

Israeli Peace Groups: Stop This Accursed War

As Israel becomes increasingly enmired in a Thirty Years' War scenario, the voices for peace inside the country are struggling to put forward an outlook supporting a just peace to a blinded population. Ten thousand peace advocates marched through Tel Aviv Aug. 5, in the weekly Saturday evening peace demonstration (given Israel's population of less than 7 million, this is like a 400,000-person U.S. gathering). The demonstrations began on day one of the war, and have gathered strength, although demonstrators are still meeting harassment by onlookers and police, and a general press blackout.

But the tide is turning for the peace movement: On Aug. 9, Meretz Party and Peace Now, traditional "peace" advocates which both had previously supported the Lebanon war as "Israel's right to defend itself," joined hundreds of peace demonstrators at Israel's Defense Ministry. Meretz chairman Yossi Beilin, well known for his organizing of support for the Oslo Accords, told the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, that the Israeli Cabinet decision Aug. 9 to expand the ground war in Lebanon "was the straw that broke the camel's back."

Although not reported internationally, and especially not in the international Jewish press, both Arabs and Jews march together in the demonstrations and hold peace vigils in Jerusalem, Haifa, and other cities, and there are also demonstrations at the military prison, where war refusers are held. Many groups are protesting the Lebanon aggression, including Gush Shalom (Israeli peace bloc), leftist political parties, Women in Black, Women against War, Israeli-Palestinian Bereaved Families, Coalition of Women for Peace, and FORA (Russian-speaking women). The same groups and individuals have also been involved in protesting the so-called Security Wall, and calling for an end to the Occupation, and for a two-state solution.

There is some understanding of how Israel has been set up in the war by the Bush/Cheney Administration. Uri Avnery, the eloquent 84-year-old peace leader from Gush Shalom, a former Knesset (parliament) member, wrote in one of his frequent commentaries on the war: "President Bush, who pushed us into this war to start with, is now pushing us to fight on ('Until the last Israeli soldier,' as the saying goes.) Like Olmert, he lives in an imaginary world. Bush, Olmert, and their like can incite and draw the masses behind them, until the call of 'the Emperor is naked' finds receptive ears."

In the same commentary, Avnery mocked his government's war push: "We are conquering Lebanon like a fly conquers flypaper."

Avnery's speech to the Aug. 5 demonstration in Tel Aviv, sums up the conviction of the best of those working for an end to war, and is reprinted here in full, as translated by Gush Shalom. —*Marjorie Mazel Hecht*

Documentation

Avnery's Speech

The black flag of illegality flies over this war. The black flag of mourning hovers over all of us. It is being said that we are a marginal group, that we are outsiders, that the huge majority opposes all that we are doing.

And I say: Indeed. We are outsiders. We are the few facing the masses that thirst for war. But next month, or next year, every one of us will proudly proclaim: I was here! I called for a stop to this accursed war! And thousands who are cursing us now—next month, next year, will claim that they, too, were here, that they, too, opposed this mad war.

From here, on behalf of this demonstration, I say to Ehud Olmert: Stop this madness! The war has gone to your head! You are intoxicated by it! You are a junkie of war! A war from which nothing good will come. Stop, before it is too late!

From here, on behalf of this demonstration, I say to Amir Peretz: Many of those here have voted for you. You have lied to them! You have cheated them! You pretended to be a social reformer. You promised to take money from the army and invest it in education and welfare. Now you have become a man of death and destruction, You have become a monster! Stop, before it is too late!

From here, on behalf of this demonstration, I say to Hassan Nasrallah: You have carried out a dangerous provocation, you have provided the warmongers with a pretext, you have played their game. Let us stop this right now! Let us begin to negotiate—Israel, Lebanon, and Syria—to exchange the prisoners, to put an end to bombs and rockets.

From here, on behalf of this demonstration, I say to our Palestinian partners: We have not forgotten you! We know about the atrocities that happen every day in Gaza and the other occupied territories. We must cooperate in order to put an end to this war, to exchange the prisoners, to make peace between our two peoples.

From here, on behalf of this demonstration, I say to the Lebanese people: As an Israeli, I feel deep shame for what we are doing to you! For the devastation we have brought on you. Deep shame!

When this madness is finally over, we shall struggle together—Israelis and Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese, Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel—so that we can live a normal life, each in his free state, side by side in PEACE!