What a far cry from the town hall meeting and Jefferson’s image of democratic citizenship1 The fundamental distinction is between markets, where people buy and sell, and publics, where people discuss.

I came away from my trp with the feeling that the Israeli left might successfully address some of these issues. As an institution, the kibbutz has all the necessary elements for democratic participation. It is small, already governed by an assembly of the body as a wole, is an economic unit, has granted to it the right to educate its own children (within the national curriculum), and includes in its culture many of the ideological (value) elements of freedom, equality and community. MAPAM, the left socialist party which is the organizing instrumentality for one of the three federations of kibbutzim, is itself in ideological flux as it tries to integrate the ideas of democracy and socialism. Other left parties, more directly heirs to the “new left”, are themselves wrestling with these questions.

Such a mission for the kibbutz movement might contribute to a recovery of its original idealism. At the present time, economic problems combine with a lost sense of purpose to erode the moral fabric of the kibbutzim. Further, the kibbutzim are not as central to Israel as they were during the Labor governments when they had direct lines of influence to the makers of government policy. This marginalization might provide a needed time-out.

A last note on the relationship of local, participatory institutions to political parties. On one of the kibbutzim I visited there is an evening discussion with guests led by a member of the kibbutz. I was struck by a comment our speaker made on the political parties. “They,” she said referring to the parties, “maintain and foster the division between Oriental and Ashkenazi Jews for their own electoral purposes. We have to learn to meet people as people. We do not benefit from this division.”

**RELIGION**

Israel lives in a contradiction. It is a democratic secular state, and it is a Jewish state that has given substantial powers to its religious leaders and institutions.

In Israel, the Rabbinical Courts Law of 1953 granted religion a monopoly over “issues of personal status,” such as marriage, adoption and divorce. The religious parties also gained a major voice in determining the answer to the question, “Who is a Jew?” They increasingly want rigorous and religious criteria to be met. Thus if a conversion is not to the liking of the Rabbinical Court, the convert may be deemed not to be Jewish. This becomes very important for people making aliyah to Israel. What if they arrive only to find that they aren’t Jews?

As election returns have become closer in Israel, so have the religious parties become more significant. Both Labor and Likud court the religious parties in order to create parliamentary majorities. This, of course, gives these parties great leverage in matters of significance to t hem.

At the same time, Israel manifests what is a world wide trend: the rise of religious fundamentalism. This revolt against modernism, secularism and its attendant uncertainties is a major theme in the Middle East. Islamic fundamentalists rival Jewish fundamentalists in their intolerance of anyone who disagrees with t hem.

I came to deeply appreciate the idea of division of church and state. I believe hat the God of Jews, Christians and Moslems cares deeply about the spiritual and material life of humanity. This God is on the side of social and economic justice. But this God doesn’t take positions on the wars, issues, rituals, beliefs and other things which fundamentalists would claim. Humans are left to work these out. That is the nature of our freedom. For believers, it seems to me, the task is to prayerfully determine whether or not they are doing what God expects of them, to measure public actions and policies by the standard of how well or poorly they serve freedom, equality, justice and community.

Some secularists want religion to be quiet on these matters, thinking that when religion speaks it is a violation of the separation of church and state. I disagree. Religion plays a major role in shaping the moral character of a people and their governmental institutions. The prohibition should be against government saying that one religion is right or better.

Fundamentalists, on the other hand, want religion ever present, prescriptive and proscriptive. They are unable to distinguish between standards of conduct and broad values, on the one hand, and specific policies, practices or acts on the other. The latter are best left to a democratic political process which recognizes the contribution of prophetic or religious presence, but decides things on the basis of compromise and mutual respect between people who may follow different prophets or claim none as their own.

On my return to the United States, I had the opportunity to hear Msgr. Guy Thomazeau, Bishop of Meaux (France). He said it clearly: “Never say God is on our side. That is the arrogant path. Rather, let us pray that we are on God’s side.”

In Israel, the fundamentalists have increasing influence. Even more disturbing to me is the fact that they seem to be the people who are most able to inspire sacrifice and commitment. Part of the crisis of the secular left is that it no longer has the capacity to inspire. Today’s settlements in the occupied areas are largely populated by conservative fundamentalists. I think the Israeli left now lacks the capacity to generate such commitment.

