

7. “Links in the Chain” — the Response of the Israeli Peace Movement

Introduction: “the great chain of nonviolence”

In his advocacy of nonviolent resistance to oppression, Gandhi laid particular emphasis on the transforming power of self-suffering in the struggle for justice. Through their preparedness to suffer for the cause of truth, he argued, nonviolent activists could convert the oppressor, revealing to them the error of their ways, offering them the possibility of joining in the creative struggle towards a better future from which both sides might benefit. More recent advocates such as Gene Sharp have taken a rather less “starry-eyed” approach, arguing that nonviolence is an efficient means of waging power-politics, its strength lying in its capacity to erode such sources of an oppressor’s power as the morale of the troops and public support at home.

Despite such attempts to wean nonviolence from the embrace of pacifist idealists, it still remains difficult for all but the “true believers” to accept that nonviolent methods on their own can be an effective means of waging a resistance struggle to a successful conclusion. After all, we have witnessed the terrifying and awesomely repressive powers of totalitarian regimes. We know that state control of the instruments of communication and education can foster a world view that appears to render its subjects immune to any appeals to morality and conscience, denying any claim the victim/opponent might make to a common humanity and, indeed, blaming the victim for whatever horrors are visited upon them. We know that soldiers can go on obeying morally unjustifiable orders — so long as they define their victims as “other”, separate from themselves and thereby less than fully human.

It follows from this that there is very little chance of the nonviolence of the dehumanised stirring the consciences of oppressors. As a general rule the degree of “shame power” exercised by nonviolent resisters is directly related to the social distance between the parties to the struggle. The shorter the distance, the more likely are the oppressors to perceive their victims as human, recognising them as fellow members of a common humanity.

On the basis of such insights students of nonviolent resistance to occupation such as Johan Galtung have sketched a model of a “great chain of nonviolence”. The image is of nonviolence communicating its message from group to group, social layer to social layer, until it reaches the nucleus of the political structure that is being challenged by civil disobedience and other resistance activities. Thus, in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Galtung has argued that whilst nonviolent resistance by Palestinians themselves might only exercise a limited degree of shame power, actions on their behalf by Israeli sympathisers is likely to have a far greater impact on the morale of the occupying forces and upon Israeli public opinion in general.¹

From this perspective the role of Israeli peace and protest groups opposed

to the continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip becomes a crucial factor effecting the outcome of the struggle. Acting as the conscience of Israeli society, they can point out to their fellow citizens the costs incurred by the routine transgression of those values to which they claim adherence, raising the spectre of social and political division within the society and state, presenting to the wider international community an alternative vision of the future than that adhered to by the political establishment, working to undermine the claims to legitimacy advanced by those who reject any possibility of exchanging land for peace. Insofar as they constitute a bridge between the two sides of the struggle, as members of Israeli society and yet feeling some degree of sympathy and even solidarity with the Palestinian cause, the position of such dissidents is not an easy one and not without its contradictions. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine their role during the Intifada.

Background

Throughout the history of Zionist immigration to Palestine there has been a minority current of opinion that has warned of the bitter consequences of discriminating against the Arab population. Brit Shalom (Covenant of Peace), founded in 1925, was Palestine's first recognised peace group. Dominated by Ashkenazi intellectuals, many of them faculty members at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, they urged that Palestine be recognised as the national home of two peoples with equal rights. The group stayed in existence until 1933 but, like its successor in the 1940s Ichud (Unity), it never succeeded in gaining significant public support for its bi-nationalist stance, and had serious problems coming up with practical political proposals that were equally acceptable to both Jews and Arabs. Jews rejected any proposal to limit immigration, whilst the Arabs saw no reason to make any concessions and were profoundly sceptical of a group that had amongst its leading figures individuals who were responsible for purchasing Arab land for Zionist settlement.²

Generally speaking the fate of Brit Shalom was typical of all the pre-1967 peace groups. They remained small, failed to command much public attention or to attract any significant support. Following the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip the debate about the character of the Israeli society and state took on a new tenor, marked by a basic shift in the approach of most Israeli "doves". From advocating a bi-national solution based on equality between the two peoples within a unified state, support emerged for the division of the land. There was little consensus concerning the amount of land to be relinquished in the cause of peace, however, and the different peace groups remained divided amongst themselves, with the Zionist groups split along party political lines and the anti-Zionists, such as the Israeli Socialist Organisation known as Matzpen (Compass), retaining a commitment to their own versions of a bi-nationalist state and thereby rendering themselves exceedingly marginal to mainstream Israeli debate. In fact, it was Matzpen and the communists who were the first to begin campaigning for a

withdrawal from the newly occupied territories. The Zionist doves as a whole did little to arouse public interest in the question of withdrawal for the first decade after the occupation. There was still a widespread belief that the Labour-led government was actively pursuing the path of peace, whilst for most Israelis these were years of general satisfaction — there was employment, Israel was powerful, the Arab world was divided, and things were looking good. Far more prominent than any peace movement in the arena of extra-parliamentary activity during these years was the burgeoning Land of Israel Movement, which laid claim to the whole of Palestine as the land of Eretz Israel.

The sense of well-being began to crumble rapidly following the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The feeling of security generated by the occupation of the territories had proved itself ill-founded. The Labour government had shown itself to be incompetent as well as corrupt, both in its lack of preparedness for the war and in its failure to deal with inflation, industrial unrest and the associated social conflicts that came in its wake. As a result the level of public protest around all these issues grew between 1973 and 1977, although it remained predominantly bound within the confines of parliamentary party politics. Thus, many erstwhile supporters of the Labour alignment channelled their activities into the formation of new political parties. Ratz (Citizens Rights Movement) was launched in 1973 and Dash (Democratic Movement for Change) in 1976. They both helped contribute to Labour's electoral defeat in 1977.

In 1977, President Sadat of Egypt broke ranks with the Arab world and visited Jerusalem. The price he demanded for his signature to a peace treaty was the complete withdrawal of Israel from the Sinai and the opening of negotiations on the future of the occupied territories. Whilst the negotiations were taking place the Likud-led government drew up plans to extend the settlement of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in order to ensure permanent Israeli rule over these biblical lands. Appalled at what they saw as a threat to the prospects for peace and seeking to mobilise public pressure, 350 reserve officers and soldiers sent Prime Minister Begin a letter in the spring of 1978 which was published as a petition and eventually obtained some 250,000 signatures. In what became known as "the officers' letter" they warned:³

A government that prefers the existence of Israel in borders of the greater Israel to its existence in peace in the context of good neighbourly relations will arouse in us grave misgivings. A government that prefers the establishment of settlements across the Green Line to the ending of the historic conflict and to the establishment of a system of normal relations raises questions about the justice of our course. A government policy that leads to the continued rule over one million Arabs is liable to damage the Jewish democratic character of the State, and will make it difficult for us to identify with the basic direction of the State of Israel

... we know that true security will be achieved only with the advent of peace. The strength of the Israeli Defense Forces lies in the identification of its soldiers with the course of the State of Israel.

The publication of the letter created a groundswell of support for what became Shalom Achshav (Peace Now), the most important movement in the Israeli peace camp. At one of its first demonstrations in Tel Aviv in March 1978 some 30,000 participated, unprecedented numbers for Israel, and new adherents continued to swell its ranks. They were urged to form local groups and engage in any activity that was in keeping with the spirit of the letter and the slogans "Peace is greater than Greater Israel", "Occupation corrupts", and "Settlements: an obstacle to peace". This was as near to a programme that Peace Now went. No positive steps were proposed and the aim, right from the start, was to appeal to as wide a section of the Israeli public as possible. It was an approach that was depicted as trying to move the mainstream of Israeli public opinion "half a step" at a time, so that eventually the national consensus would come into alignment with Peace Now.

An early indication of the determination not to step beyond the bounds of the "centre ground" within the Israeli political spectrum came in August 1978, when Peace Now denounced "The Letter of the Hundred" sent by reserve soldiers to the Minister of Defence declaring that they would refuse to defend Israeli settlements, which they considered to be "an expression of annexationist aims and of the rejectionist policy of the government" which thwarted peace efforts and endangered "the Zionist endeavour".⁴ Although Peace Now was prepared to organise demonstrations against such obstacles to the peace process as new settlements, the solidly middle class professional Ashkenazis that constituted the bulk of its adherents were reluctant to endorse any form of action or civil disobedience that could be construed as disloyal to the state of Israel and its democratically elected government.

