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JULY ■ AUGUST ■ 1998

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DILEMMA**



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ELECTS AMIR PERETZ**



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Netanyahu's Dilemmas

By Susan Hattis Rolef

In recent weeks Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has time and again informed the world that very soon an agreement will be signed regarding a second redeployment of Israeli forces on the basis of the Hebron Agreement of January 1997, which he himself signed with the Palestinians. And yet the agreement, all the details of which appear (with emphasis on 'appear') to have been worked out by Israel and the Americans, and accepted by the Palestinians (though nobody seems completely sure who agreed to what), has failed to materialize.

At first the excuse for the delay was that the Israeli Cabinet had not agreed to the extent of the territory to be handed over to the Palestinians. Some ministers, including Minister of Defense Itzik Mordechai (Likud) appear to have accepted the figure of 13% of the area of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Others, like Minister for Infrastructures Ariel Sharon (Likud) argued that anything above 9% constituted a real security risk. Still others, like Minister of Education Rabbi Yitzhak Levy (National Religious Party) continued to argue that any withdrawal was dangerous, and threatened to leave the Government if an agreement were reached on a second redeployment.

But finally Netanyahu appeared to succumb to American pressure and agreed to 13%. However, then everything got stuck again. The Prime Minister started arguing that before Israel would agree to a further withdrawal, the Palestinians had to start implementing previous agreements, like the cancellation of offensive articles in the Palestine National Covenant by the Palestine National Council (PNC) and willingness by the Palestinian Authority to hand over to Israel persons ac-

cused by Israel of having been involved in acts of terror, etc. Since there is nothing new in these demands, and even though Israel has the right — even an obligation — to insist that the Palestinians fulfill their part in previous agreements between the two sides, one gets the sneaking feeling that the insistence on their immediate fulfillment at this juncture is little more than just another delaying tactic on Netanyahu's part.

The same applies to the proposal made by the Prime Minister — apparently without much forethought — that since the issue of further Israeli withdrawals from territories in the West Bank is controversial, the Israeli public ought to be asked for its opinion in a referendum before anything is done. Immediately the idea was picked up by several Government ministers — especially Minister of Justice Tsahi Hanegbi (Likud) and Minister of Communications Limor Livnat (Likud) — and both the Knesset and Ministry of Justice went into a flurry of activity to decide what sort of referendum this should be: binding or advisory, whether a decision in favor of a 13% withdrawal should require a majority of 60% (a way to ensure that there is a Jewish majority in favor) and how the referendum should be carried out (in secret ballots, over the phone, by means of magnetic cards, etc.) A binding referendum would require the passage of a special Basic Law. An advisory referendum can apparently be held on the basis of existing legislation. However, either way, a referendum would cost the Government treasury several hundreds of millions of shekels. After a week in the headlines, the idea seemed to vanish into thin air (even though Netanyahu has con-

tinued to declare that it is still being examined), which once again leads one to the conclusion that the name of the game is "stalling."

What exactly is going on? Nobody really knows. The Opposition has been arguing that even if Netanyahu himself has understood that there is no way Israel can avoid the second redeployment, his real concern is to keep his very problematic coalition together, and he is clumsily maneuvering between those who are saying that unless the redeployment takes place very soon they are going to leave the Government (especially Avigdor Kalahani's Third Way), which commands 4 Members of Knesset) and those who are threatening to leave the Government if any sort of redeployment takes place (part of the National Religious Party, which commands 9 Members of Knesset). As long as Netanyahu stalls, he has got his Government. The moment he takes a decision, his Government (which currently commands the support of a mere 61 out of the 120 Members of Knesset) is liable to fall.

In many respects a referendum looked like a perfect solution from the Prime Minister's point of view, in so far as he can tell both the Third Way and the National Religious Party to be patient, and let another two or three months go by. But even if a referendum takes place, and assuming that there is a 60% majority in favor of the second redeployment (though this depends on how the question is worded, and how the question is worded depends on whether Netanyahu really and truly wants the redeployment — something to which nobody has a clear answer) Netanyahu is still liable to lose his Government.

The bottom line is that finally Netanyahu has — at least in theory — three alternatives. The first is to try and form a national unity government with the Labor Party. Such a government could see the second redeployment through and start working out the parameters of a permanent settlement with the Palestinians agreeable to both the Likud and the Labor Party — something along the lines of the agreement reached between MKs Michael Eitan (Likud) and Yossi Beilin (Labor) back in January 1997. At least in theory a national unity government could also ward off religious demands for a change in the religious *status quo* (e.g. the so-called "Conversion Law"), reverse past changes in the *status quo* (e.g. the stoppage of El Al flights on Saturday, which

was implemented in 1980, and which is currently placing great obstacles on the road of the much overdue privatization of the national airline), and implement an economic policy which will seriously deal with the ongoing recession (the number of unemployed is fast approaching 200,000, while the number of businesses that have failed in the past year or are likely to fail in the course of 1998, is well over the 10,000 figure).

There are two main problems with this option. The first is that in the Labor Party no one, except MK Shimon Peres (who has a lot of international prestige but no power at home), is willing to enter a national unity government in the current situation. Labor Party chairman Ehud Barak says that he is not opposed to a national unity government but only after new general elections. In other words, if he is elected as Prime Minister, he will be willing to discuss the option with Netanyahu (assuming that Netanyahu remains leader of the Likud), and if worse comes to worse and he (Barak) loses, he will be willing to go into a new government formed by Netanyahu, or whoever wins the election. The second problem is that a national unity government is apparently the last thing in the world that Netanyahu wants. He has enough problems with President Ezer Weizman (See article in this issue by Misha Louvish), and his relations with Barak are unlikely to be any simpler.

The second option is to hold early elections — possibly in the Autumn. The problem with this option is that while the opinion polls are somewhat problematic from Barak's point of view — especially since Tel Aviv mayor Ronnie Milo announced several weeks ago that he plans to run for the Premiership on a liberal-secular ticket — Netanyahu's position isn't at all brilliant, and it is doubtful whether at this juncture he could muster the absolute majority he requires to be reelected. On the other hand, if Netanyahu waits too long, the opponents of the direct election of the Prime Minister in the Knesset might actually manage to get the *Basic Law: the Government* amended and cancel the direct election. Already MKs Uzi Landau (Likud) and Yossi Beilin have managed to get the amendment past preliminary reading, and it now depends on the good will of the chairman of the Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, Hannan Porath (National Religious Party), whether the

legislation process will or will not progress rapidly.

The third option is to wait for a miracle. It is amazing (perhaps shocking) how many Israelis (especially religious Israelis) really and truly believe in miracles. I recently overheard a conversation between two well-educated religious co-workers, in which one very seriously said to the other: "I find it difficult to understand people who do not believe in miracles." For these people the establishment of the State of Israel was a miracle, as were the results of the War of Independence, the Six-Day War and Yom Kippur War. If all those events were miracles (in other words, Israel's political leaders and the IDF had little if anything to do with their occurrence), expecting something to happen which will absolve Israel from the need to go through with the second redeployment seems a very minor miracle to expect.

But seriously, there are all sorts of events which could occur which could get Israel "off the hook" regarding the second redeployment: the overthrow or sudden demise of Yasir Arafat; outbreak of a new *intifada*; a Palestinian denunciation of the Oslo Agreements. Unfortunately, none of these scenarios can be discounted as totally unlikely. On the contrary, the longer Netanyahu stalls, the more likely their occurrence becomes. Some in Israel might refer to them (if they occur) as miracles — others (including Netanyahu?) might regard them as strokes of good luck. For anyone with any sanity left they cannot be viewed as anything short of a catastrophe — proof that after all, the Oslo Agreements are reversible, and that more than just Yitzhak Rabin's life was lost on November 4, 1995.

Under the circumstances, is Ehud Barak

right in refusing to consider the idea of a national unity government now, or at least promising to support Netanyahu in the Knesset if and when he brings the redeployment for the approval of the Knesset? He is right from at least one perspective: Netanyahu has neither raised the possibility of a national unity government (unless both Netanyahu and Barak have lied about the content of recent talks between them) nor requested Labor to provide him with a safety net in the Knesset. If Barak were to express Labor's acceptance of either idea before even being asked, this would place them in the idiotic position of a woman who accepts a marriage proposal which has not been made by the prospective bridegroom, but is merely a speculation made by the media (with all due respect to the media . . .).

But even if Netanyahu would "pop the question", it is not at all certain that Barak should respond positively. It is not because the situation in Israel isn't very dangerous, but because nothing short of a real change (i.e. an electoral victory) can open real prospects for change, and the change required is a leader who knows what he wants and is determined to doggedly pursue the policy he has outlined for himself — not one who zigzags from indecision to indecision, from one dead end to the next, and from one hollow statement to another. Barak himself is undoubtedly such a man, and Labor's only dilemma is whether Barak has what it takes to win an election. The recent statement made by the chairman of the World Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency, Avrum Burg, that if Barak doesn't "take off" he will consider running for the Labor Party chairmanship before the next general elections, should be seen within that context. □

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The Time is NOW.

President and Premier

By Misha Louvish

Israel has been plunged into what might turn out to be its gravest constitutional crisis by President Ezer Weizman's public declaration that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu ought to call for the dissolution of the Knesset and the holding of premature general elections.

The relationship between President and Prime Minister has been somewhat problematic from the beginning. They share some of the prerogatives of the American leader: the President of Israel is the formal head of the nation, but the Prime Minister has almost all the executive powers. (Neither, by the way, can veto an act of the legislature.)

This situation is largely the result of the relationship that existed between the two foremost national leaders in the spring of 1948, when the State of Israel was being established. Professor Chaim Weizmann had been President of the World Zionist Organization since 1920: there was no doubt of his towering prestige on both the national and international scenes. The central figure in the practical leadership, however, especially in the homeland, was David Ben-Gurion, who was also the head of Mapai, the Israel Labor Party, which was the largest group in all the Zionist governing bodies.

Accordingly, the leaders of the State-in-the-making adopted a constitution similar to that of the United Kingdom, with a monarch (the President) as the titular head and the executive power in the hands of the Prime Minister, who is formally appointed by the President but holds office only so long as he enjoys the confidence of the popularly elected legislature, the Knesset.

President Weizmann was not happy with this arrangement; the only thing he was entitled to stick his nose into, he complained, was his handkerchief; but there was nothing he could do about it because Ben-Gurion held the electoral power. He and his successors were

faithful to this relationship between President and Prime Minister: whenever a new government had to be formed they consulted the leaders of the political parties and nominated the man most likely to command a majority in the Knesset, but it was the Knesset, not the President, that determined the legitimacy of the Prime Minister.

There were a few instances in which the President expressed an opinion on public affairs, but these were not binding on the Government and did not arouse much controversy.

Some of the tension that has arisen between Netanyahu and Weizman may be due to the change that has recently taken place in the method of electing the Prime Minister and, consequently, in his status and prestige.

For nearly half a century, a candidate for the premiership had to obtain the support of sufficient parties to give him a majority in the Knesset. As no party was ever strong enough to have a majority of its own, every prime minister had to haggle for the support of a coalition.