II

**THE CONFLICT**

I met Itzak on a side trip to Sharm El Sheikh, where I snorkeled and took my third ever in my life SCUBA dive. The dive was a great and beautiful experience. And Itzak was a memorable character: voluble, lively, opinionated, he was in many ways the classic stereotype of the Israeli. And he is a great story teller.

I asked Itzak how long he had been diving. “I dove as a young man,” he said, “then got married and my wife asked me to stop. I didn’t start again until after oour divorce of a few years back. I discovered that diving is my first love. It is magnificent, beautiful, a whole new world opens before your eyes. I don’t know how I went so long without it.”

Itzak returned to diving about five years ago at Ras Muhammed, one of the world’s best known and most beautiful diving spots. As is internationally done, the diver always goes down with a partner. In a dive boat, if you are single you are simply paired with another person on the trip. Itzak’s partner turned out to be an Egyptian.

“When you come up from your dive, you always want to talk with your partner about what you saw. So we started talking, and one thing led to another. We discovered that we had each served in the respective armies of our nations and that we had been on opposite sides in the last war. As we kept talking we discovered that we had been in the same battles. And as the conversation proceeded, we found we could finish each other’s stories because we had been face-to-face in our battle positions.

By this time the bond of the dive and the night’s talk was too deep to end the conversation. Instead the two men kept talking. The conversation didn’t end until the next day.

“We ended up staying up all night. After dinner, we broke a bottle and drank and talked. At dawn, we shook hands on a business partnership and have been in the dive business ever since. My partner operates out of Cairo; I operate out of Eilat. We meet here at Sharm El Sheikh.”

Here was the solution to the conflict: values, relationships and self-interests. The three key concepts of community organizing: tap into deeply held values; use self-interests of each to build relationships between people; connect the values and relationships to the immediate self-interests of people. “You scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours.” And, there are some things we cannot accomplish alone—we need to strength that each of us brings to the table in order to overcome the obstacles in front of us.

What I had determined before I left home to avoid I could not. The conflict between Jews and Palestinians is ever present. So I decided to dive in. I spent substantial time with Jews in the “peace camp”, and some time with those who believe that military preparedness and occupation of the West Bank are the only guarantees for the security of Israel. I also discussed the conflict with Palestinians, both in the occupied West Bank and in Israel.

**THE PEACE CAMP**

Peace Now is the major peace organization in Israel. It is, like its counterparts around the world, largely middle-class. It cuts across Party and religious lines, and has the ability on occasion to mobilize large numbers of Israelis. Its leaders point to polls which say a majority of Israelis want peace and, under conditions of recognition and abandonment of terror, they would recognize and negotiate with the PLO, including supporting a Palestinian state. But I think the peace movement, even before Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, had reached a dead-end. What people say in polls on peace issues does not determine how they vote. Other issues, like economics or national pride, may be more salient and fear may have greater weight when faced with a choice on the ballot.

The Israeli peace movement talks a lot about the intentions of the PLO, its new willingness to accept the existence of Israel, the need to develop relations of trust with Palestinians, the necessity for peace if Israel’s economy is to be restored to health. It makes other arguments as well. It fails, I believe, to deal with the fundamental question of security.

No facile analogy can be made between hawks and doves of the U.S. and their imagined counterparts in Israel. Neither Viet Nam, Grenada nor Nicaragua was ever a threat to the U.S. Nor was any other of the places in which the U.S. has intervened, either overtly or covertly, since World War II. Iran (we got the Shah after CIA involvement in dumping Mossadegh), Brazil (a military dictatorship for overthrown President Goulart), Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Chile—none of them or any other is to the U.S. what Iraq, Syria or Libya, or even the “moderate” Arab countries are in relation relationship to Israel. Nor even was the Soviet Union ever in relation to the U.S. what the Arab countries are in relation to Israel. They are antagonistic, and wrap their interests in the claims of the Palestinians; they are next door; they have attacked in the past, and say they will again; they are developing the capacity to do greater military damage than they have in the past; they deny Israel’s right to exist. The fundamental problem cannot be understood by placing it in the Cold War context, though that context is important.