This disavowal by Peace Now of any form of civil disobedience, and its refusal to support any kind of conscientious objection to military service (a particularly controversial step in the Israeli context), continued throughout the Lebanon War. What Peace Now did instead was to hold a series of protest demonstrations urging the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, culminating in the mammoth demonstration in Tel Aviv against the massacres in Sabra and Chatila that attracted a reported 400,000 people, 20 per cent of Israel's adult population. The event has passed into the folk-memory of Peace Now supporters as the high-point of the movement.

Due to its overriding concern to remain within the mainstream of Israeli political culture and the priority placed on loyalty to the state, Peace Now left considerable space for the emergence of a plurality of more particularistic organisations and groups oriented to specific sections of the Israeli public. One such group that pre-dated the formation of Peace Now, Oz ve Shalom (Courage and Peace), was targeted at religious Jews. Formed in 1975, its main aim was to counter the claims of the Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) settlers concerning their religious right to the whole of the land of Eretz Israel. In 1982 it joined forces with another group of religious Zionists,

Netivot le Shalom (Pathways to Peace). They argued that whatever historical and biblical claim the Jews might have to the whole of the land, the Palestinian desire for national self-determination precluded the fulfilment of this goal and that withdrawal from the occupied territories was essential if Israel was to fulfil its "prophetic vocation" to be a moral "light unto the nations".⁵

Another "special interest" peace group was formed in 1983. This was East for Peace, and the constituency towards which it was targeted was the Sephardic community of Jews in Israel. It was established as part of an attempt to counter the stereotyped image of the Oriental Jews that had become current amongst the bulk of Peace Now's supporters who came from predominantly European and North American backgrounds. Their essentially racist view of the Jews who had come to Israel from North Africa and the Arab world depicted them as authoritarian, rejectionist hawks who threatened not only the peace process but the future of democracy in Israel itself. Believing that Peace Now was too "European-oriented", the small group of Sephardi intellectuals and academics that constituted the core membership of East for Peace tried to link the issue of peace with that of social justice for Israel's poor, amongst whose ranks the Sephardi were disproportionately represented. They argued that the way to peace lay through Israel's integration into the Arab world. — without, it has to be said, achieving much public impact.

A group which had considerably more public and political impact was Yesh Gvul (There is a limit/border). This was founded at the outset of the war in Lebanon by a group of reserve soldiers who published a letter declaring their reluctance to perform their military duty beyond the borders of the state of Israel on Lebanese land. During the course of the war some 2,500 reserve soldiers signed the petition, and about 160 of them were tried and sentenced for their refusal to take part in the invasion. When the war in Lebanon ended Yesh Gvul lost much of its impetus, although a small number of activists kept the organisation alive as a support group for those few individuals who refused to serve in the occupied territories.

The refusal to perform one's military service because of moral and political concerns was totally abhorrent to Peace Now, which had always stressed the primacy of obeying the legal government of the day, however distasteful its policies. In this Peace Now was completely at one with majority opinion, for whom the IDF constituted one of the few unifying institutions that symbolised both the state and the society of Israel. As such, the refuseniks of Yesh Gvul defied not only the law but also a very powerful social taboo.

In defending the right to refuse military service, the members of Yesh Gvul stressed that they were not objecting to military duty *per se*. Rather, they were exercising their moral duty to refuse to serve in an army that exceeded its legitimate purpose as the Israeli *Defence Force*. As such, theirs was a selective form of conscientious objection. The number of "absolute objectors" in Israel, people who refuse to participate in any form of military

activity because of their humanitarian, religious or political principles, has always been minuscule. Such people have remained dissenting voices amongst the ranks of dissenters within the Israeli peace and protest movements. Individuals like Toma Sik and Amos Gvurtz have had the thankless task of acting not so much as a "prophetic minority" but rather as a "prophetic handful" of pacifists, bearing witness to a set of ideals and principles that has been totally at odds with the values of an increasingly militaristic (and materialistic) society. And yet, despite their marginality, these few "wise fools" have been amongst the most committed in their pursuance of peace and reconciliation between the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs on both sides of the Green Line.

By contrast, Peace Now refrained from sharing its platform with Palestinians sympathetic to the PLO until 1986, when it organised a demonstration in Hebron. In 1981, however, a protest group had been formed that was not exclusively Jewish in composition and which organised demonstrations with Palestinian participation, confronting the occupation authorities in the West Bank in a far more determined manner than Peace Now was prepared to contemplate. This was the Birzeit Solidarity Committee (BSC) which was formed to protest against the closure of the West Bank university in November of that year. Following the reopening of the university the Committee, drawn primarily from the ranks of radical students and faculty at the Hebrew University, decided to widen its focus to the occupation as a whole. It became the first Israeli peace group to move its political activity beyond the Green Line into the territories themselves. As one of the founder members recalled,⁶

We wanted to show the Palestinians that some Israelis are willing to risk beating and tear-gassing. The army would not kill us because we are Jews ... But our presence on the West Bank stirred a lot of enthusiasm among the local population. We went to Ramallah, Hebron, Dheisha refugee camp — wherever repression took place — and put a spotlight on many dark corners of the occupation which the Israeli public would have preferred to pretend did not exist.

Critical of Peace Now's vagueness concerning the future status of the occupied territories and accusing it of opposing the occupation for the purely selfish reasons of the damage it inflicted upon Israeli society, the BSC was unequivocal in its call for total withdrawal from the territories, including the evacuation of all Jewish settlers, and negotiations with the PLO leading to the formation of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Not surprisingly, such a radical stance was complete anathema to Peace Now, who prohibited the participation of the BSC in any of its demonstrations.

With the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 the BSC changed its name to the Committee Against the War in Lebanon (CAWL) and on 8 June broke the Israeli taboo on staging protests whilst fighting was still going on by organising the first anti-war demonstration. At a later demonstration many adherents of Peace Now attended, frustrated at the silence of their own

leadership — thereby prompting Peace Now to organise its own anti-war rally a few weeks later. This also set a pattern that was to be repeated in the future whereby Peace Now would leave it to one or more of the smaller peace groups to organise protests around controversial issues, and only after the mood of public opinion had thereby been tested would they mobilise their own resources.

Early in 1985 the BSC spawned another committee — the Committee Confronting the Iron Fist (CCIF). Unlike the BSC the membership was predominantly Palestinian, but it also included some of the Israeli members of the original organisation. They organised demonstrations and other actions aimed at drawing attention to the deportations, administrative detentions, collective punishments and all the other facets of the "iron fist" policy. An interesting feature of the CCIF was the fact that whilst the Israeli and Palestinian members failed to agree on a common political platform, both sides were prepared to work together to protest against the occupation, as an exercise to further dialogue and mutual understanding. A similar motivation lay behind the formation of an avowedly nonviolent grouping that went under the name of Palestinians and Israelis for Non-violence. Affiliated to the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, this group worked primarily as a support network for the Palestinian Centre for the Study of Non-violence (PCSN) which had been established in East Jerusalem by Mubarak Awad in 1985.⁷

Born in Jerusalem, Awad had spent the bulk of his adult life in the United States where he had come across the writings of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Gene Sharp amongst others. He became convinced that nonviolent methods were the most effective means of resisting the Israeli occupation, and he outlined the key features of such a strategy in an article in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* in 1984. After his return to Jerusalem Awad tried to interest Palestinians in nonviolent methods of resistance, holding seminars and workshops, urging people to boycott Israeli products, offering assistance to villagers whose land had been expropriated, running a small mobile library, and publishing Arabic translations of some of the classic works on nonviolence. One of the most widely publicised of the Centre's actions was the attempt to plant olive tree seedlings near the village of Quattanyah to replace the original trees that had been uprooted by the Israelis. The action took place on 25 January 1986, Israel's national tree-planting day! In Awad's own words:⁸

On the day of the planting, over a hundred Israelis and foreigners joined with the villagers. We began to plant the seedlings. Israeli soldiers arrived too and began to pull them up, but the planters outnumbered the soldiers. We planted seedlings faster than they could be uprooted. We sat by the plants, protecting them with a nonviolent presence. Then the major came and said, "OK, hold on. The trees can stay and you go to court to resolve the problem." We agreed. But the next day, when we came back with an Israeli TV producer who was filming a story about the trees, we found they had been uprooted. The story was on Israeli

television. The result was that we lost those seedlings, but our action and the military response publicised what was happening all the time to the Palestinians — their land being confiscated, their lives destroyed. So the villagers had proved that, in a nonviolent way, they could confront the authorities and their guns.