There was general disgust with the coalition negotiations, in which the parties often demanded concessions for the selfish interests of their supporters rather than agreement on matters of principle. After much debate, the Knesset passed a law providing for the direct election of the prime minister separately from the election of the members of the Knesset.

This change was implemented for the first time in 1995, when Bibi Netanyahu was directly elected by a small majority over the veteran Shimon Peres, who had taken over the Labor leadership after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Although Netanyahu opposed the Oslo agreements, he accepted them as binding because they were signed by a legitimate Israeli government. Since 1996, he has been negotiating with the Palestinians (with American mediation) for the implementing of the Oslo

agreement of 1993, which provided, *inter alia*, for three further redeployments (FRDs) in Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") before the negotiations for a permanent settlement, which are due to be completed by May 1999.

In addition, since the Rabin-Peres Government, in withdrawing from the Arab cities in the "West Bank," had not yet come to an agreement on Hebron, in which there is a small Jewish community, Netanyahu completed the agreement on that city, on much the same lines as the previous government had followed.

Why have the negotiations taken so long and, apparently, ground to a halt? Because, Government supporters explain, Netanyahu has insisted that the Palestinians, on their part, must fulfill their obligations under the agreements — such as the cessation of incitement against Israel, the official abolition of the genocidal Palestine National Covenant of 1954, and the extradition of terrorists.

That, however, is not all. There is a strong right wing in Netanyahu's coalition, and some of his supporters have declared that they will not tolerate any further transfer to the Arabs of territory in the Land of Israel. The fact that the negotiations have been hanging fire for some time, the Prime Minister's critics say, is due rather to the intransigence of the Israeli right wing than the obstinacy of the Palestinians.

Whatever the reason, there are no signs that Prime Minister Netanyahu is prepared to honor Israel's commitment to carry out two further FRDs, to be followed by negotiations for a permanent settlement. He has often hinted that it might be better, instead of trying to reach further agreements on interim arrangements, to go straight on to the permanent settlement negotiations, but he has not

given the slightest indication that an agreement with the Palestinians is possible, given his own attitude and that of his followers.

It is not only President Weizman who has been seriously disturbed at this deadlock. The atmosphere of hope and support which surrounded Israel under the Rabin-Peres Government, which extended even to Arab governments which had never recognized the Jewish State, has been dissipated. Egypt and Jordan, which signed peace treaties with Israel, now express distrust. The United States, once a tower of strength, now expresses serious dissatisfaction with the policy of the Israeli Government.

What was the President to do? According to precedent, he is not responsible for government policy: all the responsibility rests on the shoulders of the directly elected Prime Minister. Ezer Weizman is not a doctrinaire leftist: he was a member of the Herut movement when Begin called him to resign from the army and join his Government in 1977. He has a long record of activity in the quest for peace: he was Begin's right-hand man in the momentous negotiations for peace with Egypt.

The present Israeli policy, he believes, is dangerous; it may lead to a fresh outbreak of terrorism, even war. He obviously decided, therefore, that, whatever the precedents, he must speak out. He did not, however, denounce Netanyahu or call for his resignation and his replacement by the Opposition leader, Ehud Barak. He said, in effect: the situation is dangerous; we are getting nowhere. Let the people decide whether they still have confidence in the leaders they elected in 1996 or whether they want a change. Legalists may rule that he has exceeded his powers: the latest surveys indicate that the majority of the people support him. □

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Israel's Workers Vote AMIR PERETZ HEADS "NEW" HISTADRUT

By Jerry Goodman

There was little surprise when Amir Peretz was elected Chairman of the Histadrut, Israel's General Federation of Labor, in this past June's election. Having inherited the leadership mantle when Haim Ramon resigned to return to active political life, he had been the favorite going into the election. This, despite an unexpected challenge by MK Maxim Levy, the brother of MK David Levy, Israel's former Foreign Minister and head of the populist, right of center Geshet party. The uncertainty was how close would be the results.

Peretz's defeat of Levy was more impressive than most analysts had predicted. Having received nearly 78 percent of the votes cast, against his opponent, whose Geshet-Meretetz coalition attracted about 22 per cent of the voters, Peretz emerged as a powerful force. Even Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu quickly expressed his hopes that he could work "in cooperation with the Histadrut under your leadership".

Until recently, the traditional and somewhat mythical image of the Histadrut was that of a powerful worker's organization, which also served as a source of support for the Labor Party. If nothing else the election demonstrated the actuality of today's Histadrut. No longer dominated by avowed Marxists, the New Histadrut ("HaHistadrut Hahadasha"), as it is called in some circles, came out of the election reflecting a profound reshuffling of political life.

Writing in the *Jerusalem Post*, on the eve of the elections, Daniel Bloch, a veteran journalist who edited the now defunct Labor newspaper, *Davar*, and a keen observer of Israel's labor sector, argued that Israel needs "a strong

workers' organization". Such a force, he maintained, is "an important tool of modern society." In the past Bloch had hoped that the Histadrut would undertake dramatic and necessary reforms, to liberate it from the past and adjust it to new realities, as had "most Labor movements in the democratic world." While the Histadrut is certainly different from what it was, even a decade ago, "dramatic reforms" have yet to take place.

It is true that most of its financial holdings, created in part when Israel was still in the process of becoming a state, have been privatized. The famed medical and health care system, *Kupat Holim Clalit*, had been severed from the Histadrut by Haim Ramon. With it went the health group's members who were automatically members of the Histadrut. Furthermore, an automatic taxation system has been all but abolished, while the kibbutzim, long a powerful element within the Histadrut, are still going through their own radical transformation process, so necessary to remain economically viable. They are hardly a force within the labor federation.

The changes which have already taken place resulted in a drop in income as well as membership, and the Histadrut became an organization without a regular source of income. As a result, when Amir Peretz replaced Ramon he set an aggressive course to increase membership. An enlarged membership would demonstrate to the government and to industrialists that the Histadrut had to be considered when financial and budgetary decisions were to be made. Membership dues, just under 1 per cent of salary, would help provide the neces-

sary financial ballast. Attracting and retaining new members, or bringing back the hundreds of thousands who fled when the health plan was privatized, meant that the labor federation had to provide those members with measurable and specific benefits and gains for their dues.

In December of last year Peretz and his trade union department succeeded in organizing a nationwide strike over the issue of pension agreements. While it only lasted two days, it demonstrated that the Histadrut was well on its way to becoming a true representative of the workers, and that, despite a weakened federation, worker solidarity had held fast.

In the months before the election Peretz understood the need to demonstrate that he had a social vision for the Histadrut and for the nation. In fact the impressive victory, despite a low voter turnout, helped define Peretz as a social leader in his own right and placed him in the top ranks of the Labor Party. Not close to party leader Ehud Barak, Peretz has even hinted in the past that he might leave Labor in order to organize a worker's party. While the victory strengthened that potential threat, it also propelled Barak to quickly and enthusiastically congratulate Peretz.

Peretz was concerned about predictions that there would be a low voter turnout. He blamed the media "which is visible in the reserve they show toward social problems and toward the Histadrut elections." His worst fears came true since only 40 per cent of eligible voters — about 250,000 — actually went to a polling station to choose the federation's leadership. The voters numbered about 12.5 per cent of the country's salaried workers, including the unemployed.

How to account for the low turnout, and the seeming indifference of Histadrut members, despite a recession and growing unemployment? As has happened elsewhere, workers become apprehensive during a period of unemployment, which decreases the bargaining power of unions and workers' influence on economic or political events. Unions are in a stronger position when there is full employment and a shortage of workers, clearly not the situation in Israel. Furthermore, the growing presence of thousands of foreign workers, legal and illegal, hovered as a fringe issue.

Peretz's victory certainly reflected the image he has begun to create of one who is com-

mitted to organizing more workers, and of ensuring that they benefit from Histadrut membership. It also resulted from the oddball coalition of Labor, Likud, the Orthodox Shas, the Russian emigre controlled Yisrael B'aliya, and the Arab Democratic Party. Peretz did not see this coalition as odd but, in fact, he hoped it would "unify residents of the development towns and the poor neighborhoods and the Israel Arabs over issues of livelihood."

The political marriage of the left-wing Meretz, and David Levy's right-of-center Geshar party, did not seem out of place to Maxim Levy. He saw their ideological cooperation as one which placed them both in "the social camp" which would likely expand in light of the government's economic policies. Kibbutz members, who had been allied with Meretz and voted in the election, had the greatest difficulty in accepting the alliance, even if it were merely one of convenience.

The agreement had its origins in a decision by Meretz, after losing Knesset seats in the 1996 elections. In an effort to reach out to new voters, Meretz leaders decided to build a dialogue with Sephardi Jews. A few months ago the two parties found themselves working together in the Knesset to block the government's free-market policies which, they agreed, would hurt Israel's economically deprived population groups.

When Peretz began to forge a wall-to-wall coalition of parties, Meretz insisted that it could not support him if he included the ultra-Orthodox and doctrinaire Shas party. While waiting for a decision, Meretz agreed to support Levy, whose Geshar party sought a high profile in the Histadrut as a means to promoting brother David's prime ministerial ambitions. The matter will become more complex if Prime Minister Netanyahu attempts to bring Geshar back into the government, after many months in exile, in order to build support for any peace initiatives he might launch.

Peretz used the campaign to criticize the social and economic policies of the Netanyahu government, accusing the governor of the Bank of Israel, Jacob Frenkel, as well as the Minister of Finance, Yaakov Ne'eman of a "competition" to determine "who is the bigger enemy of the workers". The attacks on ministers of a Likud-led government, from a man whose own election success reflected a coali-

tion between Labor and Likud within the Histadrut, seemed odd. Even for Israel. Yet, no one blinked.

Peretz immediately proposed that the government, the industrialists and the Histadrut should cooperate to battle unemployment, which he set as the major priority in the months ahead. While supporting a "free market", Peretz also stressed a readiness to battle against the privatization of government companies sold to "too many American billionaires (who) have made a fortune by buying Israel companies" but, he insisted, leave very little for the local economy.

Another issue with which the Histadrut will contend is the role of private agencies who "exploit workers in Israel." He was especially critical of those who "import foreign workers . . . to exploit (them) and to rake in a fortune," calling such practices "slave trade" which must be stopped. Likely to be revisited is the issue of protecting pension rights, especially those of municipal employees, an issue which precipitated last December's highly successful strike.

Adding to Peretz's concern is the fact that a number of unions have weak or non-existing ties to the Histadrut. They include the sec-

ondary school teacher's association, the teachers union, the medical union, and several sector-specific unions, such as engineers and academics, who had begun to assert their independence by setting their own professional policies. As the Histadrut lost some of its influence, workers' committees at large enterprises have become more assertive, often setting their own agendas. These are matters which Peretz cannot ignore as he attempts to expand Histadrut membership, and to demonstrate that the venerable federation is still relevant to a changing Israel.

