

Israel's Greek Tragedy

by Dean Andromidas

It was a scene comparable to the Greek tragedy, *The Persians*, by the great Aeschylus. Dalia Rabin, daughter of slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, stood before her father's grave. Though a daughter, she was cast in the role of the Queen Mother Atossa before the tomb of the great and wise Darius. Before her stood the solemn faces of Israel's political elite—less one—like Aeschylus' Chorus of Elders, but not as wise.

It was Oct. 17; the scene was the annual memorial service marking the seventh year since Yitzhak Rabin's assassination. According to an account in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, Dalia Rabin, "lashed out against the leaders who did nothing to stifle the campaign of incitement waged against her father [leading up to his murder]. . . . She also criticized the leadership of the Labor Party for failing to find the courage to continue the work that cost her father's life. Instead of fighting to defend his path, they failed to withstand the deluge and took cover, she charged." Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, the Labor Party chairman, stood before her, expressionless, well aware that they were now following "the path led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon," in his Likud-led "national unity" government.

"What would have happened if the murderer had not hit his mark? How would we look?" asked Dalia Rabin—who herself had resigned in protest from Sharon's government earlier this year. "Every year that has passed since the murder makes the question more complicated. Every year has sharpened the loss of direction, the depth of the rift, the loss of hope. . . . All of us are surrounded by suspicion and hatred and there is no one to save us." She then lifted her eyes to the country's entire political leadership, including the Likud's former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who reversed all of her father's work—himself standing there "with a piercing look in his eyes," *Ha'aretz* wrote. Rabin continued, "We were mistaken in believing that the murderer could not sway us from our path. The broken peace turned our hope into a bitter illusion. The false prophets are again lifting their heads high, trying to lead a beloved nation and people to a dead end." Adding to the tragedy is a recent poll which revealed that 40% of Israelis would support granting a pardon to Yigal Amir, the murderer of Rabin.

Ha'aretz noted, "Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was conspicuous in his absence." It was the first time that a Prime

Minister had missed the Rabin memorial. Sharon was in Washington enjoying an evening at Blair House, the U.S. government guest residence. He was so happy following his meeting with President George W. Bush, that he reportedly led his closest aides in singing old Zionist songs.

Sharon's 'Vaunting Rashness'

Sharon returned from Washington flush with a doom-filled success. President George W. Bush once again demonstrated full support for his "old friend," putting no pressure on him other than to caution him not to launch a new Middle East war until the United States has begun its own attack on Iraq. Although Sharon expressed "sensitivity" to the Bush's needs, time is working against him. He needs to implement his "final solution" against the Palestinians, before Israel's economy fully collapses.

Sharon's smiles came with a whopping price: His office leaked to the press that they were drafting a request for \$10 billion in aid and loan guarantees from Washington to bail out the Israeli economy in which Bush expressed such "confidence." Israeli press called it the price Sharon was asking for not interfering in U.S. plans.

Sharon desperately needs the money, because Israel's sovereign credit rating is about to collapse to the same levels as Argentina and Brazil. On Oct. 18, Finance Minister Silvan Shalom rushed off to London to meet the credit-rating agencies, Standard & Poor's, Moody's, and Fitch, in an attempt to head them off from downgrading Israel's rating from the current A-. Even this rating is no more than an official fiction, since Israel, which has to borrow \$2.5 billion a year to roll over its foreign debt, now pays a "risk premium" of 2.5% over and above the interest rate of 4.75%. Thus Israel, in practical terms, has a credit rating of BBB. If Bush goes to war against Iraq, it will sink further.

Based on the promise that the Bush Administration is considering giving Sharon his "requests," Fitch did not downgrade Israel's sovereign credit rating, but downgraded its local currency debt to A-, which is also too high. Fitch pointed out that Israel has a public debt that is 103% of Gross Domestic Product, second in the world only to Japan.

The Funds Are for Fascism

A new Palestinian suicide car-bomb destroyed a bus on Oct. 20, leaving 14 Israelis dead. This bombing was as predictable as the others, because Sharon has not let up for one day, his military operations, targeted killings, or the brutal curfews imposed upon the Palestinians. In the last several weeks, dozens of Palestinians have been killed and hundreds wounded while the Israeli military has conducted daily incursions into the Gaza Strip. The appearance is that Bush will give Sharon extra billions to continue this repression.

In the midst of these anti-Palestinian military operations, Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer continued the "dog and pony

show” of dismantling so-called “illegal outposts” of Israeli settlers in the West Bank. As expected, radical rabbis issued religious rulings to the settlers to resist evacuation, and to the soldiers to refuse orders to move against the settlers. As expected, violent clashes occurred between soldiers and settlers. Although the rioting was real enough, given the numbers of soldiers hurt, the whole exercise proved to be a theater of the absurd. Military commentator Amir Oren described in *Ha’aretz* how the evacuation plans had been kept secret by the military until they briefed Sharon’s security cabinet. “Minutes—some say seconds—after the presentation was made to the Prime Minister, Defense Minister, and Public Security Minister, the beepers went off on the settler leaders’ belts, telling them when the operation would begin and which outposts would be evacuated. The settlers readied their masses, resisted the evacuation, and injured dozens of police and soldiers.”

According to press reports, Sharon promised to replace all evacuated outposts with military bases.

While this theater was playing out, settlers throughout the West Bank launched attacks against Palestinian farmers, preventing them from harvesting their olive groves. Although they killed one farmer and wounded many others, no arrests were made. In fact, the Israeli military tried to order the Palestinians not to enter their own olive orchards, because they were “provoking” attacks.

Commentator Gideon Samet, in *Ha’aretz* Oct. 23, called these settlers and their leaders fascists—especially Effie Eitam, whom Sharon recently named Infrastructure Minister. “Behind their pretensions to a ‘new Zionism’ lies that same mix of messianism, contempt for any considerations of state, and the legitimization of almost any means for the sake of an illegal end. And they are defended by politicians with proto-fascist tendencies who have never before penetrated the inner circles of the government in such force. Why fascist? Because, even by the most dispassionate definition, people like Eitam fit the specifications of this European concept. The sanctity of the land, even beyond the boundaries of the state; the abstract concepts of the significance of the people and the homeland; and the readiness to use the nation’s military might for the sake of all of the above. Israel, according to Eitam, is not just a pragmatic entity whose goal is to worry about the welfare of its residents. Its *raison d’être*, from the Jordan to the sea, is ‘to reveal the image of God to the world . . . to be the Noah’s Ark of the future . . . to reveal God’s workings in history,’ and other idiocies that compete with the most degenerate texts from the height of German and Italian Romanticism.”

Samet warned that “Israeli crypto-fascism, armed with vague religiosity, tries to bestow upon these land-grab swindles an image of heroism and renewal.” He concludes that this is a national threat of “creeping Jewish fascism. . . . The extremist fundamentalist settler right . . . has rapidly become a threat from within no less frightening than the terror from without.”