

REVIVAL

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Issue 3

The English newsletter of the Israeli Labor Party

News *The Government hangs in the balance*

News **Labor providing safety-net for Gaza withdrawal**

News The Government is looking increasingly unstable as the Right grapple over the Prime Minister's decision to push ahead with the Gaza withdrawal plan.

News Labor, who initiated the "Gaza first" policy, has provided Sharon's Government with a parliamentary safety-net in various no-confidence motions relating to the plan, but has decided to vote against the government in motions based on the government's failure in the socio-economic sphere.

News

MK Colette Avital writes about Labor's Dilemma on page 2.

Labor and One Nation Merge

Historic Reconciliation with Union Movement

By Guy Spigelman

Following six months of negotiations, the Labor Party Congress and One Nation Party approved a merger agreement between the parties in May. Labor leader Shimon Peres welcomed the decision, citing the move as 'historic'. Chairman of the Histadrut and One Nation leader Amir Peretz MK, declared that "a genuine social democratic party has been created."

The merger will have an immediate impact on all levels of public life in Israel. At the Histadrut, the General Federation of Labor, the Labor Party will join the ruling coalition of the governing council for the first time in 8 years. In the Knesset, Labor's faction has expanded to 21. The combined party has a dominant position also at local government level throughout the country.

Over the next few months the parties will be engaged in implementing the merger agreement. The first public meeting with leaders Peres and Peretz in attendance was held in late June at the Tel Aviv branch of the Party. The full merger will take effect from January 2005.

ALSO INSIDE

Israel's Gulf War Investigation, page 3

One year of Likud Government, One Year of Failures, page 5

Southward bound, Labor calls for investing in the Negev, page 6

The English newsletter of the Israeli Labor Party

Labor's Dilemma

By MK Colette Avital

Commenting on Sharon's disengagement plan from Gaza and its chances to become a reality, one of Israel's leading columnists wrote: "Once the toothpaste is out of the tube, it cannot return there."

It is difficult to assess what went on in Sharon's mind, and what the real reasons behind his decision of unilateral withdrawal are. Some claim that he must have realized that a continued stalemate in Gaza will ultimately hurt Israel's short and long-term interests.

Others think that this plan is meant to strengthen settlement activity on the West Bank. Yet others are convinced that this belongs to his strategy not to renew direct negotiations with the Palestinians. A few months ago, most of us were skeptical about his intentions. Today we know that there is no way back for him, and that his own political survival is closely tied to the implementation of the plan.

Sharon's decision has, so far, triggered a serious internal crisis within the right, consequences of which are still unknown: a split inside his own party, within the Likud faction in the Knesset and within his Government coalition.

So far, the "National Union" right wing party has left the government and the "National Religious Party" is split in two, with one wing still supporting the government, while the other is actively engaged in opposition politics.

Right wing Ministers such as Netanyahu, Shalom, Livnat and Landau, tie Sharon's hands from within the government.

To keep his coalition together, Sharon accepted a compromise to postpone actual implementation of the plan for nine months. Should he continue to drive for implementation this will entail hard choices: he can either change partners and bring Labor in, or else choose to call early elections.

Hence Labor's dilemma: join the government, knowing that without our party the plan will never be carried out, or continue to build up a viable alternative for the public. Should we reach the point of negotiations (and some assess that this may happen in the fall) we will have to formulate clear conditions which will ultimately mean a change in government policies and priorities, in the diplomatic and economic spheres.

At the moment, so long as nothing is happening on the ground, but the plan is alive, Labor has decided to provide a safety net on political votes in the Knesset, but will continue to oppose the Government on social and economic issues.

Early drafts of the 2005 budget will soon be tabled, so we are all geared up for a long, hot, dry summer.