The Histadrut has completed only about half of the process of reinventing itself. The leadership will continue to face internal as well as external issues in the months ahead. It is not clear what long-range vision Peretz has for the federation, much less if he succeeds in getting there.

What is clear is that the Histadrut seems to be moving away from its role as a general trade union, and to becoming more narrowly defined. Will the New Histadrut be modeled on the labor movements in Germany and in Scandinavia? Will it become a loose federation like our AFL-CIO? And who will provide the answers? □

Eco Zionism

I took the bus into Tel Aviv today, and again I was astounded at the amount of building and development that is going on. Everywhere there are cranes, bulldozers and cement mixers. Highways are being widened, new ones constructed, bridges are arching over where sheep grazed a few months ago. Apartment blocks, office buildings, high rise luxury hotels, pinnacles, towers, the skyline is fast becoming a backdrop for "City of the Future."

Signs of affluence are everywhere. Cellular phones, satellite dishes, new cars on the road. We should be proud of this, we have made enormous advances over the last fifty years. The economic development of this country since independence is a miracle of modernization. We have a right to be proud to be Israelis.

But the real truth is that the sight of the bulldozers and the cranes and the shiny new buildings fill me with fear and apprehension. My concern is about a lack of planning on the part of the developers that will leave the next generation an even worse mess. A country without enough drinking water for its people, a country with large areas of desert poisoned and uninhabitable, a diminishing number of wild species and natural habitats, unbreathable air, polluted streams and rivers, unable to feed ourselves. Will we again become a people without a land?

This was not my Zionist dream when I came here thirteen years ago. I was looking for a lifestyle which would combine the best of the new with the best traditions in harmony with nature. An impossible utopian dream, but Israel is a country built on dreams, and kibbutz is the most ambitious dream of all.

Ancient Chinese wisdom tells us that one who wants to plan for a year should plant rice, while one who wants to plan ten years ahead should plant trees: but one who wants to plan for a hundred years ahead should work in education.

Kibbutz Gezer, a co-founder of the Green Kibbutz Group, is one example of the growing number of kibbutzim dedicated to improving their environmental track record. Gezer has an active environmental group, who have been given a growing budget to carry out educational work within the kibbutz. We have begun an extensive program of restoration forestry on our land, and are expanding the courses we run on environmental subjects. This year we are looking at ways of reducing our sewage impact, and of saving energy. Looking beyond the kibbutz, we are forging working partnerships with environmentalists in Israel and throughout the world. We believe that ecovillages and Green Kibbutz communities can create some of the elements we need in the new civilization which must replace the old one as resources get used up, and pollution exacts its inevitable toll.

Zionism set out to provide a country where Jewish culture could find its national expression. Eco Zionism is concerned with looking after that country, with restoring it to a sustainable condition so that we have something to be proud of to hand on to the next generation.

Jan Martin Bang
from *Kibbutz Trends*

Golda's Centennial

Goldie Mabowitz — later known to the world as Golda Meir — was born on May 3, 1898 in Kiev in the Ukraine. At age 8 she arrived in the United States. The rest is history. On the occasion of the centennial of her birth, we present a brief excerpt from one of her most significant speeches. A fuller account of her life and words is contained in the volume *Golda Meir Speaks Out* (edited by Marie Syrkin) and in a biography by her son Menahem Meir, *My Mother Golda Meir* (Arbor House, 1983). The following excerpt is from the former book.

In January, 1948, the fortunes of the 600,000 Jews in Palestine were at low ebb because of concerted Arab attacks and lack of weapons. Mrs. Meir, then comparatively unknown outside of Palestine, flew to the United States to raise funds for needed arms. She made an unscheduled appearance before the Council of Jewish Federations in Chicago. Her extemporaneous statement electrified Jewry and altered its scale of giving.

Ben-Gurion described the result of her mission: "Someday when history will be written, it will be said that there was a Jewish woman who got the money which made the state possible."

I have had the privilege of representing Palestine Jewry in this country and in other countries when the problems that we faced were those of building more kibbutzim, of bringing in more Jews in spite of political obstacles and Arab riots. We always had faith that in the end we would win, that everything we were doing in the country led to the independence of the Jewish people and to a Jewish state.

Long before we had dared pronounce that word, we knew what was in store for us. Today we have reached a point when the nations of the world have given us their decision — the establishment of a Jewish state in a part of Palestine. Now in Palestine we are fighting to



make this resolution of the United Nations a reality, not because we wanted to fight. If we had the choice, we would have chosen peace, to build in peace.

Friends, we have no alternative in Palestine. The Mufti and his men have declared war upon us. We have to fight for our lives, for our safety, and for what we have accomplished in Palestine, and perhaps above all, we must fight for Jewish honor and Jewish independence.

Without exaggeration, I can tell you that the Jewish community in Palestine is doing this well. Many of you have visited Palestine; all of you have read about our young people and have a notion as to what our youth are like. I have known this generation for the last twenty-seven years. I thought I knew them. I realize now that even then I did not.

These young boys and girls, many in their teens, are bearing the burden of what is happening in the country with a spirit that no words can describe. You see these youngsters in open cars — not armored cars — in convoys going from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, knowing that every time they start out from Tel Aviv or from Jerusalem there are probably Arabs behind the orange groves or the hills, waiting to ambush the convoy. Despite the danger the British government gives no military escort to the civilian convoys. These boys and girls have accepted the task of bringing Jews over these

roads in safety as naturally as though they were going out to their daily work or to their classes in the university.

We must ask the Jews the world over to see us as the front line and do for us what the United States did for England when England was in the front line in the World War. All we ask of Jews the world over, and mainly of the Jews in the United States, is to give us the possibility of going on with the struggle.

When the trouble started, we asked young people from the age of seventeen to twenty-five who were not members of Haganah, to volunteer. Up to the day that I left home on Thursday morning, when the registration of this age group was still going on, over 20,000 young men and women had signed up. As of now we have about 9,000 people mobilized in the various parts of the country. We must triple this number within the next few days.

We have to maintain these men. No government sends its soldiers to the front and expects them to take along from their homes the most elementary requirements — blankets, bedding, clothing. A people that is fighting for its very life knows how to supply the men they send to the front lines. We too must do the same.

Thirty-five of our boys, unable to go by car on the road to besieged Kfar Etzion to bring help, set out by foot through the hills; they knew the road, the Arab villages on that road, and the danger they would have to face. Some of the finest youngsters we have in the country were in that group, and they were all killed, every one of them. We have a description from an Arab of how they fought to the end for over seven hours against hundreds of Arabs. According to this Arab, the last boy killed, with no ammunition left, died with a stone in his hand.

Iwant to say to you, friends, that the Jewish community in Palestine is going to fight to the very end. If we have arms to fight with, we will fight with those, and if not, we will fight with stones in our hands.

I want you to believe me when I say that I came on this special mission to the United States today not to save 700,000 Jews. During the last few years the Jewish people lost 6,000,000 Jews, and it would be audacity on our part to worry the Jewish people throughout the world because a few hundred thousand

more Jews were in danger.

That is not the issue. The issue is that if these 700,000 Jews in Palestine can remain alive, then the Jewish people as such is alive and Jewish independence is assured. If these 700,000 people are killed off, then for many centuries, we are through with this dream of a Jewish people and a Jewish homeland.

My friends, we are at war. There is no Jew in Palestine who does not believe that finally we will be victorious. That is the spirit of the country. We have known Arab riots since 1921 and '29 and '36. We know what happened to the Jews of Europe during this last war. And every Jew in the country also knows that within a few months a Jewish state in Palestine will be established. We knew that the price we would have to pay would be the best of our people. There are over 300 killed by now. There will be more. There is no doubt that there will be more. But there is also no doubt that the spirit of our young people is such that no matter how many Arabs invade the country, their spirit will not falter.

However, this valiant spirit alone cannot face rifles and machine guns. Rifles and machine guns without spirit are not worth very much, but spirit without arms can in time be broken with the body.

Our problem is time. The time factor is now the most important. Millions of dollars that we may get in three or four months will mean very little in deciding the present issue. The question is what can we get immediately. And, my friends, when I say immediately, this does not mean next month. It does not mean two months from now. It means now.

Much must be prepared now so that we can hold out. There are unlimited opportunities, but are we going to get the necessary means? Considering myself not as a guest, but as one of you, I say that the question before each one is simply whether the Yishuv, and the youngsters that are in the front line, will have to fail because money that should have reached Palestine today will reach it in a month or two months from now?

Is it possible that time should decide the issue not because Palestinian Jews are cowards, not because they are incapable, but merely because they lack the material means to carry on?

I have come to the United States, and I hope you will understand me if I say that it is not an

easy matter for any of us to leave home at present — to my sorrow I am not in the front line. I am not with my daughter in the Negev or with other sons and daughters in the trenches. But I have a job to do.

I have come here to try to impress Jews in the United States with the fact that within a very short period, a couple of weeks, we must have in cash between twenty-five and thirty million dollars. In the next two or three weeks we can establish ourselves. Of that we are convinced, and you must have faith; we are sure that we can carry on.

I said before that the Yishuv will give, is giving of its means. But please remember that even while shooting is going on, we must carry on so that our economy remains intact. Our factories must go on. Our settlements must not be broken up. We know that this battle is being waged for those not yet in the country. There are 30,000 Jews detained right next door to Palestine in Cyprus. I believe that within a very short period, within the next two or three months at most, these 30,000 will be with us, among them thousands of infants and young children. We must now think of preparing means of absorbing them.

We know that within the very near future, hundreds of thousands more will be coming in. We must see that our economy is intact. Of course, security has priority. But I am certain that if you were asked whether we should destroy all that we have established in Palestine to put everything solely in security and then have to face the problem of building our economy anew, you would say "No."

I want you to understand that there is no despair in the Yishuv. This is true not only of the young people. I have traveled the road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and other roads quite a bit. I have seen these dangerous buses filled not only with young Haganah men and girls, but with old people traveling the roads as a matter of course.

When you go to Tel Aviv now, you will find the city full of life; only the shooting that you hear on the outskirts of Tel Aviv and Jaffa reminds one that the situation in the country is not normal.

But it would be a crime on my part not to describe the situation to you exactly as it is. Merely with our ten fingers and merely with spirit and sacrifice, we cannot carry on this battle, and the only *hinterland* that we have is

you. The Mufti has the Arab states — not all so enthusiastic about helping him but states with government budgets.

The Egyptian government can vote a budget to aid our antagonists. The Syrian government can do the same. We have no governments. But we have millions of Jews in the Diaspora, and exactly as we have faith in our youngsters in Palestine I have faith in Jews in the United States; I believe that they will realize the peril of our situation and will do what they have to do.

I know that we are not asking for something easy. I myself have sometimes been active in various campaigns and fund collections, and I know that collecting at once a sum such as I ask is not simple. But I have seen our people at home. I have seen them come from the offices to the clinics when we called the community to give their blood for a blood bank to treat the wounded. I have seen them lined up for hours, waiting so that some of their blood can be added to this bank. It is blood plus money that is being given in Palestine.

