

REVIVAL

February 2005

Volume 2

Issue 1

The English News Magazine of the Israeli Labor Party

News

New Government seeks Coordinated Pullout from Gaza

News

It has been 3 weeks since Labor has joined the coalition and events are moving quickly. The aftermath of the Palestinian election has delivered a period of calm and coordination beyond initial expectations. On page 5, Labor Leader and Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres previews the year ahead.

News

Labor's Young Guard Takes Top Ministerial Slots

News

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In late December the Party Central Committee selected Ministers for the new Sharon-Peres government. In a surprising result the top 3 of the top five slots were won by Labor's young guard, former General Secretary Ophir Pines-Paz, former Cabinet Secretary, Isaac Herzog and former Minister Shalom Simhon. Our overview of Labor's young Ministers begins on page 7.

Primaries Date for Labor Leadership Set

The Central Committee has set June 28 as the date for Primaries for Labor Leader and Candidate for Prime Minister. Several candidates have announced their intention to seek the Party's top slot including former Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, former leader and Minister for National Infrastructure Binyamin Ben Eliezer, Minister without Portfolio Matan Vilnai and Histadrut Chairman Amir Peretz MK. Labor is set for a hot start to Summer in 2005.

'Without Labor - there would be no Gaza Withdrawal'

International Secretary Colette Avital MK on how the cause of Peace has been strengthened by Labor joining the government. Page 3.

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Editor's note

A little over a year ago we launched Revival in an effort to communicate with our supporters and counterparts in the international community as well as native English speakers in Israel. The name Revival symbolized our hopes that Labor and the policies that we are fighting for would once again take center stage.

While there is a long way to go, there is room for cautious optimism that some of these hopes will be realized.

The Disengagement Plan of Ariel Sharon will go from a unilateral plan to a plan that is fully coordinated with the Palestinians. Labor has entered the government to ensure that the plan is implemented and also to push for further progress in the Peace process.

In a previous column Labor's International Secretary, Collette Avital MK wrote about Labor's dilemma with regard to entering the government. On one hand we could not let the implementation of the disengagement plan be delayed and on the other hand we did not want to lose our prospects as the alternative governing party in Israel.



Guy Spigelman (middle) with British Labour MP Sion Simon (right) and head of Israeli Young Labor in Tel Aviv Guy Rotenburg (left) at a social gathering held in January

The election of two of Labor's young guard to the top Ministerial has shown that the Party is 'alive and kicking.' Indeed during the week after the election of the young Ministers, I received numerous calls from colleagues in the hitech sector who expressed willingness to 'return' to Labor, after voting for Shinui and other parties.

Our entering government has strengthened the party and strengthened the cause of peace. We also achieved some significant socio-economic wins in the coalition negotiations – gaining a better deal for pensioners, the chronically ill and students.

There is still much to be done. Israel will undergo significant turmoil over the coming months as the vocal and potentially violent protests of the settlers attempt to torpedo the withdrawal from Gaza. The pro-leaving Gaza camp is now planning to counter with street protests, billboard campaigns and petitions. One such initiative is an Internet campaign called Say Yes. For more information go to http://www.say-yes.co.il/index_eng.html.

If the government survives the votes on the budget, as looks likely, the next elections will only be in 2006. Given this timeframe, the Party should now conduct a serious reform process. As so many of our sister parties have shown – the way back to the national leadership starts with fixing our own shop.

We hope you enjoy this edition – your comments are always welcome. In the near future Revival will be available on the Labor Party's new web site that will be launched in the spring, where we are planning to open a Revival forum for people to comment and express their points of view.

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Without Labor in government - there would be no Gaza withdrawal

By Colette Avital MK

Things are moving again in the Middle East. After a prolonged war, and needless bloodshed, Israeli and Palestinians are meeting again. The Sharm-el-sheik summit has charged the political climate, and the prevalent mood in Israel is one of guarded optimism.

After a lengthy and heated internal debate, the Labor Party joined to government in an attempt to bring about a change of course, that is to help carry out the retreat from Gaza.

To some of our sister parties in Europe and elsewhere, our decision to join a right wing Government led by Ariel Sharon, may seem anathema to all our beliefs. In many ways it is. For others, the Sharon disengagement plan from Gaza is far from being considered the ideal solution. This is also true.

It is therefore important to elucidate the Israeli context and the reasons for this move:

On the chessboard of Israeli politics, personal and collective security, are of paramount importance. In the past 13 years the fate of the left has been directly connected to issues of war and peace. The Israel Labor Party who has led every single peace effort since 1992 – the Oslo agreements, peace with Jordan, the retreat from Lebanon, has been held responsible by the public every time that Palestinian violence flared up. In fact we have lost elections twice, as a result of violence.

