

# Israeli Peace Camp Pushes U.S. To Act

by Marjorie Mazel Hecht

Leaders of the Israeli peace movement have seized an opening in the aftermath of the Lebanon War to take their message for peace negotiations to the U.S. public, highlighting the urgent need for a change of U.S. policy if peace is to be achieved.

Yossi Beilin, head of the Meretz-Yachad Party and an architect of the 1993 Oslo Accords, brought his proposal for a Madrid II peace conference to the “Fresh Air” interview program on National Public Radio Aug. 23, and held a conference call with the U.S. Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace (Brit Tzedek v’Shalom) on Aug. 20. Uri Avnery, the leader of the Israeli Peace Bloc (Gush Shalom), and a longtime radical peace activist, spoke via a conference call with the Progressive Democrats of America, Aug. 18. (See *Documentation*.)

Both Beilin and Avnery made it clear that the Bush Administration is an “impediment to peace,” to use Beilin’s words. “The Bush Administration doesn’t believe in Mideast peace,” he said. Bush sees the very fact of negotiations as being a “prize” awarded to the enemy. “Israel wouldn’t have *dared*” to start the war alone. “The U.S. did everything possible to postpone a ceasefire, and wanted Israel to provoke Syria,” Avnery said.

Beilin and Avnery called on Americans, and particularly the American Jewish community, to support the peace effort. Beilin urged American Jews not to be “just a rubber stamp for Israel,” if Israel is harming itself. It’s been the same story for many years, he said, that the American Jewish community has supported the government in power without regard to that government’s policies. If you care about Israel, and understand the damage of maintaining the settlements in the West Bank and Golan Heights, he said, how can you support this government? We have a mutual role, he told the Brit Tzedek, in legitimizing the fact that you can be pro-Israel and not favor a particular Israeli government.

Traditionally, the Israeli peace movement has not had a presence in the U.S. media, including the Jewish press, which has been a faithful “rubber stamp” for whatever Israeli government is in power. But the horror and confusion of the Lebanon War has created a possibility for change. *The Forward*, a longtime Yiddish socialist paper, now a conservative Jewish weekly, had a sharp response to the new situation. Its Aug. 18 editorial, titled “Time To Change the Tune,” reported on the Beilin proposal for a Madrid II peace conference, concluding:

“Bush has been convinced by self-appointed spokesmen for Israel and the Jewish community that endless war is in Israel’s interest. He needs to hear in no uncertain terms that Israel is ready for dialogue, that the alternative—endless jihad—is unthinkable. Now is time to change the tune.”

### **‘A Coalition of Sanity’**

What the “change in tune” entails is very simple. Beilin explained to the National Public Radio interviewer Terry Gross Aug. 23—when she asked about the present situation of “Islamic extremism” and anti-Semitism, and how it affected Israel’s security—that the task is to create a “coalition of sanity.” As Beilin said:

“I would like to reject the idea that what we have is a war of civilizations, or war of religions. I think that everywhere, and also in the Islamic world, you have extremists, you have moderate people, and you have pragmatic people. The wisdom is to create, always, the coalition of sanity, of those people who are much more moderate, much more pragmatic on both sides, and who want to live, and who want their kids to live. These are the majorities, by the way, everywhere.

“So the coalition of sanity is something which is available, and I think that the role of the peace camp is to put an end to the war situation in the inner circle so that the inner circle—meaning Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestinians—will not create a pretext for those who want to fight forever, that they are fighting for some kind of a just cause, like the idea of the Palestinian state, or something like that.

“And this was the idea of the late Itzhak Rabin. He wanted very much to have peace in the inner circle, before Iran is becoming a nuclear power, and before the hatred towards Israel is so big in the Arab world, that anybody who would make peace with us will be seen as a traitor. And he was right. And it is still not too late.”

The U.S. partners of the Israeli peace movement in the past have too often been American individuals who themselves hate the United States, such as Noam Chomsky. But now the opportunity demands a broader “coalition of sanity” in the United States itself, linking the Israeli peace camp with a wide range of U.S. institutional forces—including the military—who are working to overthrow the policies of the Bush-Cheney Administration with a sane alternative based on economic development for the entire Southwest Asia region.

Turning around the situation in Israel, where the neo-operative Bibi Netanyahu is ready to relaunch the fighting, down to the last Israeli soldier, in large part depends on what the LaRouche movement and its allies can bring into play in the United States. The peace possibility does exist. As Yossi Beilin told interviewer Terry Gross:

“I’m far from being pessimistic—I’m not just an optimist who believes that the situation will be better tomorrow. I believe that it is my task to make it so.”