I know that many of you would be as anxious as our people to be on the very front line. I do not doubt that there are many young people among the Jewish community in the United States who would do exactly what our young people are doing in Palestine.

We are not a better breed; we are not the best Jews of the Jewish people. It so happened that we are there and you are here. I am certain that if you were in Palestine and we were in the United States, you would be doing what we are doing there, and you would ask us here to do what you will have to do.

I want to close with paraphrasing one of the greatest speeches that was made during the Second World War — the words of Churchill. I am not exaggerating when I say that the Yishuv in Palestine will fight in the Negev and will fight in Galilee and will fight on the outskirts of Jerusalem until the very end.

You cannot decide whether we should fight or not. We will. The Jewish community in Palestine will raise no white flag for the Mufti. That decision is taken. Nobody can change it. You can only decide one thing: whether we shall be victorious in this fight or whether the Mufti will be victorious. That decision American Jews can make. It has to be made quickly within hours, within days.

And I beg of you — don't be too late

Was It Worth It??

By Yosef Criden

In a few months, I shall celebrate my 60th year in Israel! It was Palestine when we came. We joined the Kibbutz, my young bride and I after spending an obligatory year in Haifa. Our two sons were born here, and my grandchildren. My grandchildren and great-grandchildren are all Sabras. My beloved wife, Ruth, lies in her grave on the banks of the Jordan. I am a "Vatik" — a veteran, an "Old Timer", if you will. Although the Kibbutz is my home, I have spent many years outside of Upper Galilee — in the Army, in Tel Aviv — and can safely say that I know the country quite well.

Often I ask myself — "Was it worth it?" The struggles, the hardships, the battle for security, for a safe place, for a better society. It is not a simple question to answer, especially in light of conditions today.

True — we have a State, a sovereign State, our own Army, Police Force, and all the paraphernalia of independence.

BUT

Economically — we are in bad shape. Unemployment increases monthly. Investments are down — way down. Exports have reached a new low. The rich are richer but the poor are poorer and their numbers are growing. Agriculture — once the pride of Israel, is no longer a paying proposition. There is a constant brain drain.

Politically — on a world-wide scale — we have reached the nadir of unpopularity. The present government has succeeded in alienating almost all of our erstwhile friends.

Politically — *internally* — never has the Knesset been so mistrusted, so scorned by the masses, irrespective of party divisions. One fiasco follows another — one debacle — another, one scandal outdoes its predecessor.

Our military position? One can only cry. Just a few years ago we were euphoric, on the verge of signing peace treaties with neighbors.

Qatar and Morocco had opened offices in Tel Aviv, there was hope. Today — Not a chance of continuing the Peace discussions on an optimistic level — Morocco refuses to accept our delegate, King Hussein questions our integrity. Arafat is not interested in meeting us. Lebanon is a seething volcano, Egypt — hesitant, Syria adamant.

And the morale of the people — The religious elements against the laity, Sephardic Jews versus the Ashkenazi, North Tel Aviv against Schunat Hatikva. Within the parties there is friction. Bibi against Dan Meridor, Begin against his party, Sharon goes his own merry way. David Levy and Geshar are either Likud or Meretz, one cannot be certain. The Russians are mistreated, the Ethiopians are victims of discrimination, Shas is against the High Court.

And my own family — the Kibbutz! Membership goes down as the age of the population goes up. The younger generation is not interested in communal living. Once the Elite — we Kibbutzniks are now the subject of scorn and — frequently — hatred. We are at once — "Snobs, Millionaires, exploiters, living off the earnings and taxes of others, land speculators".

So, I ask once more — Was it worthwhile? Did I live a useless, worthless life? Did I throw away the lives, the future, the hopes and happiness of my children and my wife and I? And the answer is — NO.

The Country offered me challenge and excitement, interest and ideals. The Kibbutz gave me a variety of jobs — the chance to meet challenge, to do things and to feel part of an effort, part of a group. Who else can say that he participated in the establishment of a State — a Jewish Homeland? I fought in *all the wars*, against Germany as one of the Jewish Brigade, in the War of Liberation, in 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982. I have voted in the elections, fought for my beliefs. And, too often, lost the battle. Still, "It is better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all." I have striven to create a more equitable society, and if I haven't succeeded completely, yet the Kibbutzim were the single most important element in the creation of the Palmach, the Israel Defense Forces, the absorption of the Youth Aliya, the establishment of the outlying borders of Israel. And if

(continued on page 27)

From Open Enrollment to Remediation: Where Now the Quest for Social Justice?

By Henry L. Feingold

In New York City and previously in California the racial fires are burning hot again. The issue is access to higher education. It is through the nation's universities that its elites are trained so that access is a crucial question. Open enrollment was designed to extend college admission for all high school graduates. Remediation is the problem that occurs once such access has been granted. Many students wanting to attend college are unprepared to do so as shown by nationwide testing, usually through the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). In addition, colleges maintain their own admission standards. CUNY (City University of N.Y.), for example, administers its own battery of tests to the entering freshman class. Once admitted, such students require help to improve their reading comprehension, writing and mathematical skills. Current plans call for phasing out remediation over a three-year period and limiting students to one-year remediation elsewhere. Should limited fiscal resources appropriated for public universities be expended for such an endeavor? Does it threaten the integrity of our public universities which would bear the brunt of such a policy? What follows are some thoughts I have had about these questions in my over three decades as a history professor in a public college.

I am not at all certain of the path we should follow, and part of my uncertainty stems from an aspiration to do social justice that I share with Labor Zionists. I submit to the readers of *Frontier* without claim to consistency.

I am aware that it is not necessary for *Frontier* to concern itself with such "domestic" problems but I submit them nevertheless be-

cause I am convinced that a factor in reenergizing the LZA is to address problems that face us where we live. Perhaps the chaverim who possess a similar social democratic sensibility and wrestle with such dilemmas may have found answers that thus far have eluded me.

1. Whether innocently or otherwise, those who deny that beyond a certain percentage, the admission of such poorly prepared students impacts on the quality of education are in a state of denial. The higher the proportion of unprepared students, the more severe the impact on the educational environment of the college. The negative impact takes several different forms, ranging from a general lowering of requirements in basic courses to grade inflation. Within the school there can be a world of difference between teaching an honors seminar and a required basic survey course. A teacher, if he is alive and honest in his transactions with students, naturally adjusts his expectations to a realistic level. When I began teaching the basic American history survey course in 1969, I required that students read ten paperbacks. By 1979 the number had been lowered to five, and ten years later one paperback was required for access to a grade of C, two for a grade of B and three for a grade of A. I was not aware that I was guilty of what my colleagues called "dumbing down." I simply related to the students who sat before me. I was trying to remain relevant. The standards simply could not be applied to students who did not read rapidly enough and who often worked in taxing jobs which left them little time. For some the response was to enroll in "touchy feely" courses where demands are low. Such courses are given in most colleges. Re-

peatedly, students beleaguered by sometimes heart-rending life problems ask me to break the contract in which requirements have been spelled out for them at the semester's outset. The pressure to bend the rules is awesome and perpetual. There has been a death in the family, a good job has been lost, he or she must return to his or her native land because of an emergency, an unforeseen pregnancy will require absence for much of the semester but she will, I am assured, submit all written work. The assumption that they are admitted provided that they will meet the existing standard is not understood by those genuinely students. They appeal to the instructor to waive requirements being met by others because of their special need. Only a professor without a heart can consistently deny their pleas.

2. In direct conflict with the first observation is my certainty that the investment of public funds in such marginal students pays off for the community. I do not mean that it helps diffuse a potential explosion in the lower classes or the concern, expressed recently by Nathan Glazer, that we risk a great deal if the elites that manage this complex society stem from only one segment of the population. That may or may not be true. I mean that shaping by the college experience does not magically stop below a certain SAT score. It continues to occur on different terms and the social income that is related to having an educated citizenry also continues. I have repeatedly received former students who, by any standard, would not have been considered good college material and am always amazed at how productive they have become. They do not become the nation's physicists or neurosurgeons but most become taxpayers and some have become pillars of their communities. In some intangible way the investment through our public colleges in what might be considered the average citizen-to-be does yield considerable social income. It is hard to imagine how that happens. Such students may grow into the certification granted by the college diploma on the job. Or, once having been certified, they realize that in the open market an investment of time and a certain level of minimum competence is requisite for keeping the job.

3. Whether based on race, gender or handicap ("challenge"), preferential treatment of any sort is not worth the social cost even when an element of social justice can be discerned.

Such proscriptive advantage generates a feeling of unfairness, especially among that strata of average students who under the system are entitled to nothing. Of course, students soon surmise who the favored students who receive such special consideration are. They cannot understand why a student from the Caribbean, who happens to have the right racial complexion but has never been victimized by American society, should be singled out for compensation. Moreover, such preferences are not easy to implement fairly and there can be manipulation of the system. Everyone seems to know a Jewish student who happens to have a Hispanic name, or a Ghanian with the right skin color, who claims such preference.

4. The penchant for blaming the unpreparedness of some students to do college work on a failing high school system does not hold water. The fact is that for most immigrant groups and native subcultures the secondary school has always been a failure. The dropout rates were very high for the first-generation immigrants. In fact the use of the public high school for college preparation before World War II was confined largely to Jews and other highly motivated groups like Armenian and Greek Americans. Asian Americans followed that pattern after World War II. The school failure has nothing to do with a poor curriculum, the low quality of the teachers, or the bad physical plant of the school. The inability to use the school for social mobility rests almost entirely on cultural factors and related economic ones. No matter how poor, Jews and Asians and other "successful" groups use their resources to invest in the human capital of themselves. They keep their children in school and place high value on doing well there. It is a cultural thing.

5. Finally, it is a great error and source of much personal unhappiness to process entire generations of young people through the colleges because it is the only instrument of mobility available to realize the American dream. Repeatedly I observe young people whose intelligence does not lie in the direction of abstraction or decoding; they are not readers and writers, the primary skills needed for success in the liberal arts. I have encountered some who loath being cooped up indoors, especially when spring comes. Yet at the same time some of these failing youngsters possess considerable skill in mechanical things. I have taught students who submit a paper that

might have been written by a ten-year-old and at the same time, while never having seen an overhead projector, can disassemble and fix what is wrong without any trouble. They possess a different kind of intelligence, one that does not easily cope with the skills required by the liberal arts. Yet it is through a version of the liberal arts curriculum, which is now often watered down beyond all meaning, that they must endure in order to receive the diploma. Increasingly, everything is channeled through it if one wants a college degree, the passport to the promise of America. What we need most of all is alternate mobility channels that hold out the possibility of realizing that dream in other ways. Such alternative paths of achievement are rapidly disappearing from American life. Is it possible that the level of violence, especially among the older adolescent cohort, is related to the decline of the kind of work which contains a modicum of risk and sheer physical exertion? Before everyone was required to become a white-collar worker we used to have such employment on our piers and wharves and in our mines and mills. In a number of cases, no one knows the precise percentage, it is simply a waste of time and money to send a youngster to college. The constant signals of failure cannot but lead to unhappiness and the college too is diminished by the failure. But how can we resolve the problem of inappropriate placement when the rewards granted for those incapable of absorbing college training are so much lower?