Colette Avital MK is International Secretary of the Labor Party and Chairperson of the Knesset Immigration and Absorption Committee



Colette Avital MK addressing English speakers at a Labor Party event in May

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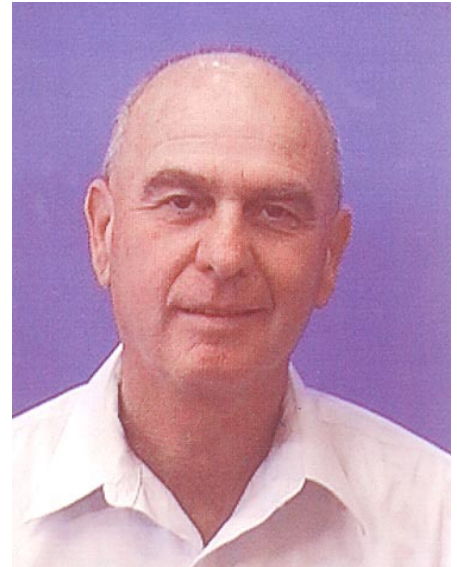
Israel's Gulf War Investigation

MK Matan Vilnai argues for the creation of a "National Security Council" to rebalance relations between the military and political echelons.

More than twelve months have passed since the United States declared an official end to the war in Iraq.

In many of the countries that sent their troops to the war, the public continues to debate passionately the need for waging the war in the first place. Some governments have even established committees to investigate various issues related to the war.

Although this is not Israel's war, it has far-reaching implications for our region and our security policy. The need for different strategic planning cannot be ignored. In a welcomed move, the Knesset established a parliamentary inquiry committee to review Israel's conduct during the war.



The committee discussed the war thoroughly and comprehensively, focusing mainly on the failure of intelligence efforts. Yet, while the intelligence aspects are important, the failures in the conduct of the political echelons before and after the war, and the national decision-making process, are equally important. It is an issue that requires in-depth examination, with an open discussion of the degree of responsibility politicians should assume.

The State of Israel does not have a well structured system for national decision making. Filling this vacuum is the Israeli Defense Forces General Staff who enjoy practical exclusivity in matters of national security. The military cannot assume responsibility for decisions of this type, nor is it equipped with the right tools for the job. The failing conduct during the war in Iraq is only one such outcome of this situation. Its extensive ramifications are evident also in Israel's conduct vis-à-vis Palestinian terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general.

The establishment of the 'Home Front Command' following the first Gulf War is yet another manifestation of the supremacy that narrow military considerations enjoy in national decision making. Upon its establishment, the 'Home Front Command' was meant to deal with the threat of strategic missiles and terror attacks on the civilian population. It relied on the military system, which at that time, was the only alternative for controlling the home front.

Over the years, as a result of the experience it gained in fighting terror, the Israeli Police grew stronger and became highly proficient in handling attacks on civilian population. All

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the committees that have looked into this issue have recommended relegating the tasks of the 'Home Front Command' to the Ministry of Public Security (responsible for the Police), as customary in other developed countries. However, the military insists on preserving the current structure despite the diminished defense budget, perpetuating inefficiencies and overlaps between the police and the army, with significant consequences.

Wrong decisions taken in Israel during the war in Iraq like instructing the public to open gas masks and the unnecessary vaccination of thousands of people, could have been avoided if a National Security Council would have been in place.

The discussion becomes even more complex when the issues at hand involve not just the management of war but also formulating policies regarding the peace process. Many countries have a 'political military authority', which consists of a combination of civilian and military bodies. It is high time that Israel, in view of the complex challenges it faces, establishes a 'National Security Council' by virtue of a special bill. Composed of a diversified range of representatives, the National Security Council would be able to consider a range of national security issues from a broad perspective, including political, social and economic aspects that transcend the narrow military view. The Council would play a central role in drafting strategy and in setting national goals. It would also translate, interpret and transform an abstract idea into a practical work plan for the army, taking into account the whole mix of national aspects.

Some attempts have been made to address this sensitive issue – among others the Agranat Inquiry Committee and a Knesset sub-committee of the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee in 1986. Unfortunately, the recommendations of these bodies on strategic decision making in Israel were never implemented.

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The important decision to investigate Israel's conduct during the Iraq war is a welcome step. Nonetheless, we should not settle for another set of recommendations; rather, we should grasp this rare opportunity for revisiting all aspects of decision-making in Israel and redesign the relations between the political and the military echelons.