This account is indicative of the ebullience and optimism that Awad displayed. In fact the Centre faced many problems, not the least of which concerned finding an appropriate Arabic term for nonviolence that did not carry with it connotations of passivity and acceptance. Awad was further handicapped by his organisational isolation within the Palestinian community. He lacked the sponsorship of any of the key political personalities or factions. He was a United States citizen with an American passport, and he was a Christian. Moreover, his Arabic was not very good — when Palestinians heard him calling for the formation of a nonviolent *organisation* suspicions were aroused that he planned to launch an alternative to the existing *organisation* i.e. the PLO. Thus it was that in the pre-Intifada period it seemed that Mubarak Awad received a more sympathetic hearing from Israelis than from Palestinians, which did little to allay the doubts in some quarters about his nationalist credentials.

Similar suspicions were entertained on the Israeli side of the divide concerning those who insisted on engaging in dialogue with the “enemy”. Meetings between Israelis and the PLO had begun on a more or less regular basis early in the 1970s. Most of these involved anti-Zionist Israelis, however, and had little impact on the Israeli public or political establishment. By the mid-1970s the pace had quickened, a trend marked by the formation in 1975 of the Israeli Council for Israel-Palestine Peace, whose members affirmed their readiness to take part in a dialogue “with all Palestinian elements who are ready to promote contacts between the two peoples of this country”.⁹ At the heart of this development was Uri Avnery who, from that date, kept the Israeli government fully informed of his meetings with senior PLO representatives. By the 1980s increasing numbers of Israeli peace activists had proven themselves willing to sit down with the PLO. In order to forestall what it feared was a growing public readiness to accept the “terrorist organisation” as a partner in talks concerning territorial compromise, the National Unity government responded in August 1986 by passing legislation that outlawed such meetings, thereby creating the opportunity for peace movement activists to court political martyrdom by defying the law — hence the “Rumanian Four” and the “Hungarian Eight”.¹⁰

By the outbreak of the Intifada, then, the extra-parliamentary protest wing of the Israeli peace camp could be characterised as a loosely structured movement composed of a number of separate organisations. At the hub was Peace Now, an umbrella movement targeted at the mainstream of Israeli public opinion. Lacking any clear organisational structure, having no formal members as such and few full-time officials, vague concerning practical peace proposals and eager to avoid confrontation with the government, especially when the Labour Alignment was in power — Peace Now still

remained the only organisation capable of mobilising people on a mass scale. Around it was arrayed a variety of more particularistic groups aiming their message at different sections of Israeli society and reflecting a range of political stances, from the religious Zionism of *Oz ve Shalom* through to anti-Zionist advocates of a democratic secular state.

Peace Now had always predicated its approach on the democratic nature of the Israeli state, believing that if sufficient people could be convinced of the need to recognise the Palestinians' right to some form of self-determination, then this would impact on the policy-makers. Their prime target was that sizeable proportion of the population which was ambivalent about the issue of the territories, with a genuine yearning for peace but a lack of any clear notion of how this might be achieved. In trying to arrive at some assessment of its performance during the years prior to the Intifada there are a number of criteria by which it can be adjudged to have been successful. It had proven itself capable of mobilising large numbers of people on its occasional mass demonstrations. In the process it had succeeded in attracting media attention and forcing the government to take its views into account, particularly with regard to the institution of a commission of inquiry into the Sabra and Chatila massacres and the subsequent withdrawal, albeit partial, from Lebanon. On the central issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, its efforts would seem to have borne less fruit. Whereas public opinion polls in 1968 revealed a solid majority of Israelis (around 70 per cent) expressing a preparedness to return the recently acquired territories (apart from East Jerusalem) to Arab sovereignty for the sake of peace, by 1986 this figure had dropped to 41 per cent, with 50 per cent opposed and 9 per cent unsure.¹¹

In seeking to explain this relative failure to shift the scales of public opinion in favour of territorial compromise Peace Now activists tended to blame the Oriental Jews who provided the bulk of the support for the Likud bloc. However, looking beyond such scapegoats, Mordechai Bar-On, a leading figure in Peace Now, focused on five factors underpinning this apparent shift towards a more hawkish posture.

1) The strong emotional attachment felt by Israeli Jews for the land of the occupied territories where so much of Biblical history took place.

2) That element in Zionist thinking that believes in the sovereignty of collective will-power, whatever the obstacles. This enables Israelis to ignore realities such as the existence of the Palestinians living under occupation.

3) That contradictory mix in the Israeli psyche which others have referred to as the "national siege syndrome". This combines a deep sense of fear, based on the conviction that the outside world is basically hostile and antagonistic, with a belief that the maintenance of sufficient deterrent strength will be sufficient to counter all dangers.

4) An increasing lack of faith in the possibility of peace.

5) The incidence of Arab violence against Israelis and Jews which, according to Bar-On, constituted the most immediate and apparent factor contributing to Israel's intransigence in relation to the Palestinians.¹²

It was these factors that fed the emergence of a "New Zionism" in the situation created by the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967. The standard-bearers of this creed, which had its antecedents with Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Zionists, were the members of the Land of Israel Movement and the religious-nationalists of Gush Emunim. These were the new "pioneers" charged with the sacred task of "redeeming the promised land" and rejuvenating the Jewish nation in the process. The defeat of Labour and the election of Begin's Likud government in 1977 gave these new pioneers a new legitimacy.

It was the disquiet of the adherents of the old Labour Zionism with this new trend, coupled with the emergence of more extreme groups such as Kahane's Kach, who advocated the expulsion of all Arabs from the Land of Israel, which provided the impetus behind the formation of Peace Now. In an effort to counterbalance the appeal of this "New Zionism", the ideologues of Peace Now consistently advocated a "sane Zionism", which, they argued, could not be reconciled with the domination by force of some 1.5 million Palestinians. It was in this sense that Peace Now affirmed that the "Palestinian problem" was in essence an "Israeli problem". Peace Now took on the hue of a moral crusade for the soul of Zionism, reflecting the conviction of Martin Buber that "Independence of one's own must not be gained at the expense of another's independence". Its adherents, disproportionately drawn from the ranks of the Ashkenazi professional middle class, were as likely to attend a rally against racism as they were to protest against collective punishment in the occupied territories. Their vision was of a democratic, tolerant, pluralistic Zionist state and society, with security resting upon harmonious co-existence with its neighbours in the region — quite how this was to be achieved was never spelled out with any clarity.

The mushrooming of Israeli peace and protest groups

At the outbreak of the Intifada the Israeli peace movement lay relatively dormant, and Peace Now was slow to respond to the new situation. Whereas its vagueness with regard to the conflict with the Palestinians presented no great problem so long as the major political issues in Israel were matters of "foreign policy" such as peace with Egypt and withdrawal from Lebanon, its reluctance to step beyond the bounds of national consensus with regard to the occupied territories (occasionally expressed as the "Three no's": No withdrawal from the 1967 borders, No Palestinian state, and No negotiations with the PLO) immobilised the organisation during the early weeks of the Uprising. Its failure to call out its supporters in protest or to issue any statement of outrage or dissent from government attempts to suppress the Uprising by force was attributed by some observers to the close links that many Peace Now activists had with the Labour Party, one of whose senior leaders was the Minister of Defence and as such a major architect of that policy.

Into the vacuum thereby created a proliferation of groups and initiatives emerged. The majority of these were segmental groupings representing

particular sections of Israeli society, lacking any clear programmatic prescriptions for action to resolve the conflict beyond a general commitment to urge a political rather than a military solution. A second category consisted of specific task-oriented groups which also eschewed any firm attachment to any particular platform or political stand-point, but expressed their commitment to resolving the conflict by organising their activities around particular aspects of the occupation. A third category of groups aspired to operate nationally, with definite political programmes aimed at bringing the occupation to an end and leading to a peace settlement.

Alongside all these new groups, *Yesh Gvul* rose once more into the limelight, seeking to advise and support the increasing numbers of reservists with doubts about serving in the occupied territories. What follows is a brief overview of the range of groups that mushroomed into the public domain in the context of the Intifada.