There are of course other factors to be considered. Can we afford to compromise and otherwise diminish the elites who manage this complex society? Do you want a procedure done by an affirmative action neurosurgeon? On the other hand can we abide the risk of creating two separate cultures: one which has it all, money, power, health and another that has none of these because there is no certification of academic skills?

For readers of this journal the question of social justice is central. The way open enrollment and remediation have been implemented at the City University of New York has shown me that the effort to achieve social justice can actually create new social injustices. What is most troubling is that we seem increasingly to require that the world be made over to fit the college professor's image of the worthwhile

life. I am reluctant to allow my colleagues to run the world or even to determine value. If a man is happier as a trucker than a preacher, who is to gainsay that? But then, that links the idea of social justice to personal happiness where it might not belong. That brings me to the profound insight of my father who, when his children complained that they had not achieved happiness, answered happily: "Where is it written that you are supposed to be happy?" Kibbutzniks were not necessarily happier than the denizens of Tel Aviv. Is it possible that the just society is not necessarily a happy one? □

CONTRIBUTORS

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Hersey's *Wall* Revisited

By David Rosenthal

John Hersey, Pulitzer Prize novelist and author of 25 books, including *The Wall*, died in Key West, Florida on March 24, 1993, at a time when the newspapers and television were full of publicity on the Washington "Monument to Memory" which "combines the functions of an architectural memorial to the Holocaust and a museum devoted to the history of the Holocaust."

In Hersey's impressive literary legacy, *The Wall* occupies a special place. First published in 1950 by Alfred Knopf, it went through seven editions that same year, setting a record. In this work Hersey attempted to immortalize the martyrology of Jewish Warsaw under Nazi rule. And he undertook this daunting task without any previous knowledge of Polish Jewry and its historical past. But after years of extensive research and innumerable conversations with Jewish survivors, he produced a 632-page work dealing with material that had previously been absolutely foreign to him.

In order to get some idea of the challenge that faced John Hersey it is necessary to know something about his biography and his environment, about the internal and external processes of the world in which his creativity was rooted.

John Hersey was born in 1914 in China, where he spent the first twelve years of his life. In 1926 his family moved to the United States. In 1936 he graduated from Yale University, then went to England to continue his studies at Cambridge. During World War II his work as a war correspondent took him to the Pacific in 1942, the Mediterranean in 1943, the Soviet Union in 1944-45 and China-Japan in 1945-46.

Immediately following the war he visited Poland and Esthonia, witnessed the destroyed ghettos in Warsaw and Lodz, and stood before the German gallows and crematoria in several concentration camps. In this way the horror-filled reality became the background for his novel *The Wall*.

From the very first day of Hersey's appearance in the literary arena in 1942 he was imbued with the idea that a writer's pen must serve moral-ethical ends. He called for a humanist view of life. His writings moved the reader to look deeply into the situations he described, to share the temptations that life places before us. In brief, his works stirred the conscience of the reader.

The clearest evidence of this is the reaction to his work *Hiroshima* (1946), in which he depicts the life of six individuals who survived the atomic bombing of Japan in 1945. He had originally conceived *Hiroshima* as a work of fiction in three parts, and that was the order in which the *New Yorker* had planned to publish it. But then, under the strong impression of the material itself, the editors decided to publish the entire work on August 31, 1946. The response in the press was unanimously laudatory. The *New York Herald-Tribune* called the series the "best war reporting." Albert Einstein supposedly ordered 1000 copies to distribute. Can there be a greater expression of recognition than that?

The Wall: Omissions and Intentions

The Yiddish word for wall is "moyer" — and that is exactly what the Jews in Warsaw called the three-meter-high brick wall surrounding the ghetto.

Hersey managed to achieve results which only writers with an ideological mission can produce. Generally speaking, his novel mirrors the bloody, afflicted Jewish reality of the war years in Warsaw both in chronology and in actuality.

Nevertheless, there are accounts in the book that are outside the framework of probability. Also, the author has not chronicled the sufferings of the tens of thousands of refugees who were driven to Warsaw from other places; the starvation in the ghetto; the smuggling of food; the struggle of young children to stay alive after

their parents had been taken from them; the entire labyrinth of complex and interconnected social-psychological problems in the ghetto.

I am not carping here. As the Yiddish critic Tsivion once said: one does not criticize a writer for what he has *not* written, but for something he *did* write. In the case of literature that attempts to describe the Holocaust, such aspects cannot be overlooked. After all, what was Hersey's intent and how did he wish to arrive at his goal? On the inside of the book jacket you will find these passages:

"To reveal the full stature of man in the face of catastrophe, John Hersey has used a classical device — the rediscovery of lost records. For even though *The Wall* is ostensibly culled from the Lewinson Archive, it is a novel. Its substance is history, but its details are invented. It transmutes the record of vast tragic events into a great work of imagination.

"On the surface *The Wall* is the story of the systematic piecemeal extermination of the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto, and of the heroic resistance of defenseless men and women against the full brute force of Germans. But the real story is the growth in spirit of a group of friends, so that they emerge undismayed and triumphant in the face of physical annihilation . . ."

As the reader will certainly surmise, the "Levinson archive" in *The Wall* is a synonym for the Emanuel Ringelblum archive. This is Hersey's version:

On a sunny day soon after the end of the war, a search commission found the "Levinson archives" sealed in 17 metal boxes, plus a number of packages wrapped in rags and old woolens. The "dig" took place beneath the ruins at Nowolipki 68 and Swiętojęcka 34. The archive consists mostly of personal notes, but there are also a large number of Judenrat documents. According to Hersey, Levinson was interested mainly in individuals, not in the general history of the period. He must have been a lonely man . . . In a period of three years he wrote more than four million words . . .

Then Hersey gives us a description of Levinson's outward appearance. "In appearance, Noach Levinson was, it seems, not only unimpressive; most accounts agree that there was actually something repellent about his looks. His stature was small. He had the face of an intellectual, narrow and drawn out forward, and upon his unruly nose sat a pair of steel-

rims glasses whose lenses were so thick that Levinson's eyes seemed, to one who looked into them, far larger than most human eyes."

For a Jewish reader it is superfluous to point out that this account of the Levinson archive, as well as the characterization of Levinson himself, is not only ridiculous but also a distortion of the truth. It contains not even a morsel of historical veracity, if it is supposed to document the finding of the two milk cans in which the notes of the Oneg Shabbat group were hidden, or if it is supposed to represent a realistic picture of the historic chronicler of the Warsaw ghetto, Emanuel Ringelblum.

The imaginary characters in *The Wall*, who are supposed to personify actual ghetto personalities, appear often in situations quite different from that, controlled by a fate totally different from that of their prototypes. Thus, for example, Hersey describes Dr. Zadkin (in reality, Dr. Alfred Nosig) as a victim of a Communist conspiracy. According to Hersey, Nosig was one of those people who tried to influence the Germans to look favorably upon the Jews. The truth, however, is that Dr. Alfred Nosig — communal leader, writer, sculptor — sat in the Judenrat as an "inside man" for the Germans, with whom he cooperated fully. The Jewish Fighting Organization, in fact, issued a death sentence on him which was carried out after the expulsion in January 1943.

In America *The Wall* was given a positive reception, one would say an enthusiastic one. The book touched the hearts of its readers. The Jewish Book Council awarded it the Daroff Memorial Fiction Prize. The Sidney Hillman Foundation awarded the author its highest distinction. *The Wall* was even dramatized for the Billy Rose Theater in 1960 and filmed for television in 1962.

An objective summation by "a person who was there" cannot remain indifferent to all the errors and inaccuracies that are to be found in this book. It is undoubtedly a work of broad scope and contains many deeply moving moments. What it does not reflect, however, is the Jewish and human struggle that took place behind the walls of the Warsaw ghetto; the Jewish ordeal, the Jewish dilemma and the Jewish historical consequences of the Holocaust. □

The Bizarre Case of Lord George Gordon

By Joseph Adler

For all the ferocity of the attack upon religion made by the advocates of the Age of Enlightenment, the eighteenth century remained at heart a religious era. The "enlighteners" who emphasized reason tried to remove religious concerns from the center of life to its periphery. Their efforts, however, were not always successful as there were other forces and individuals at work who preferred the status quo and fought to reverse any trend toward religious toleration. In England, for example, the attempt to remove religious disabilities took a strange turn in the person and life of an eccentric aristocrat named Lord George Gordon (1751-1793).

The youngest son of the 3rd Duke of Gordon, he was educated at Eton, and entered the British Navy as a midshipman, rising to the rank of lieutenant in 1772. When the 4th Earl of Sandwich, then at the head of the Admiralty, would not promise him a command, George Gordon resigned his commission shortly before the onset of the American Revolution. In 1774 he entered Parliament, representing a pocket borough that was given him as a bribe to withdraw from an election elsewhere.

Gordon attracted little attention as a member of Parliament until 1779, at which time he organized and led several Protestant associations formed to secure the repeal of the Catholic Relief Act of 1778. On June 2, 1780, Gordon, at the head of a mob estimated to have numbered 50,000, marched to the Houses of Parliament to present a petition urging the restoration of Catholic disabilities. When Parliament rejected the petition the mob, inflamed by Gordon's rhetoric, rioted. The disturbances, known to history as the No-Popery, or Gordon

Riots, raged for six days. Roman Catholic chapels were destroyed; the Bank of England and other public buildings were attacked; the notorious Newgate Prison was set on fire, and other prisons opened and criminals released by the unruly mob. Twenty thousand troops were required to quell the rioters. During the disturbances three hundred persons were killed, and one hundred ninety-two convicted of crimes (twenty-five would later be executed). Gordon was arrested and charged with high treason for instigating the riots, but in the trial that followed he was acquitted. His defense, headed by Thomas Erskine, argued that Gordon had not had any treasonable intentions.

The trial of Gordon attracted the attention of many of England's most prominent personages. Edmund Burke considered Gordon a romantic eccentric and described him as a Don Quixote. Horace Walpole called him "the lunatic apostle", and Charles Dickens in his novel *Barnaby Rudge* referred to Gordon and the No-Popery Riots.

Lord George Gordon's popularity did not wane after the trial. In 1781 he was nominated as a candidate for Parliament for the City of London, but declined the honor. His life thereafter was a succession of political and financial schemes. Three years after his refusal to run for Parliament he once again came forward as the Protestant champion in a quarrel between the Dutch and the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II. In 1786, Gordon was excommunicated from the Church of England by the Archbishop of Canterbury for refusing to bear witness in an ecclesiastical suit.