**THE SECURITY ISSUES AND NEW BOUNDARIES.**

The security issue dominates all discussion. Is it solvable? Who can solve it if it is?

Part of the solution is to develop new ideas about boundaries. A return to the pre-1967 “Green Line”, that is a return of Gaza to Egypt, Golan Heights to Syria and the West Bank to either Jordan or a new Palestinian state, is not likely to be accepted by a majority of Israelis, nor, without some other things happening, does it seem reasonable that they should accept it. On the other hand, the Palestinians have legitimate claims to land they were forced to leave that is now occupied by Israel. Is this conflict reconcilable?

I think new ideas are needed in the land-for-land, peace-for-peace discussion. Why can’t there be pockets of Jews within what might be a new Palestinian State, as well as pockets of the Palestinian state within Israel? Why can’t there be a corridor of access linking the West bank to Gaza? Why couldn’t some of the present Jewish settlements in occupied territories permanently become part of Israel in exchange for Israel giving up some of its pre-1967 lands to a new Palestine? I think of this as a mutual hostage plan: each side has key population and institutional representatives clearly within its most defensible borders. If one side attacks, it guarantees the loss of its people and institutions that are within the borders of the other. I caught the cartographer fever in Israel, and started thinking about checkerboard and other map patterns to make such a scheme work.

Perhaps other areas need to be set aside as well. If some ultra Orthodox Jews believe a state is a blasphemy, since it precedes the coming of the Messiah, let there be a territory, not part of any state, protected by a jointly agreed upon military force for those who don’t want to be part of a state. Are there other population groups who want an autonomous area of some kind? Why not consider its creation?

The idea of land for land could also be the framework for solving another deep source of tension. While Jews may base their claims on ancient history, it is predominantly Palestinians who can point to specific places which were once their homes and which are now part of Israel. A peace plan that involved restitution for the living of what was wihhin one or two generations in the past theirs would also go a long way toward resolving the conflict. If, after almost 50 years, the United States can pay reparations to its Japanese citizens who were interned in concentration camps and deprived of their property during World War II, perhaps a way can be found for Israel to do the same with Palestinians—and, in places like Hebron, for Palestinians to do the same for Jews. But it is mostly Jews who took Palestinian lands. And, more broadly, might Arab states do the same as well? The creation of the Jewish State was marked by the destruction of Jewish communities throughout the Arab world, as well as of Palestinian communities in the land that was once Palestine.

**A PEACEFUL ENCLAVE IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT**

A related question, of course, is whether the Palestinians can be engaged in successful peace talks without the involvement of at least several major Arab states. Jordan is at the top of this list. Syria is not far behind. The Jews fear an independent Palestinian State is a Trojan Horse for Arab States looking to begin another war with Israel. The mutual hostage idea only partially responds to such a fear.

The reciprocal question is whether the Palestinians can negotiate a settlement with Israel without the approval of bordering Arab States, particularly those who at this writing (mid-October 1990) are aligned with the United States against Iraq, but even with Iraq itself. Presumably the PLO's efforts to at once support Iraq in Kuwait while seeking to be a mediator in the Arab world have to do with their own perceived need to balance the pressures from their own base with their assessment of the relative power of all the camps within the Arab world. It did not take Iraq's invasion of Kuwait to demonstrate that there is no single Arab camp. Yassir Arafat may be likened to the man riding two logs down a turbulent river. He needs both logs to stay upright. What happens if the logs begin to split apart and head in different directions? For Arafat and his Fatah majority in the PLO there are many logs and lots of turbulence: radicals in the PLO camp; the Moslem Brotherhood in the Gaza (and perhaps growing in the West Bank); even more radical Moslem groups in the occupied areas; Syria vs. Iraq; Egypt vs. Iraq; Syria vs. Egypt; Saudi Arabia vs and on and on it goes.

What should be clear is that a hard line on one side pushes the other sides together rather than creating wedges of division. If Israel's interests are in weakening their most implacable foes in order to create a buffer of peace around them, they will hardly accomplish this result by refusing to respond positively to the overtures of the more moderate.