A society which constantly feels insecure is blinded by slogans such as: “We must be strong, and never give in. The Palestinians will never succeed to remove us from our land”. In such circumstances no society has patience for humanistic slogans, for a philosophy based on human rights, progressive and universal values.

It rejects, out of hand, any understanding for the plight of the other side, or empathy for its suffering. After a while the enemy is dehumanized.

In this context, the leaders of the Israel Labor Party became “The Criminals of Oslo”. As for Arafat and the Palestinians, the belief was that they had never meant peace, and could therefore not be trusted as partners.

Some say that Israel is the land of paradoxes – and so it is. After 4½ years of bloodshed, 75% of the Israelis believe that the only valid solution is two states for two people. And yet the same 75% will say that it is not achievable because we have no partner.



Colette Avital MK with President of South Africa Thabo Mbeki at a recent meeting of the Socialist International

Here lies the secret in the overwhelming support for Sharon's plan: a majority of Israelis, left and right are in favor for a quick total and unilateral retreat from Gaza. In fact, by deciding to leave Gaza, Sharon has adopted a part of our political platform. This, no doubt, is an ideological victory for us. But in our view disengagement should not be unilateral.

Moreover – here is a second paradox: a right wing Prime Minister carries out left wing policies – the end of occupation and the dismantlement of settlements.

Our choice became clear: Join the government even if imperfect, join the government whose social and economic policy we utterly reject. Join the government for a limited period of time and for one purpose alone: to get Israel out of Gaza, once and for all.

That, in turn has set in motion a series of political reactions: a split in the governing Likud Party, the exit of right wing parties from the coalition, leaving Sharon with a minority government. In fact, without the Labor Party, Sharon could not carry out his plan, against the will of a sizeable opposition within his own party.

The options facing Labor were difficult and complex: Should we allow the government to fall, thereby losing an almost unique opportunity to see the withdrawal from Gaza set in motion, or should we join, save the government, give peace a chance, but – loose, at the same time, any possibility to be a real alternative to this government?

With Arafat's disappearance from the scene, the orderly transition of power, the perfectly democratic elections of the Palestinian Authority, and Abu Mazen's responsible behaviour, Israelis started seeing a change. But there remained a basic contradiction between the greatness of the opportunity, and the weakness of the political structure. Our choice became clear: Join the government even if imperfect, join the government whose social and economic policy we utterly reject. Join the government for a limited period of time and for one purpose alone: to get Israel out of Gaza, once and for all.

For us this is a first step in the right direction, by no means the last. The disengagement plan is not ideal, we know. It is partial, limited in scope. But let us not belittle the difficulties that lie ahead: the settlers' movement has launched an all-out struggle against it. Incitement and threats are in the air. Religious authorities issue orders against the evacuation. We may yet see brother fighting against brother.

With Labor in Government, and with Abu Mazen showing signs that he is taking security in Gaza in his hands, one can expect now that the disengagement will be conducted in full coordination with the Palestinian Authority and with the International Community. If successful, the public will demand more moves on the West Bank as well. We must strive to make it succeed. And so we will.

Colette Avital MK is the Chair of the Knesset Immigration and Absorption Committee and is Labor's International Secretary

The Year Ahead

By Deputy Prime Minister and Labor Leader Shimon Peres

A new government has been instated in Israel. It is a government with a basic purpose: ending the Israeli presence in Gaza. Against the forces seeking to perpetuate a one-state conflict, this government has been put in place to take the critical first step towards realizing the two-state solution that a majority of both people support. We have now an opportunity to realize the only solution ever that would allow Jews and Arabs to get justice – even if partial. It is the only solution that men of moral standing, vision, and political understanding could ever accept. The Peel Commission in 1937, the UN in 1947, Ben-Gurion in 1948, Egypt in 1979, the Palestinians in 1993, President Bush in 2003 have all repeatedly said: a state in the Land of Israel for the Jewish people; a state in Palestine for the Palestinian people. Two peoples; two states – mutual acceptance.



Shimon Peres with leaders of the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY) at a meeting of the Middle East Committee of the Socialist International held at the Knesset in November

2005 is a year of hope and opportunity. For the first time ever, majorities in Israel and among the Palestinians favor a two-state solution. Israelis, Palestinians, as well as Arabs, Europeans, Americans, and the International community should not let this glimmer of light pass by.