Sectional groupings

Professional groups

Amongst the protest groups that drew their participants from particular sections of Israeli society, there emerged a surprisingly large number of "professional" organisations and committees. Their activity might consist of little more than sending occasional letters to the press or publishing statements expressing their concern, but more often it went beyond that. Thus, medical doctors organised a group called Physicians Against the Occupation, working as a pressure group in solidarity with Palestinian colleagues to draw attention to the state of health facilities in the occupied territories. Mental health workers including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and the like formed Mental Health Workers for the Advancement of Peace, issuing petitions and organising conferences and meetings to warn about the implications of the occupation on the mental health of the young soldiers and their victims. Academics in Tel Aviv formed Ad Caan (Thus Far and No Further), inviting guest lecturers from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, holding seminars, teach-ins and sit-ins, protesting in particular against the closure of Palestinian universities, seeking to draw upon their professional status and expertise to add weight to their political interventions. Creative writers and artists organised themselves into a joint Israeli-Palestinian committee — one with the longest name of them all: Israeli and Palestinian Writers, Artists and Academics Committee Against the Occupation and for Peace and Freedom to Create! On 13 June 1988 they signed what they claimed to be the first peace treaty between Israelis and Palestinians, thereby illustrating in the words of one of their number, "that it was possible to reach a compromise, with pain and gritted teeth ... for the sake of the future of the two peoples, whose common interest was to live together and not die together".¹³

In drawing up a peace treaty, the committee had to confront the difficult issues of the future of Jerusalem and the Palestinian right of return. Most groups avoided such specifics and hence the danger of causing divisions within their ranks, confining their positive political proposals to the demand

that peace negotiations with the Palestinians be commenced as a matter of urgency to end the occupation. This was particularly the case with groupings that sought to appeal to whole strata of Israeli society such as the youth, with groups like Youth Against the Occupation and Youth for Refusal being formed.

Women's groups

More remarkable than the emergence of youth groups was the prominent role quickly taken by women in the protest activities. On 2 December 1988, 150 women participated in a women's peace gathering to mark one year of the Intifada. Linking the oppression of women to that of the Palestinians, the organisers affirmed:¹⁴

We, as feminists who daily wage war against oppression in our society, are especially sensitive to the oppression of other groups and peoples, men and women alike. We believe that the rules of this game, which divide the world into victims and oppressors, the victorious and the vanquished, are not the ones which will bring a just solution to all sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The gathering led to the formation of Reshet (The Women's Network for Peace). Amongst the affiliates was one of the earliest women's groups to be founded in response to the Intifada, Shani (Israeli Women Against the Occupation). Shani was started in Jerusalem in January 1988 with the aim of helping women develop a more informed political basis to the emotions aroused by the outrages being perpetrated in the occupied territories. Discussion meetings, seminars, public lectures, fact-finding trips and solidarity visits to the West Bank constituted its programme, complemented by the occasional nonviolent training session in preparation for demonstrations and other actions.

Undoubtedly the best known and most highly publicised women's nonviolent protest action in which members of Shani and other groups participated was that known as Women in Black. Each Friday lunchtime at major intersections in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa women dressed in black have stood in silent vigil, holding placards in the shape of a hand signalling "Stop!" with the slogan "End the Occupation". They stand together for an hour or so, enduring verbal abuse and harassment from vehicle drivers passing by and from counter-demonstrators. The protest has been going on every Friday since January 1988. It has remained a visibly powerful and politically impressive form of witness. Its origins lie with a group of Jerusalemite women who decided to hold a demonstration in protest against the murder of women and children in the Gaza Strip. On that first Friday in France Square in West Jerusalem they decided they should return the following week. The regular Women in Black became a familiar sight, and in June 1988 similar weekly pickets were started in Tel Aviv and Haifa. As one of the initiators explained:¹⁵

For women it is easier to express themselves as women rather than just

as people. Women are also more persistent in fulfilling their commitments, which explains why these demonstrations have lasted for such a long time. We avoid any attempt to define political programmes for ourselves — there are many other structures for this — so as to keep those things which unite us, and to continue to identify ourselves as women, without a political identification.

Another project launched by women was the Peace Quilt. Some 5000 Israeli women participated in the creation of a cloth made up of individual squares — each embodying a personal statement about peace. The quilt, about 200 metres in length, was started in January 1988 and was eventually displayed in front of the Knesset in June of that year as a symbolic peace cloth for the negotiating table.

Other groups

Parents Against Moral Erosion was established as a mutual support and pressure group by parents of IDF soldiers, concerned about what they considered to be the impossible dilemmas faced by their children serving in the occupied territories and the impact this was having upon them. Alongside the opening of a "Hotline for Soldiers' Parents", they also added their voices to those calling upon the government to start negotiations for a political settlement.

A group representing a somewhat smaller section of the community was Israelis by Choice/ Olim (new immigrants) against the Occupation. This was formed by a group of American immigrants at the time when Mubarak Awad was fighting against his deportation order. They sought to highlight the cruel paradox that they, as Jews born in North America, enjoyed the right to live and be politically active in Jerusalem; a right denied to someone such as Awad who was actually born in the city. Following his eventual deportation in June 1988 they organised a daily picket outside the Prime Minister's official residence in Jerusalem for a couple of hours each afternoon calling for an end to the occupation.

Another group which established a regular pattern of protest during 1989 was Runners for Peace. Most Fridays a group of Israelis from Jerusalem joined with some Palestinians from the Bethlehem area for an afternoon run, wearing T-shirts bearing the slogan "We want peace between Palestine and Israel, both free and secure". Like other groups that have sought to engage in joint protest activity with Palestinians, these political sportsmen encountered selective harassment from the military who tended to focus their attentions on the Palestinian participants — including the detention of one 19 year old runner from Aida refugee camp.

Task groups

Few of the protest groups have had any kind of formal membership and most of the activists have participated in the activities of more than one group. Thus, many of those who regularly devoted a portion of their time to standing on a picket line or helped to draft petitions and letters of protest would also

be likely to be involved in one or other of the task-oriented groups that have been formed. These have organised their actions around a specific aspect of the occupation, with the purpose of extending relief, solidarity and support to those Palestinians who have suffered as a consequence of their resistance activities. Thus, amongst the women who participate in the weekly vigils of Women in Black one finds members of the Women's Organisation for Political Prisoners (WOPP). Formed in May 1988 in response to the harassment of Palestinian women by the security forces, the group's aim has been to support women who have been imprisoned in Israeli jails for their social and political resistance activity and whom WOPP consider to be "political prisoners". Its work has developed on a number of fronts. At one level it has acted as a relief agency: visiting prisoners, collecting and distributing food and clothing for their families, and engaging in other forms of welfare activity. It has also worked to arouse Israeli and international opinion against the denial of prisoners' basic rights: illegal arrests and administrative detentions; lack of proper medical care, particularly for pregnant women; the refusal of the authorities to allow breast-feeding women to keep their child with them in prison; using women prisoners as hostages to bring pressure to bear on their family and friends.

WOPP is typical of other task groups insofar as the participants share no single political platform or ideology. What has united them has been their opposition to the occupation, and their commitment to struggling against it by working around a particular issue, in this case the plight of women political prisoners. In similar fashion, the Committee for Beita was formed in April 1988, following the military reprisals against the village which resulted in the deportation of 12 of the villagers and the destruction of sixteen houses and the subsequent campaign by settlers to have the entire village destroyed. A group of about 30 Israeli men and women took it upon themselves to assist in the rehabilitation of the village. Builders and architects offered their services to repair the damaged homes and replace those that had been demolished, whilst lawyers launched a legal campaign to obtain compensation for the villagers and arranged legal aid for those who were prosecuted for their involvement in defending themselves from the settlers on that day in April 1988 when two of their number and a young Israeli woman were shot dead.¹⁶

Other groups that came into existence during the Intifada with a similar focus upon a particular dimension of the occupation, without requiring of its members any firm commitment to any single political programme, included Shomer Achiv (His Brother's Keeper — the Rabbinic Human Rights Watch). An exceedingly rare phenomenon in Israel, the group consists of a coalition of rabbis from orthodox, reform and conservative streams who got together early in 1989 to stress the moral imperatives of Judaism and to "cry out against the growing acts of humiliation, degradation and abasement against the Palestinian people".¹⁷ It has concentrated its attentions primarily on the paucity of medical facilities in the occupied territories and the attempts to use health care as an instrument of control and suppression. In acting as a

pressure group to bring about changes in Israeli policy, its members have drawn upon their religious credentials to add weight and legitimacy to their task. In similar manner, the Committee Against Torture in Israel, which was formed in April 1990, included amongst its members lawyers, psychiatrists, criminologists and physicians who could lay claim to relevant expertise in their efforts to publicise cases of torture and press for its abolition as a means of interrogation in Israel.