Some time prior to his excommunication, the former Protestant leader had become interested in Judaism and the Jewish people. He initiated a correspondence with the heads of the Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewish communities of London, indicating a desire to convert to Judaism. The letters, replete with Hebrew quotations, seem to indicate that Gordon had some knowledge of Jewish Scripture and sources. Although his application for conversion was rejected by the Chief Rabbi, David Schiff of the Great Synagogue of London, Gordon persisted in his efforts to convert. Eventually, he was accepted into the covenant in 1786 (probably in Holland or Birmingham, England). He was circumcised, and took the name Israel bar Abraham. In addition, he grew a long beard, and dressed in the fashion of Orthodox Jews, and began to live an observant Jewish life. Many of his critics at the time believed that the conversion was a ruse. His true objective, they felt, was to gain adherents among Jews for his financial schemes, with the hope that they would use their wealth to withhold loans from the government for waging wars.

The year following his conversion, Gordon was accused of libeling the Queen of France, Marie Antoinette, the French Ambassador to London, and the administration of justice in England. Found guilty on all counts, he fled to Holland. After a brief exile he returned to England (Birmingham), and was taken into custody. In January of 1788 he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in Newgate Prison, and to pay a fine of five hundred pounds, and to furnish two securities of 2,500 pounds each.

Although lodged at first with the common prisoners in damp and cold conditions, Gordon continued to write pamphlets and articles on political and social issues, in addition to carrying on a correspondence with prominent personalities. In time, thanks to the intervention of his aristocratic friends, he was given more comfortable quarters and privileges. Thus, the theologian John Wesley, one of his numerous illustrious visitors, was able to report that Gordon's quarters were more like the study of a recluse in a private home than a prison. Other visitors included the Dukes of York and Clarence, the sons of King George III, as well as a number of artists who came to paint the aristocratic prisoner's striking appearance.

Throughout his incarceration in Newgate, Gordon meticulously practiced the precepts of

Judaism. On one prison wall hung the Ten Commandments in Hebrew, and every morning he donned his phylacteries ("tefillin") and prayer shawl ("tallit"), and prayed. On Saturdays he was usually joined by nine other Jews (mostly foreigners) to make a prayer quorum ("minyan").

Although a prisoner, Gordon had a Jewish manservant, and kept a magnificent table. He never dined with fewer than six guests, and often these repasts were followed by music and dancing. He ate only specially prepared (i.e., "kosher") food, and refused to see any Jew who was not bearded. Occasionally he amused himself by playing his violin, or bagpipes.

The conversion of Lord George Gordon to Judaism shocked London society and especially his former colleagues in the Protestant associations, and he soon became the butt of numerous jests and satirical ditties. Typical of the latter genre is an excerpt from a contemporary ballad:

Ye Jews, Turks and Christians, I pray now
draw near,
When a comical ditty you quickly will hear.
Concerning Lord George who for Protestant
laws,
His life said he'd lose in so glorious a
cause . . .
To a Jew he turned, with a beard as long as
a goat,
What a glorious defender of Protestant laws.
With pork or fat bacon I'd well rub his jaws,
So we wish them much joy of the new convert
Jew.
Tho' my tale is told, yet I'm sure it is true,
So farewell my Lord since to Newgate you're
taken,
You may find it hard to save your own bacon.

The effect of Gordon's conversion upon English Jewry was equally electrifying. Dickens in his novel *Barnaby Rudge* captured the feelings among some of the Jews when he has one of his characters (Gashford) declare that the Jews regarded the leader of the "No-Popery" riots as a second Moses, and fondly hoped he was designated by Providence to lead them back to their fathers' land. However, the majority of Jews, particularly the leaders of the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities, were fearful that the conversion might trigger off an anti-Jewish reaction.

Indeed, the situation of the Jews in England was paradoxical. They enjoyed more freedom

in the economic sphere than in any other European country on the eve of the French Revolution. Nevertheless they remained deprived of precisely that privilege to which they most aspired, namely their formal recognition as citizens with equal rights — particularly the right of active participation in the nation's municipal and national political life. In 1655, as a result of the pleas of Manasseh ben Israel, and Oliver Cromwell's desire to attract trade to British shores, the Jews were readmitted to England, from whence they had been expelled in 1290. Their official status, however, remained uncertain. A bill passed by Parliament in 1753, allowing Jews to become naturalized citizens, created such an uproar that it was repealed the following year. Jewish political rights would not make any progress until the age of parliamentary reforms in the 1840s. However, complete equality and freedom from all disabilities would not be granted until 1890.

Lord George Gordon's imprisonment paralleled the early stages of the French Revolution. He welcomed the event enthusiastically and noisily, playing dirges on his bagpipe and entertaining political radicals such as John Horne Tooke. His radicalism so angered Edmund Burke that the latter, in his great work *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, proposed to the Paris revolutionary regime an ex-

change of prisoners. He suggested that the French send to England the popish Archbishop of Paris and the English would send them their Protestant Rabbi.

After serving five years in Newgate Prison, Gordon was due to be released but could not obtain the heavy securities required by his sentence. Accordingly, he was returned to his cell, and a few months later he caught a fever that led to his death (1793). The Jewish community, still fearful of being too closely identified with the former Protestant leader, refused to bury him. His own relatives interred him in a Protestant churchyard in Hampstead, London, and the site of his grave was soon forgotten. □

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LETTERS

Dear Editor:

I received the May/June issue of the *Jewish Frontier* and enjoyed reading it. For historic reasons I want to bring to your attention a number of my reflections:

1. In the article "The Signing of Israel's Declaration of Independence" the writer suggests that "There was strong opposition from Zionist leaders in the U.S., who lobbied for postponement, partially due to pressure from the State Department." I am not certain that this statement is correct. I was a member of the Political Committee of the Poale Zion. We were informed that there was pressure from the State Department to postpone the declaration of the state. In the discussion which followed there was no one on the Political Committee who even suggested a postponement. Two days before the proclamation of statehood I met Hayim Greenberg who informed me that the state would be proclaimed and if necessary "a government in exile would be established."

2. In the article "Before and After May 14th 1948" the writer states that the declaration was

made at the old Opera House. This is incorrect. The Independence was declared at the Tel Aviv Museum on Friday at 4:00 pm so as not to conflict with Shabbat.

3. In the fine article on Chaim Arlosoroff nothing is mentioned about his two missions to America. During the time that Arlosoroff was in America (a comprehensive article of this period by Shlomo Grodzensky appeared in *Labor Palestine*, a publication of the movement) he had a great deal of influence on the Zionist Labor Party (Hitachdut) and the Avukah (American Student Zionist Federation). I have in my possession a pamphlet entitled *To the Jewish Youth* which appeared in 1928, a comprehensive booklet on *Hechalutz* which appeared in 1929, pamphlets of *The Young Jew* series which appeared during that time and a letter to members of the Zionist World Executive which was sent on March 1st, 1929. This letter had a powerful influence on American Zionism.

Shalom U'Vracha,
DAVID BRESLAU
Jerusalem

LIONHEARTS: Heroes of Israel.

edited by Michael Bar-Zohar.

May 1998. \$30.00 (330p).

Warner Hardcover

On the occasion of Israel's 50th anniversary, a large number of celebratory volumes has appeared this year. Many of them are lavishly illustrated; all of them have interesting texts covering the half century of the country's rebirth and development. One of the most appealing is appropriately named LIONHEARTS: *Heroes of Israel*. More than just a handsome coffee-table exhibit, *Lionhearts* gives the reader a rich gallery of 50 men and women trailblazers, from the turn of the century through the World Wars and the Holocaust to the fight against terrorism and the military victories that assured Israel's survival in a hostile region.

The fifty sketches were written by leading political, military, literary and artistic figures, including three Prime Ministers.

Former President Haim Herzog writes on the Six-Day War. Shimon Peres on Jonathan "Yoni" Netanyahu who died at Entebbe in 1976.

The roster of heroes starts off properly with Joseph Trumpeldor, the Russian-Jewish army captain who came to Palestine to join its pioneering stalwarts, and died in Galilee in the defense of Kibbutz Tel Hai in February 1920. That stand against Arab marauders helped define the northeast borders of Palestine and included a vital segment in the newborn Jewish State. Trumpeldor was also involved in the organization of the nascent labor movement, but was killed before he could participate in the launching of Histadrut in December 1920.

Some of the Lionhearts are still alive today. One of them is well known to the veterans of the Labor Zionist youth movement of the 1930s. He is Zvi Brenner, a *vatik* of Kibbutz Afikim in the Jordan Valley. Born in Poland in

1915, Zvi came as a boy to Chicago, to join his divorced mother. In Chicago, he associated with the Labor Zionist youth, who were close to his earlier connection in Poland to Hechalutz Hatzair, which strongly advocated *aliya* to Eretz Israel. Pursuing this course, Zvi went to the Hechalutz training farm at Parkville, Maryland. In 1934, he left America in a group of 40 young people, some of whom had trained at the Hechalutz farm in Minnesota. After some preliminary adjustment to their new country, they joined the young Kibbutz Afikim, whose nucleus had come from Russia.

In those days, settlement and self-defense were twin activities. Zvi Brenner immediately became a member of Hagana, and during the 1936 Arab riots, participated in the defense of Ramat Hakovesh. He was to be on constant call, as a member of the auxiliary police force. In March 1938, Zvi was detached to the establishment and defense of a new kibbutz, Hanita, in western Galilee. During that period he came to the attention of the British officer, Captain Charles Orde Wingate, the *yedid* (staunch friend) whose special night squads made special preventative sorties against known Arab terrorist formations. The British mandatory authorities did not look with favor on these Jewish maneuvers, and from time to time arrested the participants. Once, Zvi was among the arrestees and thrown into Acre prison. Among his fellow inmates was Moshe Dayan. While Dayan was treated with relative kindness by his jailors, Brenner was roughed up.

World War II changed the scene radically. After much negotiation, the British finally agreed to the establishment of a Palestine Jewish Brigade. In March 1945, the Brigade landed in Italy and engaged in combat with the Nazi foe. Zvi Brenner stepped on a land mine and almost lost a foot. Only rapid action and long-term care saved the limb, although Zvi was to limp on it for many years. Only gradually was he able to assume some duties back in Afikim.

Now, Zvi Brenner is one of Afikim's elder statesmen. With his wife Ruthie, his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren he enjoys the bounty of his life's work on the farm and in the military ranks. It takes the heart of a lion to do both in the land of Israel. □

Nahum Guttman

TISHA B'AV and YOM HASHOAH

By Amnon Hadary

Many years ago — so many that it was before the advent of TV in Israel — there was a popular radio program emceed by Shmulik Rosen. Basically it was a round-robin quiz show pitting high-schools from around the country against each other. The subject matter was varied and the sharp intellects of the students kept audiences' interests. The final match was between teams that had been on the air a number of times. Shmulik asked a question about Bialik. Team A flubbed it. With a tie score Team B could have won the whole contest if they answered that really rudimentary question, but to everyone's surprise they didn't know either. Good emcees are the ones who don't fluster and always have a fall-back question. So the next question put to Team A was about some detail of Herzl's life. Again the collective head-scratching of the A's came up with zilch. Next, the question was presented to the B's and again they didn't have a clue. At a loss, Shmulik stopped the program to ask: How is it that the two best teams in the country failed to answer relatively easy questions? A principal of one of the high-schools provided the denouement: "great personalities are taught in

'citizenship' classes close to their birthdays or the date of their death. Herzl and Bialik died on *khaf* and *khaf-aleph* (20 and 21) *tammuz* during the summer break; so there is a justifiable lacuna in the students' education."