Matan Vilnai MK is a former Deputy Chief of Staff of the IDF and former Minister of Science and Culture

One year of the Likud Government One year of **Failures**

On the eve of the first anniversary of the Likud led Government, Labor MK Danny Yatom, produced a comprehensive report on the government's failures. Here is a summary of the main points raised in the report.



Education

A breakdown of the Education System, with the position of Israeli students continuing to deteriorate in international surveys

Welfare

A harsh economic program was implemented that led to cuts to pensions and social security allowances, increasing unemployment and a massive rise of 5% in poverty levels

Security

Dramatic delays in building the security fence around the West Bank, with major changes to the originally planned route based on political and not on security considerations

Diplomacy

The Sharon government completely rejected Syria's proposal for renewing talks and evaded any opportunity for dialogue with the Palestinians. The disengagement plan was rejected by the Likud rank and file that exposed the party's true face – an extreme right wing party

Immigration

A complete failure in immigration and absorption. The budget for immigrant absorption was slashed, stopping the flow of new immigrants with many emigrating from Israel to other countries

Health

The health system fails to supply health services to all citizens. The chronically ill have been abandoned, the health basket (covering treatments and pharmaceuticals) has been cut and government policies are driving the wealthy to private insurance and the poor to the streets

Internal Security

The Government has failed in the war against crime. Criminal and organized crime have grown in 2003

Corruption

The behavior of the Prime Minister and other ministers bear witness to a break-down in clean governance, with suspicion of personal corruption and the binding of big money to government

Local Government

A breakdown of the local government sector as a result of a 50% cut in transfer payments to local authorities, resulting in non-payment of salaries to workers for several months, bringing many to the verge of abject poverty

Development

Severe damage to the Galilee, Negev and other areas in the the periphery and destruction of the agricultural and water infrastructures

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Southward bound

Labor calls for the development of the Negev and Galilee regions instead of the Occupied Territories

By Leah Goeppinger-Levy

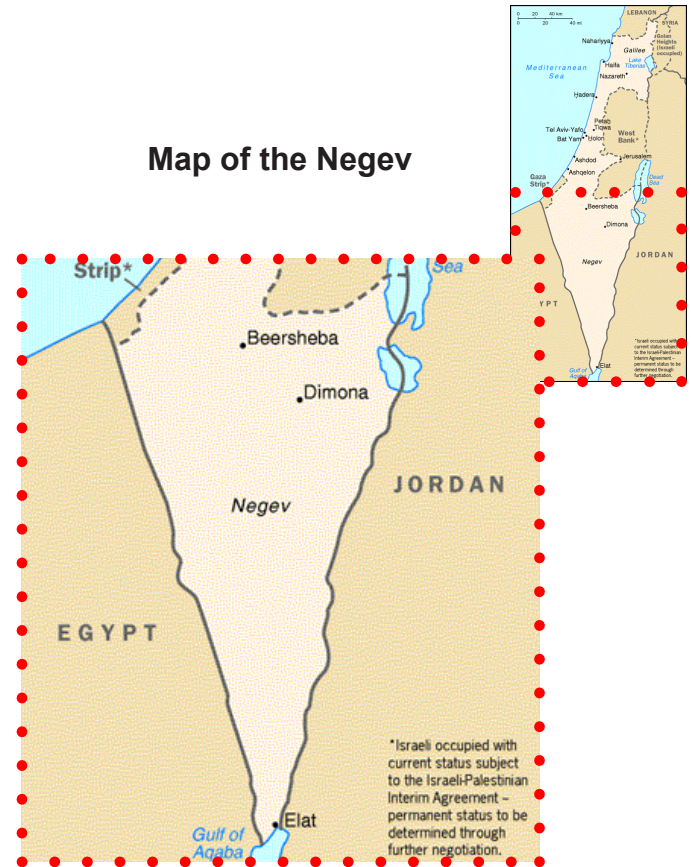
In late April, members of the Labor Party's Central Committee held their deliberations in Be'er Sheva, the Capital of the Negev, to discuss the party's stance and future action regarding the Negev region in the South of Israel and the Galilee region in the North.

Party members were joined by leaders from the Negev as they vowed to change the deplorable conditions faced by the residents of both regions – high unemployment, diminishing budgets, poverty, a deteriorating infrastructure, broken streets, failing sewer systems and the list goes on.