The best known of the human rights organisations is B'Tselem ("In the image"), the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. Established in December 1988, it received (in association with its Palestinian equivalent, Al Haq) a Jimmy Carter Award for "profound commitment to human decency and the protection of human rights" in 1989. Its aim has been to provide an authoritative monitoring and publicising of human rights abuses in the territories by means of monthly bulletins, special reports, and parliamentary questions placed by some of the Knesset members who are on its board. As its director explained, "Our main aim is to tell the Israeli public what is going on. Our geographical area is the territories; but our target is the Israeli citizen".¹⁸ On a more personal level, she confessed:¹⁹

I don't want to be the conscience of this country, but if my children ask me in the future what I did during the Intifada, I'll at least be able to say: "I did my bit. I was one of those who warned."

B'Tselem has acted primarily a documentation centre and has refrained from taking up individual cases. This became the work of another human rights group, Hotline for the Victims of Violence, staffed by Israelis and Palestinians. It started out primarily as an agency to assist Palestinian victims of military and settler violence, helping them to file complaints with the appropriate authorities. Increasingly, however, it came to operate as a missing persons bureau. Almost half the requests for help during 1989 came from people trying to locate friends and relatives who have been arrested, 20 per cent of cases concerned physical violence, 16 per cent damage to property, and 18 per cent other abuses.²⁰

One of the human rights abuses which particularly concerned Palestinians during 1989 was the deportation of those lacking the proper residency permits required by the Israeli authorities. By the end of that year some 250 Palestinians, mainly wives and children, had been deported to Jordan because they did not have the necessary "legal" status for permanent residence according to the military government. A number of Israeli organisations joined the campaign around this issue, including the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, and in June 1990 it was announced that the 250 expellees would be allowed to return. However, this still left a considerable number of Palestinian families whose spouses remained separated because one or other of them lacked the necessary documentation to reside permanently in the West Bank or Gaza Strip. A voluntary group, Israelis for Family Reunification, was formed to work alongside the Palestinian Centre for the Study of Nonviolence in a joint campaign around this issue of "invisible transfer", the idea being

that an Israeli family would “adopt” a Palestinian family and take up their case with the appropriate authorities. The initiative for the formation of the group came from members of The Twenty-First Year, one of the few Israeli peace groups that had come into existence in response to the Intifada with some kind of political programme and set of proposals of how Israelis should act to advance the peace process.

Political groups

The label “political groups” is applied in this context to those groups within the extra-parliamentary Israeli peace camp that lay claim to a more defined political identity than the sectional and task-oriented groups. They include The Twenty-First Year, Dai la Kibbush (End the Occupation), and Hala ha-Kibbush (Down with the Occupation). Discerning the exact nature of their political identities, and the differences that exist between them, can be a rather tortuous task for those unfamiliar with the history and sectarian practices of non-Zionist political factions in Israel. Indeed one suspects that the key factor distinguishing each of these three groups is their geographical base. Hala ha-Kibbush is strongest in Tel Aviv and Haifa, Dai la Kibbush in Jerusalem, and (according to some cynics) The Twenty-First Year is strongest in the Hebrew University, particularly amongst the associate professors!

The Twenty First Year was launched in December 1987 on the initiative of a lecturer in Philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Its founding Covenant committed the signatories to “refuse to collaborate with the system of occupation in all of its manifestations”. They argued that the occupation was total, embracing the cultural, economic and political life within the territories and within Israel — deforming Israelis as well as Palestinians. As the occupation was total in its effects, so resistance needed to be total and wide-ranging. They called for a boycott of goods produced by settlers, they urged Israeli Jews not to go to the occupied territories, they have supported those who refuse to do military service within the territories, and have encouraged members to examine the curricula of their local schools and to challenge any contents that present a distorted version of the occupation. The Twenty-First Year also organised solidarity and fact-finding visits to the occupied territories, frequently arranged in coordination with other groups such as Dai la Kibbush.

Dai la Kibbush traces its origins to the original “Committees” (BSC/CAWL/CCIF). Shortly before the outbreak of the Intifada a few surviving members of the original groupings formed Dai la Kibbush For Israeli-Palestinian Peace. Its platform contains the unconditional demand to end the occupation and calls for the recognition of the PLO and the commencement of negotiations at an international peace conference leading to the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Its activists have been drawn from a range of left-wing and non-Zionist parties — their historical rivalries seemingly irrelevant in the context of the Intifada. However, it has no formal membership list and has tried to practise the experiment of having a revolving executive with new people taking over coordinating functions each month.

Weekly meetings are held on a Sunday evening to plan such activities as demonstrations and leafleting, house meetings for dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, and the regular Saturday solidarity visits to a village or refugee camp in the occupied territories

The structure and functioning of Hala ha Kibbush has followed a similar pattern. It was formed in 1985 with a membership drawn primarily from the left wing of the Israeli Communist Party which had also been active in the "committees". It initiated a number of protest actions but its level of activity increased dramatically with the outbreak of the Intifada. Seeking to appeal to activists with a variety of political positions who are united in their opposition to the occupation and willing to express concrete solidarity with the Palestinian struggle in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the organisation eschewed any detailed political solution to the conflict — confining itself to an affirmation of unconditional support for the Intifada and the demand for immediate withdrawal from the occupied territories. The central theme of its platform has been support for the fourteen demands made by Palestinian personalities in January 1988. As was remarked above, Hala ha Kibbush has been particularly active in Tel Aviv and Haifa. It was instrumental in organising the first food convoy to the Gaza Strip in January 1988 and has held regular collections of toys and learning materials for the children of Jabaliya Camp, alongside its regular pickets, vigils, leafleting, solidarity visits, house meetings, and participation in joint actions and demonstrations with other groups.

There is a well-known saying about Israelis to the effect that whenever six of them are gathered together you will hear seven different opinions — the peace camp provides little evidence to doubt the veracity of this observation! However, they have made efforts to coordinate their activities by means of occasional national gatherings. At the city level, such as in West Jerusalem, coordinating meetings have been held much more frequently with each group reporting on their planned actions and seeking the cooperation of the others. The result has been that the dangers of stultification occasioned by the dominance of a single organisation have been minimised, and whilst outsiders might find the range of groups confusing and the duplication of effort wasteful — the activists themselves seem quite happy to live with such a fluid and flexible infrastructure.

Yesh Gvul

The massive deployment of troops in the occupied territories in order to suppress the Intifada led to that much remarked upon phenomenon — "shooting and weeping". Protest songs exploring the themes of guilt and responsibility became popular during the Intifada. One of them, "Shooting and Crying" by Si Hyman, contained the refrain:²¹

Boys play with lead, girls with steel dolls;
Life looks different in the shadow of filth.
Shooting and crying, burning and laughing,

When did we ever learn to bury people alive?
Shooting and crying, burning and laughing,
When did we ever forget that our children too have been killed?

In another, "Chad Gadya" by Chava Alberstein, the questions are asked:²²

Till when will the circle of horror continue?
The prosecutor and the prosecuted
The one who beats and the one who is beaten
When will this madness end?
I was once a peaceful lamb and kid?
Today I am a preying tiger and wolf
I've already been a dove and I have been a deer
Today I don't know what I am any more.

In Israel this is the kind of refrain one can hear again and again from those who are opposed to the occupation, but feel that they must meet their obligations to the state by fulfilling their military duty and serving in the army, even an army of occupation. They argue that during their tour of duty they can act as a restraining influence upon the "Rambos" in their unit — humane agents of civilisation in the brutal world of occupier and occupied. These are the people like the restaurateur, a Peace Now sympathiser, who was serving his journalist friends a meal one week and angrily confronting them with a rifle the next, as he prevented them from entering a closed military area. They are the people like the man I accompanied on a "peace convoy" to the West Bank in the late spring of 1989. The aim was for members of the Israeli peace camp to visit Palestinian communities as friends, rather than as occupiers. Our contingent visited a village a few miles north west of Hebron. After a couple of hours sitting and talking in the sun, my companion indicated he wanted to leave. As we walked down the road to his car he was obviously in some distress as he confessed:

I'm bored. It achieves nothing. Why do I still continue in this kind of activity? OK — the media were here and we may influence Israeli public opinion. But next month I know I will be driving down these same roads in a jeep, wearing my uniform! Do you realise that I spend one twelfth of my life here — just trying to get through my thirty days reserve duty without being injured and not hurting anyone else!