**CREATE INSTITUTIONS OF INTERDEPENDENCE OR MUTUAL DEPENDENCE.**

Accompanying a program of mutual hostages, it seems to me there would also have to be the creation of new institutions and organizations in which relationships around common interests could be established. Then, over time, hostages might become neighbors and neighbors become friends. In the case of this polarized and charged situation, it is unlikely that relationships of mutual trust can precede carefully crafted, enforcable, mutually agreed upon negotiated deals.

A checkerboard pattern of population would, of course, necessitate the creation of bi-party (Jews and Palestinians) institutions. How else would water be allocated, transportation be planned, energy be conserved or markets be organized. This is the second piece of creating the peace. A system of such institutions would create a self-interest in the peace. It seems to me that such institutions are needed to solve the economic, environmental, planning and other problems that face the region.

**RECOGNITION OF THE PLO.**

All ideas are coffee house chatter until negotiations take place. Israel takes the position that it will not deal with the PLO, despite PLO gestures and positions that answered some of Israel's objections to the PLO as a negotiating partner. At the same time, Israel calls for bi-lateral negotiations with Arab States and an unnamed Palestinian partner and opposes an international conference, as well as international pressure on it to get to the negotiating table. I don't think they can have it both ways. Someone needs to say, "you recognize us and we'll recognize you"; it seems to me that the more powerful party, namely Israel, ought to say it first -- whether secretly or publicly -- and that until someone says it, the impasse will continue.

You don't get to select your negotiating partner. The principal question to be asked is whether the partner represents who he claims to represent, and whether he recognizes your similar claim. The PLO has said, however tenuously or circumspectly, that it recognizes the fact of Israel. It is not clear to me whether it has also said it recognizes Israel's legitimacy. Why can't Israel make a parallel statement in relation to the PLO? Let full and mutual recognition either be mutually agreed upon through secret parleys that precede official talks or be part of what is agreed to in those talks? Everything I learned while in Israel and the West Bank leads me to conclude that for the purpose of settling the conflict, the PLO is widely recognized by Palestinians as the group with which Israel and the world must deal. The fact that the Intifada took   
place independent of PLO leadership does not belie this recognition by Palestinians of the role of the PLO in the diplomatic arena. Nor do criticisms of "absentee leadership" (references to the absence of the PLO from the actual areas of Palestinian population concentration), criticisms about their alleged high style of life or anything else eliminate the fact that there is no other likely partner at the present time. And the partners waiting in the wings are likely to be more hostile than less to Israel's right to exist.

**SHAMIR, NIXON AND REAGAN: WILL A WARRIOR MAKE THE PEACE?**

It was Nixon who went to China and Reagan who dealt with Gorbachev. For good reason: the Democrats felt too vulnerable to the charge "soft on Communism". Will Shamir find a way to play such a role with his adversaries in the Middle East? No one can now tell.

Given my view of the peace camp, and the problems the Labor Party (or a Labor bloc) would have in being the party of peace, I have the reluctant feeling that in the near term a serious overture for peace is more likely to come from Likud than from anyone else. While Likud's Sharon and the parties to the right would pounce on such a move, and their reaction would have to be neutralized, it would appear that Shamir could keep the nationalist sensibilities of his constituency satisfied while, at the same time, stealing the peace plank from Labor and the Left. Of course, he would have to have a satisfactory answer to the security issue. That is why I think new thinking on the issues of borders and on the creation of interdependent or mutually dependent institutions is so important.

**THE MORE POWERFUL SHOULD TAKE THE INITIATIVE**

In modern statecraft it is likely that the more powerful will take initiatives for peace. Certainly this was the case for both Nixon in relation to Beijing and Reagan in relation to Moscow. At the present time, at least in relation to the Palestinians and Jordan, and perhaps in relation to the forces of the Arab world, Israel is the more powerful. Though in a state of siege, it is Israel's military that has won the day in every conflict. Israel's capabilities for war remain greater than those of her likely adversaries. The weaker party cannot take the initiative without appearing to be weak. Thus PLO initiatives were interpreted as a sign of weakness (or of duplicity: "they don't really mean it") by many hard-liners in Israel.

Shamir could begin negotiations without risking the interpretation of coming from weakness. Of course he would have to do his own homework within the Likud, but he is not vulnerable to the same kind of nationalist criticism of peace overtures as would be a Labor initiative.