Israel should carry out the disengagement plan as scheduled – no excuses and no retreat. We have to mobilize constant political will throughout this complicated process. We should serve the interests expressed by the Israeli majority, as well as the

interests of Israel's future generations. In face of domestic opposition and threats of violence from the extreme right, we must remember that extreme minorities should not overrule healthy majorities. If majorities lose, it is the end of democracy.

The Palestinians must end terrorism – full stop. The Palestinian street should not follow the extremists within their society. They should speak out and show the extremists that terrorism as a tool of political struggle cannot and does not serve their cause. Terrorism does not create Palestinian destiny. It frustrates it. As experience repeatedly shows – the Palestinians stand to gain more by the pen than by the sword.

To achieve this, the Palestinians should unify their security forces under one command. If the Palestinians continue to have multiple security forces, they cannot have a unified state. Leaders cannot lead by words alone, especially when the enemies of peace lead by the sword.

The international community can help the Palestinians build strong political institutions and economic infrastructure. The international community looks to the Palestinians in hope to build the first

Arab democracy. A good clear constitution will help cement the election results and put in place the foundations for a functioning Palestinian government.

Oil-rich Arab countries that have benefited from a windfall of income as a result of the rise in oil prices, and private corporations that hope to prosper in a peaceful two-state environment should lay economic foundations for Palestinian prosperity now. Financial donations alone will not be effective. The Palestinian economy must be integrated into the global economy through development of a strong private sector. Private corporations should be financially encouraged by their respective governments to set up branches and activities in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority. A free market economy is an ally of free people.

The new state of Palestine will be the homeland of the Palestinian people. Palestinian refugees will return to it and build their homes there. Just as the Jewish People will not return to all of the biblical Land of Israel, which is dear to their heart, so too Palestinians will not return to all of historical Palestine, which is dear to their heart.

The Palestinian economy should be independent and self-sufficient. It should not depend on Israel. At most, Israelis and Palestinians can trade goods, not people. The European Union should work with Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians to introduce European norms into the economic relations between the three. This could be the first step towards integration of the three into the EU in a special form. US Free Trade Zones that have proved themselves in Jordan and Egypt should be expanded to the Palestinians. The UN should support Gaza's independent economic development and aid in its restructuring. The Arab League should become a genuine Arab League for Peace, aiding the cause of economic regional cooperation. Financial Aide is temporary. Economic aide will have sustained impact.

Problems are immediate. Solutions take time. But we have to start acting right away. Our immediate priorities should not relieve us from the need to plan for the day after disengagement.

As part of its acceptance of the Roadmap and President Bush's vision, Israel agreed already to recognize a Palestinian state. Israel agreed to do so first within provisional borders, and later within permanent borders as part of a final status agreement. The borders that emerge will have to reflect realities on the ground. We have a right and an obligation to protect our people, but a reduced threat can mean a more open border.

The new state of Palestine will be the homeland of the Palestinian people. Palestinian refugees will return to it and build their homes there. Just as the Jewish People will not return to all of the biblical Land of Israel, which is dear to their heart, so too Palestinians will not return to all of historical Palestine, which is dear to their heart. Attempts to translate historical attachment to actual territorial dominance have failed again and again wherever it is tried. We must all learn to live in this world as it is today rather than as it was a hundred or two thousand years ago.

The Arab Israeli conflict has concerned the world for over a century. Some of the best, brightest and mightiest individuals have placed their talents, skills and time in the service of resolving the Conflict – to no avail. But there is no substitute for Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians working together to resolve their differences. Ultimately, peace cannot be imposed. Peace should be born out of the interaction of the two peoples. Others should support peace, but only we, together, can make peace.

This is the year ahead. These are the things we should all do. 2005 is a unique year of hope. It should be the year for seizing opportunities, not ignoring them.

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Labor's Young Guard Takes Charge

The new Sharon-Peres government has 8 Labor Ministers and 3 Deputy Ministers. Revival profiles 3 ministers from Labor's young guard – who achieved top slots in the Central Committee elections held in December.



Ophir Pines-Paz, Minister of the Interior

Ophir Pines-Paz entered the Knesset in 1992. Considered one of the parliament's most outstanding performers, Pines-Paz has headed the Constitution and Law committee, was coalition chair in Barak's government and served until recently as Labor's Secretary-General.

For the past four weeks I have been serving as the Interior Minister and have discovered that this Ministry is both complex and unique. The diversity of subjects the Ministry is responsible for is overwhelming including Citizenship, local government, environment and planning matters, the fire department and the list goes on. After spending much of the month listening and learning about the various facets of the Ministry I can already state that I look forward to completely devoting myself to this challenging mission.

My primary goal is to turn the Ministry into an office that will be more humane, friendly and accessible to the public. I am here to serve the public, this is the reason that I was elected and I have every intention to improve the connection between the Interior Ministry and the Israeli public.