A minority of Israelis have tried to resolve their dilemma by refusing to serve as agents of occupation. The overall number of "refuseniks" during the Intifada is unknown. More than a hundred soldiers, over 90 per cent of them reservists, have been jailed, some of them repeatedly. But hundreds more have avoided prison sentences due to the action of their commanding officers, who have assigned them to duties that have not clashed with their consciences regarding the occupation and the treatment of Palestinians — a solution that

suits both sides insofar as it keeps the recalcitrants out of the headlines as well as out of jail.²³ Yesh Gvul is the movement to which all these people have turned for advice, support and counselling.

Yesh Gvul is that strange entity, a soldiers' movement that is part of the wider peace movement. It has tried to steer a difficult path between the law and morality, refraining from urging disaffection upon reservists and soldiers, whilst pointing out that they have a duty to disobey illegal orders; reluctant to adopt specific political positions in order to avoid division within its ranks, yet participating with other organisations and groups in peace demonstrations and related actions. Very few of the people associated with Yesh Gvul are what one would term "absolutist" in their objection to military service. Theirs is a selective objection to service in the occupied territories rather than to military service *per se*. A very few have moved beyond this boundary and adopted the stance of the total resister, either because of pacifist conviction or through the realisation that the performance of *any role* within the IDF involves participation, however indirectly, in the occupation.

One of those who came to this conclusion was Adam Keller. In April 1988 he had been arrested whilst on reserve duty. Not content with putting up "Stop the Occupation" stickers around the base near Tel Aviv where he was stationed, he had spray-painted peace slogans on 117 parked tanks, armoured personnel carriers and trucks! He was fined, demoted from corporal to private, and sentenced to nine months imprisonment, with six months suspended. Early in 1990 this one man graffiti commando was drafted for reserve duty once again. This time he refused even to don the uniform, arguing²⁴:

The IDF was founded as the Israeli Defence Forces, but it has become the Israeli occupation forces, an instrument to oppress another people.

I refuse to be a smoothly working cog in that machine.

Sentenced to 28 days in prison, he began a hunger strike after being forced to wear military uniform. On his release he was exempted from future reserve service for "psychiatric reasons". As far as he was concerned "If such an army calls me 'crazy', then crazy I am proud to be".²⁵

Peace Now

There can be little doubt that most of the leading figures in Peace Now would endorse the use of such an epithet to describe the stance of activists such as Keller. As far as Peace Now was concerned, those who refused military service placed themselves beyond the parameters of the national consensus and thereby rendered themselves politically irrelevant. Indeed, Peace Now (along with the relatively conservative pressure group Council for Peace and Security)²⁶ prided itself on the prominent role played by senior reserve officers in its activities as a means of securing legitimacy for its pronouncements. It has consistently refused to endorse any confrontation with the authorities or any form of civil disobedience for fear of alienating public opinion. Its leaders

likened it to a train, moving slowly towards its destination — people could get on and off the “peace train” whenever they wanted, according to the extent of their identification with its speed and direction. The secret of its ability to mobilise thousands of people lay, so it was argued, in its ability to deliver a sophisticated and balanced phrasing of its political positions which have “advanced the consensus by half a step and have drawn it gradually to our side”.²⁷

Thus, whilst reservists were refusing to serve in the occupied territories and members of the more marginal anti-occupation groups were getting themselves arrested in pickets and demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinians, Peace Now continued to plough its centrist furrow. The problem was that, under the impact of the Intifada, this notional middle ground was becoming narrower and narrower.

It is generally agreed that one of the most significant consequences of the Intifada with regard to Israeli public opinion has been an increasing polarisation of political opinion, with a corresponding intrusion into mainstream political debate of viewpoints that had previously been considered beyond the pale. Thus, on the right, the extremist views advocating the “transfer” of the Palestinians, which had previously been the preserve of Kahane and Kach, had become a legitimate policy preference endorsed by significant sections of the electorate. Likewise, at the other pole, the need to recognise the PLO as a partner in talks leading to the formation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel had become an increasingly commonplace assumption amongst sectors of the population. The result was that the national consensus based on the Three No’s disintegrated. To some observers it seemed as if a situation had been created whereby no one in Israel could afford the luxury of being neutral about the Intifada. The occupation and the Intifada could not be separated, and could not be ignored.

Peace Now could not remain untouched by this process and by the summer of 1988 some of its leading figures, particularly some of those from the Tel Aviv area, were talking in private of the need to recognise the PLO following King Hussein’s relinquishment of his claim to the West Bank. The subsequent failure of the Labour Alignment to make any substantial gains in the general election, coupled with the Algiers announcements from the PNC, created the conditions necessary for the leadership to take the decisive step of launching a campaign under the slogan “There is a Partner for Discussion. Speak with the PLO.”, calling for direct negotiations on the basis of mutual recognition and the cessation of violence. A month later, on 24 December, somewhere in the region of 10-15,000 marchers participated in the first demonstration organised by Peace Now against the government’s refusal to talk to the PLO. None of the other groups could dream of getting so many people out on the streets on a wet Saturday evening, and hopes began to rise that this was a harbinger of a mass mobilisation against the government’s intransigence.

1990: Time for peace

The truth of the matter is that Peace Now failed to mobilise anything like the numbers that came out onto the streets to protest against the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Indeed, by the early months of 1989 the activity of the peace camp in general had reached a plateau as Peace Now followed the lead established by the smaller protest groups in organising peace convoys and solidarity visits to the neighbours across the Green Line.

Peace Now still would not support the refuseniks of Yesh Gvul, but by 1989 its members were beginning to adopt slightly more confrontational approaches in their pursuance of peace. In May 1988 Peace Now had planned a motorcade to Nablus to distribute leaflets expressing comradeship with the Palestinians. The symbolism of the event was somewhat diluted by their acceptance of the restrictions imposed by the military authorities who insisted on providing an escort, forbade the handing out of leaflets and the display of banners, and stipulated that there were to be no meetings with Palestinians. The final rally was held on the rifle-range of a military camp outside Nablus. By September 1989 Peace Now activists were prepared to try and break the curfew imposed on Beit Sahour and, as a further expression of solidarity, announced their intention of purchasing items confiscated by the Israeli tax gatherers when they came up for auction, with the aim of "leasing" the goods back to the villagers in order to prevent their subsequent confiscation.

Despite the undoubted radicalisation of Peace Now, it was still wary in its dealings with other protest groups, as was revealed by the delicate negotiations that preceded the 1990: Time for Peace international peace rally that took place in Jerusalem at the end of December 1989. The original initiative had come from the Associazione per la Pace (Italian Peace Association) and was taken up by the UN-affiliated International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organisations on the Question of Palestine (ICCP). In September 1989 a delegation went to Israel/Palestine to discuss the planned event. In taking this initiative the European peace movement was building on the experience gained at a joint Palestinian-Israeli gathering at Amersfoort in Holland in 1986 convened by the Dutch Pax Christi group. A considerable number of representatives from European peace movements had also participated in the ill-fated *al Awda* "Boat of Return" initiative of February 1988, when they joined Palestinian deportees in an attempt to sail from Athens to Israel in an effort to draw world attention to Israel's violations of international law and human rights and also as an expression of solidarity with the Intifada. The Israel authorities sabotaged the planned voyage by blowing up the ship in a Cyprus harbour.²⁸

The original idea behind the action for January 1990 was to mobilise Palestinian nationalist organisations and Israeli peace organisations, with the participation of a sizeable international contingent, in a joint nonviolent demonstration of support for Palestinian rights and the cause of a just peace. Peace Now, however, proved itself very reluctant to cooperate with the more radical wing of the Israeli protest movement and considered the ICCP to be

too pro-Palestinian. Eventually a formula was found that satisfied all parties, whereby the responsibility for different events over a three day period would be divided between the different participating organisations.

Thus it was that on 29 December 1989 the streets of Jerusalem were taken over by women — Israelis, Palestinians, and overseas participants — mainly Europeans and North Americans. Following a congress attended by around 1,500, a gathering of around 3,000 women joined the traditional Friday vigil of the Women in Black. This was followed by a Women's Peace March from West to East Jerusalem in which somewhere in the region of 5,000 women participated. It was an impressive display as the women marched down the hill alongside the walls of the Old City singing and shouting their slogans of "Peace Yes, Occupation No", "Two States for Two People". Amongst the foreign participants the Italians were to the fore, singing their own versions of "Bella Ciao" and making an attempt at "Occupation No" in Hebrew which sounded suspiciously like "Kibbutz No" rather than "Kibbush No"! The celebratory atmosphere was shattered somewhat when they reached their final destination in East Jerusalem when the police moved in with clubs and tear-gas, later claiming that some youngsters had unfurled a Palestinian flag and chanted nationalist slogans.