Simply put, the Negev and the Galilee regions are suffering from neglect. The Likud Government pledged to place the development of these regions high on their priority list, but has failed to live up to its promises. Beyond the basic responsibility to attend to the needs of citizens living there, these regions provide many opportunities for future development and growth.

Party Chairman Shimon Peres addressed the issue of funding development projects, making mention of the extremely large budgets –billions of dollars – which the current Government has invested in the West Bank and Gaza settlements, while claiming that no money exists for the poorer outlying Negev and Galilee regions. “Shall we choose the settlements over poverty?” Peres argued. “Are the settlements synonymous to security while the Negev and Galilee suffer?”

A severe social and economic gap has emerged between these regions and the center of Israel, where the majority of Israel's infrastructure and economy resides. While the center continues to grow and develop, the north and south are being left further and further behind with little or no help from the Likud-Shinui government. The average unemployment rate



in the Negev has reached 14 percent. The Bedouin communities in the region are suffering from an even higher unemployment rate of over 50 percent.

“We have no wealthy citizens in the south, there are no wealthy in the Negev,” proclaimed Be’er Sheva’s Labor Mayor, Ya’acov Turner. “The wealthy live in the center of Israel.”

Labor leaders vowed that they would fight for the development of the Negev and the Galilee in the Knesset. They argued that this development is critical to Israel’s security, as security does not just depend on national defense and the military, but on strengthening Israel’s social and economic infrastructures.

“Shall we choose the settlements over poverty?” Peres argued. “Are the settlements synonymous to security while the Negev and Galilee suffer?”

Peres also addressed a large group of new immigrants who came to hear the Labor Party’s plans for improving their situation. Many of them recently came from the former Soviet Union. Upon arriving, they were sent to development towns in the Negev where they received inexpensive housing with discounted mortgages. But since then, they have been neglected, along with the rest of the Negev population, lacking jobs and social services.

According to Peres, over 600,000 Russian Jews who left Russia in recent years have decided to go to Germany or the United States rather than to Israel. Terrorism is only part of the reason for this choice. He stated that Israel does not offer serious social and economic benefits to encourage immigration. The successful absorption of Jews into the State should be one of Israel’s highest priorities.

Many of the speakers supported moving of settlers from the West Bank and Gaza settlements to the Negev or Galilee. According to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s in-limbo withdrawal plan, these settlers could be evacuated in the near future.

Avishay Braverman, President of Ben Gurion University in the Negev, noted the importance of financial investments, but stressed that the key is cooperation in order to get projects underway. There are many individuals, groups and organizations – Israelis as well as foreigners – who are interested in participating, but a concerted and coordinated effort is necessary for projects to succeed. Braverman referred to the development of the Negev and Galilee as a new “Zionist revolution” and stressed the importance of acting quickly and collectively, for the good of the future.

English speaking event at Labor

In May, the Labor Party hosted an event for English Speakers at party headquarters in Tel Aviv. Over 35 people attended the event which was widely reported in the local English-speaking press. Speaking at the event were MK Isaac Herzog and MK Colette Avital.

Following a lively discussion, participants responded to a call to action by signing up to the party and volunteering for party activities.

The next event for English speakers will be in early September - more details to follow.



MK Isaac Herzog (left) with Revival editor Guy Spigelman at the event for English speakers in May

Guests in Israel

- A delegation of young Romanian politicians, led by our comrade Victor Ponta, Vice President of the S.D.P. (April)
- A delegation of the UK Labour Friends of Israel including: Rachel Cowburn – International Secretary, Alexandar Evans, Michael Dugher and Joe McGowan, accompanied by Dan Fox. (June)
- A delegation of Labour MP's from the UK consisting of Andrew Dismore and Fabian Hamilton, accompanied by Dave Harris from the Labour Friends of Israel
- A delegation of Human Rights Activists from Norway including Elrik Øwre Thorshaug, Gro Mette Moen, and Rannfrid Telle, from the Norwegian Labour Party (June)

Next Issue:

**Interview with
Amir Peretz MK,
Chairman of the Histadrut**

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