This leads to my second goal, which is transparency. This is a government office and therefore the public is entitled to receive all the relevant information that it requires and the highest level of service.

Israel has a particular problem with regard to the enforcement of government decisions and I intend to implement substantial changes in order to improve the situation. I am also planning to implement a reform of Local Authorities by changing the relationship between local and central governments.

It should not be forgotten that the main reason that Labor joined the current government was the Disengagement Plan. As a member of the Cabinet I will fight for the implementation of the disengagement and for its transformation from a unilateral plan into a bilateral effort conducted in full cooperation with the Palestinians.

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Labor's Young Guard Takes Charge



Isaac Herzog, Minister of Housing and Construction

Isaac Herzog entered the Knesset in 2003. A lawyer by trade, Herzog served as Cabinet Secretary in the Barak Government and headed up Israel's anti-Drug authority before entering the Knesset.

The challenges that are placed on the shoulders of the Israeli government before the implementation of the Disengagement Plan are greater than many realize. The Ministry of Housing and Construction, that I have the honor to lead, will play an important role in the process and I will provide the Prime Minister with all the necessary assistance in order to implement the various components of the plan.

In addition to facilitating the disengagement, I have begun to change the order of priorities at the Housing and Construction Ministry. Regretfully, the priorities that were characteristic of the Ministry over the past few years were reflective of a clear-cut worldview centered on the preferential treatment and the allocation of resources to settlements in the territories.

In the State of Israel, where many citizens find themselves without a roof over their head, where the suffering of the weaker sections of society cries out at us every day, where the periphery gets second-rate treatment and where women, the elderly, minorities and many other sectors of society do not have equality of opportunity – the onus is on all of us to bring about a change.

The Ministry of Housing and Construction is primarily a socio-economic ministry that should lead policies for the welfare of the public and not for the fulfillment of territorial ambitions. Within this framework I plan to place at the forefront of my priorities assistance to the Negev, the Galil, development areas and weak towns in the center of the country along side the providing of solutions to the predicaments of weak social sectors. The budget of the Ministry will be directed accordingly, to serve those who really need it.

I believe that the Government of Israel, in its current make-up, will succeed in preventing the worsening of the socio-economic gaps that has led to the fracturing of social solidarity and that has damaged the moral and economic backbone of the State of Israel.

Labor's Young Guard Takes Charge



Shalom Simhon, Environment Minister

Shalom Simhon, a social worker by profession lives on the “confrontation line” (towns located near Israel’s northern border). He began his public activities as the Secretary- General of the Moshavim (Co-operative Settlements) Movement in 1993. Simhon was elected to the Knesset (Parliament) in 1996 as a representative of the Moshavim and served as Chairman of the Finance Committee.

In the first government of Prime Minister Sharon, Simhon served as Minister of Agriculture and was a member of the Defense Cabinet.

Before being elected as Minister of the Environment, Simhon served a one and a half year term as Chairman of the Economics Committee of the Knesset, a position in which he focused mainly on consumer protection. The Economics Committee headed by Simhon received the Prime Minister’s mark for excellence as a result of its contribution towards creating a business environment supporting growth.

Upon his recent appointment as Minister of the Environment, Simhon announced his intention to address the environmental damage originating from industry, without closing factories. Along these lines air, water and soil pollution will be treated.

Simhon is currently negotiating with the Ministry of Finance to increase the budget of the Ministry of the Environment that is bearing fruit.

The Minister plans to advance progressive legislation in the Knesset for the protection of the environment. He also intends to strengthen the ties between central and local government in order to increase environmental awareness amongst the local authorities.

Filling out the Ministry on behalf of Labor

Deputy Prime Minister: Shimon Peres

Minister for National Infrastructure: Benjamin Ben Eliezer

Minister for Communications: Dalia Itzik

Minister without Portfolio: Matan Vilnai

Minister without Portfolio: Chaim Ramon

Deputy Minister for Regional Development: Orit Noked

Deputy Minister for Housing and Construction: Eli Ben-Menachem

Deputy Minister for Education: Rabbi Michael Melcior

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The Engagement of the Disengagement Government



Minister without portfolio, Haim Ramon, considered the master-mind behind the current Unity Government, reflects on his determined push for disengagement over the years and the crucial role that Labor needs to play in implementing the plan during 2005.

Back in October 1987 I proposed a disengagement plan for the Gaza Strip to then Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Almost 20 years ago I was more than convinced that Israel should withdraw unconditionally – by agreement or unilaterally – from Gaza as soon as possible. In a speech in the Knesset I said: “The State of Israel cannot cope with this problem. We cannot wait anymore – until peace is proposed to us by somebody. Gaza problems should be solved separately.” Unfortunately my proposal was not adopted.