The next day some 30,000 people formed a Human Peace Chain around the walls of the Old City, including a surprisingly large number of Palestinians, considering the fact that the Israelis had been trying to prevent Palestinians from entering the city from the West Bank for some time prior to the event. Surrounding the demonstrators was a second chain of some 2,000 police and border guards armed with clubs, rifles, tear-gas and water cannon. They began to practise their crowd-control methods some time before the official start of the event by loosing off a few rounds of tear-gas outside the Damascus Gate, followed by a trial drenching of demonstrators who had the temerity to be chanting "We Want Peace" alongside Herod's Gate. Whilst the majority of Palestinians, Israelis and foreigners held their ground, one or two Palestinian youths managed to throw a few stones before being stopped by fellow demonstrators. Others began singing the Palestinian national anthem "Biladi, Biladi". This was all that the police needed by way of an excuse to start launching tear-gas canisters and rubber bullets into the crowd. By the end of the day some 50 demonstrators had been arrested, another fifty had been quite seriously injured, and hundreds suffered from the effects of tear-gas; the police continued to attack demonstrators as they made to leave the scene.

For the Israelis in the crowd this kind of unprovoked action came as a profound shock. They were witnessing at first hand, and for the first time, the kind of brutality routinely inflicted upon the Palestinians during the Intifada. There was a rush of theories to explain the police attack as Peace Now demanded an independent investigation into the police behaviour.²⁹ If it was meant as a warning to Israelis against holding any further joint protest ventures with Palestinians, then it failed as Peace Now announced its preparedness to participate in future events. A common theory amongst Israeli

leftists was that the brutality was part of an attempt to provoke the Palestinians to violence, in order to show the Israeli public and the wider international community that these so-called “nonviolent” Palestinians were, in fact, as violent and unreasonable in their behaviour as any other gang of terrorists and as such were not fit people with whom to negotiate or do business.³⁰ Another possible explanation was that following the controversial visit of Archbishop Tutu the previous week, when he had compared events in the occupied territories to the situation in South Africa, added to the unprecedented influx of foreign peace activists, the security authorities were very tense and over-reacted to the situation in the only way they knew how — with violence.

Whatever the reason, the police violence gave to the event a level of publicity that it would otherwise never have achieved. It served to convince the bulk of the Israeli participants that the need to change government policy was more urgent than ever. If the authorities were prepared to behave in such an outrageous manner in Jerusalem, when the world media was there to film and record it, then what must their behaviour be like in the occupied territories when they were shielded from the public gaze? What was the future of civil and political rights within Israel if the security forces were so willing to bring the Intifada home — by beating and intimidating Israeli citizens who had the temerity to engage in public protest? What about the damage done to Israel’s standing in the international community as pictures of police running amok were broadcast around the world? The need for an alternative Zionism, a sane Zionism, was never greater.

Conclusion

A considerable amount of time during the Time for Peace rally was devoted to small group meetings and workshops, where a natural focus of discussion was an evaluation of the Intifada as it entered its third year. The consensus amongst Palestinians was that their main target should become Israeli public opinion, to convince them of the wisdom of withdrawal. When people like Faisal Husseini talked about Israeli public opinion it was clear that he was thinking of the Likud voters rather than the dissidents of the protest groups and the doves of Peace Now. They were cast in the role of go-betweens, links in the chain of communication.

Palestinian participants also expressed frustration and disappointment in the performance of the Israeli peace movement. It had failed to mobilise the tens of thousands that had filled the streets following the invasion of Lebanon. Moreover, Palestinians were beginning to tire of the repeated meetings with Israeli doves who flocked over the Green Line at weekends to meet with Palestinians. Whereas many of the Israeli women’s groups and professional groupings had established strong working relationships with their Palestinian counterparts around issues of mutual concern, it seemed to many Palestinians

that the majority of Israelis participated in the peace convoys and solidarity visits for reasons which had more to do with their own personal and political needs rather than with supporting the Intifada.

To understand this phenomenon it is important to realise that prior to the Intifada the majority of Israelis never met with Palestinians — except as labourers, or as hawkers on the streets of Tel Aviv, or perhaps as the people they stopped at road blocs during their reserve duty, never as *human beings*. Under the changed circumstances of the Intifada there emerged a genuine desire to meet with these people who, far from being objects of contempt or pity depending on one's political persuasion, had revealed themselves capable of standing up to privation, hardship and repression. At first Palestinians were enthusiastic about welcoming these people into their midst. Gradually, however, the feeling began to spread that what was taking place was a dialogue between unequal partners in which they, the Palestinians, were being cast in the image that the Israelis felt was necessary in order to further their own campaign to sway the Israeli public. Thus, at one meeting at Beita, Dedi Zucker and other Israelis were forced to leave after objecting to the nationalist slogans chanted by some of their hosts. The Ratz MK left complaining, "After all I've done for them, they should show some consideration for the sensitivity of the Israeli public."³¹

Palestinians began to feel as if they were therapists, acting to assuage the fears and doubts of Israeli doves. At one such encounter session in which I participated I eavesdropped on the conversations taking place. The dominant theme expressed by Israelis was that of *fear*: "Why doesn't the PLO disavow the Covenant? How can we trust someone like Arafat who was responsible for terrorist attacks on innocent civilians on buses and children in schools? Can you understand the deep need we feel — even though we have all the weapons and tanks — the deeply felt need for security?" The people from whom they were seeking reassurance were the villagers of Nahalin who, one month earlier, had buried five of their young men killed by Border Police.

Despite such frustrations, the Palestinian advocates of dialogue with the Israelis realised that such fears were real. Fear is the dominant emotion in Israel. It was this fear that Palestinians, with the aid of the Israeli peace movement, sought to address. The complexity and difficulties associated with this task are compounded by the fact that the Palestinian issue touches the very heart of that fear. For Israelis the conflict with the Palestinians is not a foreign policy issue like the invasion of Lebanon, it raises far deeper problems. Most of them cannot forget that the PLO was formed in the 1960s with the aim of destroying Israel. As such, the Intifada, when viewed through the prism of old suspicions, continued to raise questions about the whole future existence of Israel as a society and a state. Is it any wonder that the peace movement failed to mobilise the same numbers as it did over Lebanon?

In the context of the Israeli peace groups acting as links in a great chain of nonviolence, communicating to their fellow citizens a vision of a cooper-

ative future with the Palestinians based on two states for two peoples, the depth of this fear of the other — the Palestinians — has continued to represent a virtually insurmountable obstacle.

In a conflict where one of the parties defines the issue at stake as entailing their very survival and existence, then any attempt by the other party to convince them otherwise requires, at the very least, an exceptionally high degree of consistency in the content of the reassurances being communicated. When one starts to consider the nature of the Intifada, the heterogeneous composition of the Palestinian nationalist camp, and the fact that the struggle takes place within the context of a changing regional and international arena rather than in some hermetically sealed capsule — then one starts to grasp the scale of the conversion problem with which the Palestinians and the Israeli peace camp have had to grapple.

To begin with, we need to recognise that the medium by which a message is communicated is as vital as the content. The Intifada has not been a nonviolent struggle in the sense of refraining from inflicting physical harm and injury upon the Israelis. It has, for the most part, been an unarmed struggle during which the use of lethal weapons has been eschewed by the Palestinians. However, under certain circumstances stones can kill, as can firebombs and Molotov Cocktails. Even when they do not kill they can create fear and panic — and reinforce the image of the other as fundamentally threatening. Likewise, the image presented by the youths responsible for throwing the stones and the petrol bombs, with the *keffiyas* wrapped round their faces. They might be shouting "Down with the occupation", but their appearance conveys a deeper message: that of the "masked terrorist". For Palestinian youths in the Intifada, wearing the *keffiyah* as a mask became tantamount to a fashion, a symbol of commitment to the struggle. For the Israeli public, dependent on their own media for their images, the mask became synonymous with "mindless violence", best illustrated by the brutal killing of collaborators. Not an image conducive to accepting at face value the reassuring words of Palestinian political leaders and intellectuals about peace and cooperation, particularly when the Palestinian camp contains within its ranks factions which have declared their intention of establishing an Islamic state in the whole of historic Palestine.