**THE VICTIM MUST NOT BECOME THE EXECUTIONER**

The Holocaust, and the almost 2,000 years of anti-semitism that preceded it, make the Jews one of history's most tragic victims. This history cannot be forgotten. Christians, in particular, and other religions as well, must come to terms with their own role in the persecution of the Jewish people. Jews are right in reminding the world of its silence in the face of Hitler. And there is a special danger attendant to all of this. The Jews must avoid the temptation of being permanent victims. A powerful state, however vulnerable to attack it may be, now exists. I believe it is in the interests of that State, consistent with the tradition of its people and in the interest of world peace for Shamir, or someone who follows him, to take the first step. Otherwise Israel will increasingly become the oppressor of another people, using the historic oppression of the Jews to justify what can never be justified: the oppression of another people. Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza places it in that role. Before it is hopelessly too late, Israel needs to change its course.

**THE INTERNATIONAL "COMMUNITY"**

Too much is at stake in the Middle East, as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait made so painfully clear (it happened right in the middle of my stay in Israel), to leave settlement of the Jewish-Palestinian issue to its most directly engaged protagonists. Despite Israeli demands for bi-lateral negotiations, there is little evidence they want to negotiate with anyone who is representative of the Palestinians. At the same time, any lasting peace must involve a result acceptable to the Jews and the Palestinians. Power relationships are always filled with contradictions; this one is no different. What follows?

It seems to me that the United States, Soviet Union, Western European nations and Japan all, for their own reasons, want to defuse this conflict. They can best accomplish this by even handed pressure placed on both parties to come to the negotiating table. This, in turn, can be done by providing carrots to make negotiations even more attractive (a no-strings attached Marshall Plan for the Middle East administered by the UN?) and sticks when necessary (cuts in aid and deeper sanctions as with Iraq).

**THE TOLL OF THE CONFLICT AT HOME**

What struck me most in conversations with people in Israel is the toll that semi-permanent occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is taking and will continue to take on Israel. Because of it, some of Israel's most sensitive citizens have left the country.

Israel is burdened with a defense budget that strains its economy to the brink of breaking.

More important, there is a toll on the spirit of the people. This is illustrated by stories that come from soldiers who serve in Israel's people's army. Israel's army is, as armies go, one of the most restrained and democratic in the world. Every Jewish Israeli serves. The Army performs important socialization functions for newly arriving immigrants, often serving as a school for young adults. Given the command structure that is characteristic of an army, it is a remarkably democratic institution in spirit. The occupation is destroying these national characteristics. Many Israelis have stories about the dehumanization resulting from being an occupying force: the breaking of legs of presumed "rioters"; destroying homes of presumed insurgents; killing stone throwing teen-agers. Some of the most committed Zionists I met quietly observed that peace oriented Jews are beginning to leave Israel. How can what is going on not have an effect on the spirit of a people? One either hardens or leaves. The sabra, prickly on the outside and tender on the inside, is not surviving this: the hardness is invading the soul of Israel.

**A POSTCRIPT**

I wrote most of this Report in September, 1990--prior to the killing of 18 Palestinians on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Things have gotten a lot worse since then. Israel's peace forces fell into almost immediate disarray as a result of the PLO's stance regarding Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Of course supporters of an Israeli hard line use the PLO's position to justify their refusal to negotiate with it. And PLO supporters explain the PLO position as a sign of their frustration and anger at Israel and the West for not responding to their step toward recognition of Israel. Meanwhile, Saddam Hussein speaks over the heads of Arab State leaders to the discontented of their repressive regimes, appealing especially to the Palestinians. Whether the appeal is cynical is beside the point: the accounts I heard while in Israel were of real support for him in the Palestinian grassroots in Jordan and Israeli occupied areas. The failure to deal with the PLO in a window of opportunity may now haunt Israel for some time to come.

When I left on my trip, I was determined to stay out of the foreign policy arena, one that is remote from my daily work and preoccupations at home. I found I couldn't.