In 1992, after the inauguration of the Rabin government, I discussed again the proposal with the Prime Minister. Mr. Rabin, who consistently backed initiatives that I led including the Health Insurance Act and the public health system budget reform, promised me he would thoroughly consider the disengagement proposal. The Oslo talks caused him to suspend his decision, and the rest is history. What was achieved during Rabin’s term was the building of the separation fence along the Green Line around Gaza.

After the collapse of the Camp David talks in 2000 and the outburst of the second Intifada, I presented to the public two major initiatives: The Separation Fence in the West Bank and the Disengagement Plan from the Palestinians – starting with “Gaza first”.

Actually I adopted Ben Gurion’s doctrines with regard to the moral and practical dangers of occupying the Gaza Strip and have added to them the security and demographic concepts of the fence along the Green Line. Despite this, the initiatives were at first rejected by Labor leadership. It took about two years of tough campaigning to convince the Labor party to adopt the concept of the Separation Fence and the Disengagement from Gaza as its official policy.

During this time, Prime Minister Sharon kept rejecting these proposals out of hand despite the suicide bombers and despite the fact that only 7000 Israeli settlers live in Gaza, surrounded by 1.5 million Palestinians. But after a while he decided – due to public pressure – to partially build the Security Fence around the West Bank. Later on, in a sudden change of tack he decided to adopt the Disengagement Plan and “Gaza First”.

But Mr. Sharon is not in a position to implement the plan without the active support of the Labor Party. The right wing parties and the militant opposition inside his Likud Party will do everything in order to stop or sabotage the Disengagement Plan. The Labor Party has had to sacrifice its position as the main opposition party and has shown that it will not let Israel miss the window of opportunity created by Sharon’s determination to carry out Labor’s policy and the shift on the Palestinian side following the election of Abu Mazen as Palestinian leader.

We must do all we can in order to bring our soldiers home from Gaza. We must give this new political initiative a chance. History will not forgive us if we do not do not put aside almost everything, disengage from all narrow political interests and do all that is possible to push forward the disengagement wagon.

International guests in Israel

1. A meeting of Socialist International (SI) Middle East Committee took place in Jerusalem of Nov 3, 2004, in preparation of the SI Council in South Africa.
2. George Papandreou, leader of the PASSOK – visited Israel and met with Shimon Peres on 25/11/2005.
3. Massimo Dalema, leader of the Democratici da Sinistra met with Shimon Peres and MK Colette Avital On January 13, 2005.
4. Swedish Foreign Secretary Annika Soder and Ann Linde, International Secretary of the Swedish Socialist Party – participated in the International Women Conference “Peace and reconciliation” (16/12/04).
5. A delegation of the British Labour Party led by Ian Lewis, MP, Minister of State for Skills and Vocational Education visited Israel between January 16 – 21. Other members in the delegation: Meg Munn, MP, Ashuk Kumar, MP, Tony Coleman, MP, Linda Perham, MP, Sion Sinon MP and Huw Irranca – Davies MP. The delegation met with MK’s Avital, Tamir and Sneh as well as Young Labor in Tel Aviv.
6. A delegation of the Socialist International led by Luis Ayala acted as observers in the Palestinian National Elections on Feb. 9th. On Feb. 10th the delegation visited the Knesset, met with Shimon Peres and Colette Avital and were present at the swearing in ceremony of the new government.
7. A senior delegation of the Chinese Communist Party, led by Mr. Wenpu, visited Israel between 12 – 18 January. They visited Kibbutz Degania, the Galilee, the Golan Heights and Jerusalem. They met with members of the Labor Party (MK Colette Avital, Minister Haim Ramon, Ambassador Ora Namir, Mayor Effi Stentzler) and Members of the Likud and Communist Parties.
8. A delegation of young SPD members of the Bundestag visited Israel between Feb. 9 - 12. The delegation included MP’s Sigmund Ehrmann, Kerstin Griese, Christian Lange, Dr. Carola Relman and Andreas Weigel. The delegation met leading members of the ILP and conducted a seminar with the young leaderships of the Labour, Likud and Shas parties.
9. A delegation of the Socialist group in the European Parliament led by MEP Martin Schultz visited Israel and the Palestinian Authority on Feb. 2nd. The delegation met with Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres. In the Knesset they met with members of the Labor Party faction MK Colette Avital, MK Yuli Tamir, MK Danny Yatom and MK Deputy Minister Orit Noked.