In America we pioneered in many aspects of Jewish camping. Exploiting the summers *davka*, Habonim Camp-Kvut-zot covered more ground in greater depth than a year's attendance at a Sunday school or even at a three times weekly Hebrew school. Exploiting the inherent advantages of informal education, we certainly inculcated a greater commitment to things Jewish, energized a stronger sense of belonging to the Jewish people in our *hanikhim*. For instance, some of the most impressive Tisha b'Av "celebrations" I've experienced were at lakes or poolsides when, each year, the "temple" was ritually set afire on a raft to the recitation of highly emotive readings. By the way, are Herzl-Bialik days still held at Habonim camps?

In Israel we celebrate too many holidays; 13 a year (three of them at least a week long) is an embarrassment of riches. And that doesn't even take 6 fast-days into account.

You can't run a country this way. Now that we have our own country again there are other urgent matters to attend to beside memorials, rituals, ceremonies and liturgies. There is such a sensory and cognitive overload that the holidays' educational thrust is sacrificed — there are so many "postings" that the really important messages get lost. We need to regroup if we want to make a coherent statement of what Jewish history is all about.

Not only in the school system; in the life of the country as a whole. In a manner of speaking, those of us who grew up in a youth movement believed that adulthood (read living in the Jewish State) would be one uninterrupted educational *peulah*.

Menahem Begin had a good idea — along with many I categorically rejected — why not integrate several holidays? Yom HaAtzmaut could go well with Pesah as a combined spring liberation holiday and Tisha b'Av should be yoked with Yom HaShoah by moving holocaust day to the summer as a catchment basin of catastrophes. Reflecting, I've come to the conclusion that the idea has much to recommend it. Conceptually, Tisha b'Av and

Yom HaShoah go together as bookends holding up a virtual two-volume book of lament: call it "Galut from Beginning to End", (the era of the sigh, the groan and the whimper).

Volume One is the Scroll of Lamentations, *Eikhah*, a heart-rendering cry over the destruction of the nation, of Jerusalem, the First Temple and Jewish sovereignty — the beginning of exile. First and foremost it is the painful moan of a mourner when consciousness of the magnitude of the disaster bursts through the protective veil of initial shock. Each memory occasions a renewed gush of tears. It seems he cannot grasp what has happened. He repeats the dirge-like question, "eikhah?" how? How could such events possibly have occurred? How could non-Jews have acted in such a way? Yet the very refusal to believe is in itself an initial comprehension of the facts. Even as one recoils, reality penetrates consciousness. The mourner must come to grips with actuality. Otherwise he remains in constant illusory hallucination — and to knowingly bring about illusory hallucination as an escape is the beginning of madness.

Eikhah, which tradition attributes to Jeremiah who witnessed the destruction of the Temple, continues to fulfill its primary role to this day, though it is an "ancient" anguish. If the determination to retain a grievance against the world "for what it did to us" is not worked through, it will become fixated, cursing us with an attitude problem. The pattern began when in their anthologizing wisdom the Sages assigned grief over the

destruction of the Second Temple, too, to the ninth day of Av. And over the years other tragedies were added. But this was only an overture in the opera of tragedy. All along Tisha b'Av was in rehearsal — a paradigm for the holocaust.

The holocaust has not yet been canonized in a single work. But the missing companion volume to *Eikhah* is at hand in Bialik's prescient poems: "In the City of Slaughter", "Scroll of Fire", and "The Dead of the Desert".

The portents leading up to the spiritual crisis of the holocaust (Where was God?) began as early as the end of the renaissance and burst into the Jewish public sphere along with the downfall of Shabbatean messianism when the traditional believing world-outlook fixed in the Middle Ages by the Kabbalah no longer adequately described reality. Suddenly the believing Jew who directed all his intellectual and emotional powers toward communicating with the spiritual spheres, hoping that by kavanah, devotion and purpose in his prayers and the performance of mitzvot, he could change the human condition and the situation of the Jews among the nations. Suddenly he senses that there is no connection between his efforts and the daily reality in which he lives. Worse, as a result, a terrible sense of isolation attacks the believer as he fears that God averts His gaze from him.

Bialik stepped into this breach. In his early "Facing the Bookcase" even as he describes an unbroken continuity from the Bible to hasidism, his poem reflects the crisis in the heart of a believer

who encounters the reality of a Jewish fate that no longer allows a believing response. Yet Bialik had to formulate a national Jewish ethos that would enable a new response to the suffering of the nation.

Bialik's infuriated reaction to the Kishinev massacre was articulated in "In the City of Slaughter". It embodies the breakdown of meek acceptance which was the traditional reaction pattern to Jewish fate in exile, while the mytho-poetic element in "The Dead of the Desert" declares a rebellion against the heavens.

The catastrophe of exile which began with the destruction of Jewish life in Eretz Israel has come full circle with the end of Jewish acquiescence to exile as a divine punishment. The Jew who had been encapsulated in the history and geography of other nations has re-entered history.

There is no exile any more. Galut is kaput! As long as it lasted, exile was an estate, a status, a presence and not merely a condition. As long as it had a rationale, galut was a God-ordained reality, a corrective hiatus *en route* to the redemptive goal in Eretz Israel. Now there is only the goal made real. Israel was realized by the grace of the Jewish people's endeavors without the connivance of God. Now that the bipolar Tisha b'Av Yom HaShoah exile has run its course, Jews who remain not-ingathered, who elect to remain abroad do so as individuals practicing personal choice, as Jews who live merely in diaspora.

Some light summer reading. Read it to the light of the Tisha b'Av fire at camp. □

Between Ashes and Hope

By Nahum Guttman

As noted elsewhere in this issue, summer on the Jewish calendar contains some of the most somber dates in the annals of the Jewish people. The ninth of Av — *Tisha B'Av* — commemorates major calamities visited upon the Jews during the millennia of their existence. In 586 BCE, the first Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. In 70 CE, Romans sacked the second Temple on Mount Zion and sent the people into Exile. Great as these traumatic shocks were, they did not cause Jewry to disappear. On the contrary, fresh resources were developed, a great Diaspora evolved, and the people mustered strength to endure the pains of their dispersion and strive for the Restoration of Zion "in our days. . . ."

In the 1930s, when still active in the Labor Zionist youth movement, Habonim, I directed several of their summer camps, and one of the highlights of the program was the observance of *Tisha B'Av*. It was truly a *fast* day, and the kids had to forego their meals. Only when some irate mothers complained at this "mis-treatment" of their offspring did we relent and excuse those under *Bar Mitzvah* age from the *mitzva* of abstinence.

Another feature of the day was an address on its significance. We told the story of Rabbi Akiva, who with his students were at the site of the Temple ruins, where foxes ran among the sacred remnants of the Holy of Holies. The students were taken aback when Rabbi Akiva broke out in laughter: how could their revered rabbi rejoice on this disastrous day? Rabbi Akiva explained: it was written that the Temple would be destroyed, but it was also written that the Temple would be rebuilt. Since the

first half of the prophecy had been fulfilled, the second half would surely follow.

So, in the 1930s, we young Labor Zionists felt — we knew — that out of the ashes would come redemption. I know that many of my young charges in Accord (NY), Camp Tel Hai (New Buffalo, Michigan) and the California camp outside Los Angeles, have lived to see the rebirth of Israel and are now enjoying life in redeemed Jerusalem.

Scarcely a decade later, in 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed. Together with Isaac Hamlin, head of the Histadrut Campaign in America, I flew to the new state, where we saw, literally, how the Zionist leaders had been transformed into members of a provisional yet viable government. There was a gala outdoor party in Tel Aviv where civilian and military personalities mingled and lifted a *l'haim*.

That week there was a Labor Party gathering in the city. It was the eve of *Tisha B'Av* and some members were in a quandary: what to do, to observe the historic fast day, or welcome the new era in some other manner. Zalman Rubashov, the always ebullient mentor and scholar, who was to become the country's first Minister of Education, and later, as Zalman Shazar, its third President, rose to solve the dilemma: "*Yiddn — in shul arein!*" I don't know how many of the Laborites literally followed Shazar's directive to attend synagogue, but it was clear that full restitution of Israel's Nationhood was yet to be achieved. We are not relieved of the obligation to remember the ugly moments of our collective path.

This year, *Tisha B'Av* occurs on August 1st, a Saturday. Hence the fasting is deferred one day, to Sunday, August 2nd.

"*Yiddn — in shul arein!*" □

WAS IT WORTH IT?

(continued from page 12)

today they are no longer in the forefront — So what? Without the Kibbutzim there would very likely have been no Israel at all. And I — I have been part, an active part, of it all!

It is good — there is a good feeling, that I am an actor in the grand drama — realizing the dreams of Herzl, of Kallisher, of Brenner and Berl. A story which is not ending — and will never end.

Yes — It Was Worth It □

The LZA Convention — A Remarkable Experience

The 31st Biennial Convention of the Labor Zionist Alliance, which took place in suburban Detroit June 5–8, was a remarkable experience for all the participants as well as an important milestone in the history of the LZA. A uniformly high level was maintained throughout the extended weekend, combined with energy, youthfulness, willingness to serve, and the *chavershaft* (camaraderie) that both defines and informs the movement.

This convention differed from its predecessors in terms of both time and place. It was the first such gathering since the three-way merger that produced the LZA in 1971 to take place outside New York, and the host organization in Metropolitan Detroit more than lived up to the expectations of this move. Indeed, through their year-long voluntary endeavors, their financial generosity, and their attention to detail, the Detroit members established a model for all future conventions. Participants from across the country recognized the high standing of LZA in Detroit as expressed in greetings by leaders of the community federation and council. A debt of gratitude is due the Detroit co-chairs, Dena Greenberg (1997) and Jeremy Salinger (1998); Helen Neimark, president of the Labor Zionist Institute; national officer Norman Neimark; and the entire host committee for their exemplary efforts.

Complementing the change in location was a new format — a Friday-Monday schedule beginning with a hosted supper and Oneg Shabbat at the local headquarters of the movement and ending three days later with the concluding business session on Monday morning. The addition of a day to the program enabled the organization to avoid conducting regular

business on Shabbat and instead to have events appropriate to the Sabbath yet leading seamlessly into the more typical convention session and deliberations beginning Saturday night.

In addition to the aforementioned Friday night dinner, the convention joined forces with a local Reconstructionist congregation in which several LZA members are active for Shabbat services at the convention hotel, highlighted by a D'var Torah delivered by one of the founders of the congregation, Senator Carl Levin (D-MI), who enunciated a progressive Jewish public-affairs agenda relating to both America and Israel that resonated throughout the convention. Jeffrey Rem served as liaison between LZA and the congregation.