My recent trips to Brazil and Israel made abundantly clear the connection between what happens in the communities with which I work as a community organizer to what goes on around the world. Plant shutdowns in the Bay Area? Look at the living and working conditions of the country to which the plant moved. Lack of loans in the inner city? Look at the loans to dictator run Latin-American countries who mortgaged the future of their own people to get rich quick schemes approved by American multi-national bankers and now enforced by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. (The Catholic Bishops of Brazil, noting this fact, simply say that their country's debt should be written off. They consider it having been illegitimate in the first place, and that the interest already paid on it should suffice. If the bankers wanted to negotiate with a US supported and partially installed military dictatorship, they should live with the results.) Should we be pleased with toxic wastes being removed from one low-income community which was originally chosen because of its relative inability to politically defend itself? Only partially if it means they are dumped in an even poorer community in the third world country whose dictator is supported by the US and who will take the money from a dumper and pocket it.

It seems to me that beyond the free trade vs. protectionism debate is an idea of foreign policy as an extension of democratic policy at home. Why can't democratic standards become part of what determines with whom we trade and don't trade, where we invest and don't invest, where we give favored nation status and don't, and so on. What would these standards include? At least the following: (a) The right of workers to free, autonomous unions, and of citizens and residents to free, autonomous, voluntary associations. (b) The absence of discrimination on the basis of political belief, race, ethnicity, religion, sex, and age. (c) The presence of what we generally consider First Amendment rights: freedom of speech, the press, the right to assemble and the right to petition one's government. (d) Policies that preserve and enhance the environment, rather than destroying it. (e) Respect for the territorial integrity of other nations, and the right of self-determination to nationalities within present national boundaries. (f) The presence of decent minimum standards for health care, education, housing, employment and income for all people within a country. I think this last will follow from the others. When people are free to organize they do so and struggle for the elimination of these social and economic inequities.

Since we fail some of these standards ourselves in the United States, it is unlikely that such a basis for foreign policy will be adopted by our own government. At the same time, such standards can link domestic struggles for social, economic (and environmental) justice to the conditions of oppressed people throughout the world. These standards properly focus our attention on the major beneficiaries of some so-called "free trade" policies: the multi-national banks and corporations who can and do take our money and our jobs elsewhere because they can better maximize profit by doing so. They can provide a basis for discussions within unions and community organizations who now find growing anti-Asian, Moslem or Latin American sentiments among their members who think it is people in these countries who "took" their jobs or raised their gasoline prices. Not that I think these standards will come to the agenda of most of the organizations with which I work in the near future. But the religious institutions and unions of America could debate and adopt such standards.

This kind of policy is to be contrasted to the balance of power doctrine now in favor in this and past Administrations. We give money to one set of dictators to help them balance, we say, the power of another set of dictators. When those we aid bite the hand that feeds them, we shift alliances and give money to the set of dictators we originally opposed. Each round increases the military capability of our recipients and the danger to the world. The arrogance of the current debate in the United States is extraordinary. We speak of ourselves as managing the world for democracy, despite our own interventionism in every major continent since World War II, as if it is ours to manage. In an economic sense, much of it is. That used to be called imperialism, a word not in vogue these days. What is mostly argued about is the best way to manage things. This approach is neither in the interest of most Americans, most people of the world or of world peace.

In the short term, with the end of the Cold War, it appears that it is now possible to negotiate de-militarization of the world. The balance of power, assuming it to be the framework of policy in the short term, will be better achieved by mutual destruction of arms rather than their increase. That is also a policy to be struggled for by Americans who want peace with justice. It seems to me that it is impossible to avoid the fact that events, history and situations in the Middle East are linked. This fact is sometimes confused with what I understand to be the narrower idea of "linkage". To understand that things are linked doesn't mean that you trade support of the PLO for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait, restoration of its (also undemocratic) government or release of hostages. It may mean, however, that you promise that the post withdrawal period will include PLO participation to deal with: (a) Israel - PLO negotiations and secure borders for Israel; (b) destruction of Iraqi chemical, biological, offensive missile and nuclear (military) capabilities; (c) enforceable demilitarization of the region; (d) the rights of national minorities within other nations (Kurds in Iraq, Palestinians in Kuwait or Israel, etc); (e) democratic rights of citizens; (f) economic aid conditioned upon agreements in these areas, and; (g) whatever else needs to be on the table to diffuse the bombshell that is now the Middle East.

December, 1990