Despite the essentially "non-life threatening" forms of unarmed struggle that became the routine of the Intifada, I was assured by one leading figure in Peace Now that what stayed in the psyche were the "atrocities" — the stabbing of an old man in Jaffa Street, the murder of Israeli hitch-hikers, the tragedy of the Jerusalem-bound bus which was forced over a precipice by a young Palestinian in July 1989 causing the death of 16 passengers. As he remarked, "We are not talking about whether this is rational or not — this is the popular perception". This sense of outrage and fear reached an unprecedented level in the weeks following the slaughter on 8 October 1990 at the al-Aqsa Mosque, as individual Palestinians sought revenge by knife attacks on Israeli Jews.

The burden borne by the spokespersons of the Intifada when trying to

convince their allies in the Israeli peace camp, and through them the Israeli public in general, of the sincerity of their commitment to peace is made even weightier by the intervention of Palestinians from outside the occupied territories. As has been remarked, Israelis view the Palestinians through the lens of old suspicions, based in part on their experience of past examples of Palestinian terrorism. Thus, when the Iraqi-sponsored Palestine Liberation Front launched its disastrous sea-borne raid on a Tel Aviv beach at the end of May 1990, all the old fears and nightmares returned, fuelled by Arafat's failure to condemn the assault. Palestinian protestations about the imbalance between the violence perpetrated by their guerrillas and the human suffering caused by Israeli state terrorism fall on deaf ears in such circumstances.

The raid of 30 May 1990 took place at a time when relationships between Israeli doves and Palestinian nationalists had become strained by the question of the mass immigration of Soviet Jews, and the fear that they would be settled in the occupied territories sparked by Prime Minister Shamir's declaration that "a large country is needed for a large migration". The question of migration thereby became inextricably linked in the Palestinian mind with their worst nightmare — the annexation of the occupied territories and the expulsion of the Palestinian population. In Israel at the time, however, there was a kind of euphoria shared by all shades of Zionist political opinion at the prospect of the mass immigration of Soviet Jews. For such people, any attempt to halt the exodus of Jews from the Soviet Union was tantamount to questioning Israel's right to be sovereign within its own borders, and to question Israel's sovereignty was to question its right to exist.

In August 1990 another external factor intruded to deal a crippling blow to the joint efforts of Palestinians and Israelis to sway Israeli public opinion. Iraq invaded Kuwait. Palestinians in the occupied territories applauded Saddam Hussein, whilst the PLO appeared equivocal in its attitude towards the Iraqi action. For the Israeli peace movement this all came as a terrible blow: how could they possibly convince their fellow citizens to trust people who were prepared to applaud a tyrant like Saddam Hussein?

With the outbreak of war in January 1991, and the Scud missile attacks on civilian targets in Israel, the Israeli population joined together in a display of national unity in the face of external threat. Prime Minister Shamir enjoyed an unprecedented degree of national support, and notable Israeli "doves" such as the novelist Amos Oz criticised their Western counterparts for demonstrating against the war. Thoughts of dialogue with Palestinians were superseded by more immediate concerns.

However, Peace Now displayed a degree of political maturity by maintaining its commitment to the on-going dialogue with Palestinians. Its leaders followed a "twin-track" approach: acknowledging the difficulties and differences over the Gulf Crisis, but recognising that this was a more transient phenomenon than the Palestinian question, which they continued to address at meetings with Palestinians.

The main Israeli opposition to the war came from socialist anti-imperialist groupings, including the communists, and a small Committee Against the

War based in Tel Aviv. Other groupings, such as the newly formed Committee Against Starvation organised food and medical relief convoys for Palestinians suffering under curfew throughout the duration of the war.

In a region as fluid and unpredictable as the Middle East there are few certainties. But for the time being at least it would seem that there is little chance of the Israeli peace movement converting the necessary numbers of their fellow citizens to bring about a change in the rejectionist stance of the governing coalition. The demonisation process, accelerated by reports of Palestinians cheering at Iraqi missile attacks on Israel, has gone too far and is too deeply embedded to be reversed in the short term. Moreover, the alternative definition of the Palestinians — as a people who can be trusted when they say they have relinquished their dream of regaining the whole of the land between the river and the sea — lacks the necessary foundations in words and, more importantly, in deeds to be embraced in anything remotely resembling a whole-hearted manner by the majority of Israelis.

Despite all this, it remains the responsibility of the Israeli peace camp to pursue such a task. In the final analysis, whatever the actions of the Palestinians or the threats and blandishments from outside powers, the determining impetus necessary to make Israel withdraw from the occupied territories must come from within Israel itself if any eventual peace settlement is to have a decent chance of lasting. Moreover, if and when such a settlement is ever reached, then Israelis and Palestinians will have to live alongside each other as neighbours. For this to happen a profound transformation in inter-communal relations is required. Whatever their limitations, the many dialogue groups that have been established between Israelis and Palestinians at the grass-roots level, particularly the various solidarity groups with a history of working together on concrete projects, will have a significant part to play in this longer term process of trust-building.

In the shorter term, the Israeli peace camp as a whole may have a more dramatic role to play — acting as a veto group to block any attempt to solve the Palestinian problem by expelling the Palestinians. If the need for such action should ever arise, perhaps Peace Now might finally overcome its reluctance to endorse civil disobedience for the sake of a sane Zionism.

Notes

1. See J Galtung, *Non-violence and Israel/Palestine*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1989, p 19.
2. See D Hall-Cathala, *The Peace Movement in Israel, 1967-87*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990, p 28.
3. Quoted in Adam Keller, *Terrible Days*, Amstelveen: Cypres, 1987, pp 167-68.
4. *JP*, 23 August, 1978.
5. Oz ve Shalom, *English Bulletin*, no 1, p 2.
6. E. Farjoun, quoted in I Ertugrul, "Working together for peace", *MEJ*, 9 January 1987, p 15-16.
7. One of the principles of *Palestinians and Israelis for Non-violence* was to organise actions in which Palestinians, Israelis and international visitors participated. In this way, one of the founder members claimed, they anticipated the 1990: *Time for Peace* rally. See below. (Interview with Amos Gvurtz, January 1990.)
- *8. Quoted in Tom Keene, "Mubarak Awad: Behind the Intifada", *Peace Media Service*, nd. (1990).

194 *Living the Intifada*

9. Uri Avnery, *My Friend the Enemy*, London, Zed Books, 1986, p 72.

10. The "four" were Latif Dori, Yael Lotan, Eliazer Feiler and Reuvan Kaminer who were charged with meeting PLO representatives in Bucharest in November 1986. The "eight" were similarly charged for a meeting in Budapest in June 1987.

11. Figures quoted in Mordechai Bar-On, "Trends in the political psychology of Israeli Jews, 1967-86", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, V xvii, no 1, Autumn 1987, p 24.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Y Kaniuk, *New Outlook*, September 1988, p 26.

14. *The Other Front (TOF)*, no 15, 8 December, 1988, p 5.

15. *TOF*, no 1, 8 August 1988, p 2.

16. One of the main problems faced by the Beita Committee was that every time the volunteers went to the village to work, the army would declare the area a closed military zone and deny them entry.

17. Quoted in D Gavron, "The fight for civil rights", *JPIE*, 13 January 1990, p 17.

18. Quoted in Gavron, *ibid.*

19. Quoted in *G*, 5 Feb, 1990.

20. Gavron, *op. cit.*

21. Translation from *NFW*, v IV, no 6, 31 May 1988, p 11.

22. Translation from *TOF*, no 36, 10 May 1989.

23. It has been estimated that there have been approximately ten "grey refusals" for every "refusenik" sentenced.

24. *AF*, 26 Feb 90, p 3.

25. See *The Other Israel*, no 41, April-May 1990, p 11.

26. This group was formed by Moshe Amirav, one-time member of Likud. Composed primarily of high-ranking reserve officers, it urged the exchange of territory for peace on the grounds that Israel no longer needed the whole of the occupied territories for security purposes.

27. Yossi Ben Artzy, *TOF*, no 24, 9 February 1989.

28. See A Rigby, "Alawda: the PLO Boat of Return that never sailed", *WRI Newsletter*, February/March 1988, p 3.

29. Subsequent investigations led to the removal of the East Jerusalem police chief and disciplinary procedures were initiated against other officers.

30. See, for example, *TOF*, no 58, 2 January 1990.

31. Quoted in *TOF*, no 31, 29 March 1989.