Following a stimulating presentation on the new era in Zionism by Prof. Michael Harris, the Shabbat program reached a high point in a panel discussion on “Reinventing LZA,” in the form of an intergenerational dialogue involving the current leadership of our youth movement, Habonim Dror, represented by its outgoing mazkira (general secretary), Esther Lederman; two alumni active in Habonim camp committees in the East, Bennett Lovett-Graff and Esther Raymont (the latter also concluding four years as national LZA administrator); and Judy Loebel, an alumna, parent, and key supporter of the youth movement in Detroit. Following breakout discussions led by Elyse Frymer of New York, Eileen Meddis of Los Angeles, and Arthur Slabosky of Detroit, and a greeting by the local shlichah (Israel emissary), Sara Canning, the plenary reconvened for group reports and a final response by

Fradie Kramer of Cincinnati, who stressed the need for renewing the intensive commitment that had pervaded both LZA and Habonim Dror in the past. (The texts of several of these presentations appear elsewhere in this issue.) Among the recurring themes of the afternoon were the need to enhance the already strong ties between the two organizations, the camp committees, and the parents; to maintain contact with alumni of Habonim Dror through their college and young-adult years; and to demonstrate the relevance of LZA as a political and social force worldwide.

On Saturday evening the opening business session was chaired by Jeffrey Mallow of Chicago, national convention chair, who had invested energy, creativity, and responsibility throughout the preceding year as well as at the convention itself. Judi Widetzky of Jerusalem, regional director of the Israel Aliyah Center in Washington and immediate past co-chair of the World Labor Zionist Movement, gave a personal report from Israel, in which she stressed the link between the movement in the Diaspora and the Jewish state and called for a renewal of aliyah as a central principle of Labor Zionism. Dina Spector, national president of NA'AMAT USA, gave a warm and informed greeting. The keynote address was delivered by Samuel Norich, general manager of the Forward and movement activist, who spelled out a full agenda of communal activity for LZA in the coming two years.

After the opening business session, there was a special meeting of delegates, chaired by Ben Cohen of New York, which approved the rules of the convention and the makeup of various committees and ratified several amendments to the LZA constitution and by-laws intended to rationalize and facilitate the operations of the organization. The convention also voted unanimously for a one-time suspension of the two-term limit in the constitution, thus enabling the incumbent national president, Daniel Mann of Washington, and most of the other officers and members of the National Executive Committee to continue in office two additional years.

Most of Sunday was devoted to planning the programs and projects of LZA for the next term. The day opened with a plenary session chaired by Norman Naimark of Detroit, focusing on the biennial report by the presi-

dent concerning the political, communal, and organizational work of the LZA since the last convention. Daniel Mann stressed the point that the coming two years would constitute a period of major transition in many of the central institutions of American and World Jewry and called on LZA leadership to build on the progress of the past two years in strengthening the human and fiscal resources of the organization. A highlight of the president's report was his announcement of the affiliation of new younger groups in various cities and the establishment of several funds earmarked for organizational and programmatic priorities. He also introduced the incoming administrator, Stephane Acel.

Much of the rest of the day was spent in workshops, coordinated by Martin Taft of Los Angeles. Three groups met in two separate sessions each: LZA on the local scene, led by Helen Neimark of Detroit; LZA on the national scene, led by Daniel Greenberg of Chicago; and LZA in Israel, led by Steven Weinberg of New Jersey. The workshops then reported their recommendations to the plenary. A persistent theme was the need to translate what LZA does nationally to the grassroots level. (A full summary of the workshop deliberations will be published later this summer.)

Another Sunday session, chaired by Simon Golden of Chicago, was dedicated to reports of several city committees: Marilyn Golden for Chicago, Jeremy Salinger for Detroit, Bernard Weisberg for Los Angeles, and Jechil Dobekirer for New York; and to presentations concerning the two national publications: Henry Feingold for the *Jewish Frontier* (in the absence of, due to illness, of the editor, Nahum Guttman), and Jechil Dobekirer for the *Yiddisher Kemfer*. The new editor of the *Kemfer*, Kobi Weitzner, was introduced to the plenary. It should be noted that the high quality of the convention was maintained in the entertainment program Sunday evening, featuring Neil Alexander, an accomplished and knowledgeable interpreter of Jewish music in several languages.

The central event open to the community took place Sunday afternoon: a public meeting chaired by Prof. Henry Feingold of New York, on the theme of the labor movement in Israel and in America. The speakers were Yehiel Leket, former acting chair of the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency

and now world co-chair of the Jewish National Fund; and Michael Perry, staff member of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) in Chicago and Chair of the Jewish Labor Committee in that city. Jared Mates, incoming mazkir of Habonim Dror, greeted the convention.

The convention concluded with a business session on Monday morning led by Louis Sensieff of Los Angeles, at which Reisle Goldstein of New York gave the report of the Credentials Committee and Anne Goldman, also of New York, the Resolutions Committee. The letter comprised a set of general resolutions, some dealing with internal organizational matters, with an emphasis on strategies for outreach to younger cadres, and others with public policies of LZA, including the following:

- Commendation of the Clinton Administration for its efforts on behalf of peace in the Middle East, and a concomitant program for stepping up LZA activities in support of the Oslo accords;
- A call on the Knesset to legislate a new and rational election system in Israel that would

preclude special interests from holding the balance of power;

- Urging the government of Israel to declare, legislate, and implement full religious freedom, equality, and pluralism for all Jews;
- A strong request to President Clinton for the release of Jonathan Pollard.

Special thanks were offered to Detroit LZA for "hosting a most productive, gracious, dignified, and successful convention and providing a standard for future conventions." In a warm, poignant moment the convention expressed its "appreciation for the extraordinary service given by Emma Raymont as administrator of the LZA for the past four years," and presented her with a gift of candlesticks on the occasion of her impending wedding and for her new home in Philadelphia. The convention closed with remarks by the re-elected president, Daniel Mann, who emphasized the need for following up the success of this event in Detroit with intensive activity on all level to assure a "reinvigorated, replenished, and renewed Labor Zionist Alliance by the year 2000." □

Reinventing Labor Zionism

Whenever I hear that an organization is about to "reinvent" itself, I fear for its future. Too often reinvention becomes an excuse for pretending to be something that one is not. Of course, all organizations must redefine themselves or face the prospect of a slow extinction. But during this process of redefinition surely we are justified in asking if we sacrifice too much just to appear sexy.

Whatever transformation the LZA undergoes in the next five years, its membership ought not forget the basic philosophy upon which the organization was raised. That philosophy is Labor Zionism, and notwithstanding the presence of a Jewish state, I do not think the philosophical contribution of this form of Zionism is so easily discarded.

Labor Zionism, it must be remembered, grew out of a nineteenth-century nationalistic notion that sought to restore the connection between a homeless people to a patch of land that later became the state of Israel. That connection has been restored, but the philosophical principles that made that connection possible — the belief in responsibility for one's self

and others; the recognition of the dignity inherent in all forms of human labor — have yet to be fully realized.

Their realization depends in part on our ability to recognize their value, a recognition that comes from our education when we are young. Parents of Habonim-Dror campers, for example, recognize and welcome these values because they see them for what they are: essential steps in the healthy socialization of their children. Human beings are social animals who fare better overall when they struggle together rather than alone, and we learn how to struggle together best when we are young.

What parents need to learn — and what LZA branches need to teach them by reaching out to the Habonim-Dror camps that educate the children of these parents — is the place LZA holds as an adult organization in the furtherance of the value of collective responsibility and respect for labor. If LZA can show parents that the socialization process begun in Habonim Dror does not end there, but continues in LZA itself, then surely LZA has a bright future. □

— Bennett Lovett-Graff,
Chair, Na'aleh Camp Committee

The Seventh 'C' — Continuity

Fradie Kramer of Cincinnati, summed up one of the break-out sessions of the LZA Convention, fueled by the provocative essay The Survival and Success of Jewish Institutions by Steven Windmueller, in which the author listed six "C"s — Core members; Causes; Credibility; Competition; Capability and Cash. Chavera Kramer went on:

I would suggest we add a seventh "C" — Continuity. That unique element which in the past sustained Labor Zionist organizational life in a continuum from childhood through adulthood. Habonim was a natural feeder into the senior movement and Poale Zion chaverim sent their children to the City Habonim ken, to our summer camps, to Hebrew School and to folk-shule. They sat on Chai Commissions and gave of their time, support and financial assistance to nurture the growth of Habonim. The *sine qua non* for both age groups was a passionate, all-consuming commitment to the ideology of Socialist Zionism.

Even after 1948, when Zionism was realized through the establishment of the State of Israel, Labor Zionists could maintain a sense of special purpose through a vicarious identity with Labor as the ruling political party in Israel. Our Socialist ideals were firmly anchored in our commitment to the kibbutz movement.

However, for the last twenty-one years, since the Likud victory in 1977, not only has our special political relationship changed, but Israel itself has changed from our dreams of an idealistic society to a modern consumer nation. Unfortunately, we could not seem to find a way to accommodate to these changes and still maintain the ardor that had fired us to action in the past. We were not able, twenty-five years ago, to anticipate the need to reinvent ourselves in light of the changes so, with rare exception, we lost a generation of Habonim and a generation of young Labor Zionists.

What has come out of the panel discussion and "buzz" groups in light of this dismal preamble is truly awesome. The message is loud and clear: There is a place for a progressive Labor Zionist movement that spans the generations; that it is time we stop questioning and criticizing ourselves; and, above all, there is no cause for predicting our imminent demise. We are not a mass movement. We never have been. So let us not look for quick fixes or soar-

ing membership rolls. Rather, look at what already has taken place. Look at the re-emergence of groups in the 25-50 year old generation who want to be part of an ideological movement that transcends time and age.

But let us not leave this convention with the idea that unless we duplicate the renaissance experienced in Detroit or Chicago or New York in our own communities we have failed. It may well be that our movement in smaller cities will not be able to continue in the foreseeable future. That does not change the fact that we are a needed organization with an illustrious past and a promising future.

However, I add this proviso: Reinventing LZA calls for more than innovative programming. It calls for passion. And passion must have an emotional outlet. Lectures, seminars, conventions, publications are ancillaries to a group's sense of purpose. Today's modern communication technologies of faxes and E-mail and Internet lack the energy that coming together as an identifiable group provides. When Labor Zionist were out of the mainstream, we could act as a gadfly to arouse the community. We debated the Anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism. We picketed stores that sold non-Union grapes and lettuce. We marched as Labor Zionists in the Civil Rights march on Washington. All of these activities were integral to our ideology: Creation of a Jewish homeland; support of the union movement; commitment to social justice.

We cannot reinvent ourselves unless we clearly articulate an ideology that calls upon us to act as Labor Zionists in our local communities. If we are committed to the recommendations presented this afternoon, we must develop directives for local branches to follow to accomplish their implementation. I don't know how much reinvention is really necessary. We are a movement that for almost one hundred years has transmitted the concept of a Jewish state as essential to Jewish existence everywhere. □

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