

## An opposition view in Israel

By Mark A. Bruzonsky

### Tel Aviv

Israeli Labor Party leader Shimon Peres hinted at some new thinking on the Palestinian issue when he spoke in the Knesset following President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin. After his speech he even told one of his dovish colleagues that he had purposely "veered from the Labor platform" in discussing the Palestinian problem.

Mr. Peres detailed his new thinking to me a few days ago as follows:

**Q.** You accept the idea of Palestinian national existence?

**A.** That's right. . . . Every nation can decide about its identity. If there are Arabs who consider themselves Palestinians it is their decision, not mine. And they don't have to have my approval, and my disapproval is meaningless. The question is if the PLO is a representative or a terrorist organization. . . . If people want to discuss. . . let them keep their guns under government control. Because the moment they come with guns they don't represent, they threaten. That's No. 1.

No. 2. Their [PLO] charter is not for Palestinian nationhood. . . . They claim Israel is Palestine. . . . The PLO doesn't say we are Palestinian people and for that recognize our people. That would be 'OK.' They say Israel is Palestine. So we are playing ping-pong on two different tables.

No. 3. To make them a partner means to select a partner which is against an agreement, while we have the people that we live with, and we have the Jordanians, and with them we can and should conclude a negotiation.

No. 4. When two peoples, two nations, are living on the very same land it is accepted by the civilized world that there is more than one solution. There can be a territorial solution, there can be a federal solution. I can't say that Switzerland or Yugoslavia are less civilized because they didn't divide the land.

**Q:** What if, as you say, West Bank Arabs come to the negotiations and announce that it is their intention and their goal to negotiate for the creation of a Palestine state?

**A:** We shall talk with them and we shall explain to them that there must be . . . compromise on both sides. As far as I am concerned, I will tell the Palestinians and the Jordanians:

"My dear friends, there are two possible compromises, either a geographical one — and that's partition but not along the lines that you are seeking — or, alternatively, a federal arrangement; namely, to divide the government instead of dividing the land. You must decide. First of all make up your minds and then we shall deal with territories."

I maintain that there will be many Arabs who will think . . . let us have partial control on a larger piece of land than complete control over a partial piece of land.

**Q:** In principle do you not oppose the opening position of a demand for a Palestinian state?

**A:** I can't oppose anything. I say this is a negotiation without prior conditions. Everybody can come with his ideas, provided he will be a free agent and a free representative of his people not terrorized by the PLO with threats to his life. . . .

I'm obviously and truly for a confederation between Jordan and ourselves over the West Bank and to give the West Bankers a sort of their own parliament and their own government, which in my judgment is the best solution. . . .

I'm for a government with three levels: the municipal one which exists, a regional one

which we have to create, and a federal one which we have to create over the issues of the West Bank whereby Israel would be satisfied with its security problems and the Arabs and Palestinians and Jordanians would be satisfied with their self-expression.

**Q:** In that framework, would you insist on the right of Jews to settle on the West Bank?

**A:** Yes, as I don't object to Arabs to settle in Israel.

**Q:** If the PLO accepts Resolution 242 and if the PLO agrees to the idea of reaching a co-existence arrangement with Israel, what would be your attitude toward the PLO?

**A:** Then they would stop being the PLO. Then we wouldn't have a problem. . . . Let's face it, we don't object to the PLO just because they killed people. Actually, we are dealing with people who killed Jewish people on the West Bank. But the PLO is an organization to transform the Jewish majority with an Arab majority and to destroy the state of Israel if they will stop doing it they will stop being the PLO.

Mr. Peres characterized his party's willingness to compromise on the West Bank and to negotiate for the fulfillment of Palestinian national identity as "quite a major difference."

from the attitude of the Begin government. So did the director-general of the foreign ministry, No. 2 to Moshe Dayan, when I visited him a few hours later. "The government does not accept the Labor Party's views," Ephraim Evron told me. Peres' new views are "extremely different" from past Labor Party policies, he added. "As far as giving any sovereignty, any independent status, to a Palestinian entity, the government is opposed to it. We will not accept any foreign sovereignty in Judea and Samaria whether it's in the form of a Palestinian state or any other."

Evron repeatedly refused to accept the concept of a "Palestinian national existence" or even of "Palestinian identity." Instead, he insisted there is only a Palestinian Arab problem to be solved within the framework of Israeli sovereignty over all the territory west of the Jordan River. Though he insisted also that "everything is negotiable," Evron made it most clear that the Likud government envisioned no compromise on the basic issues of Palestinian identity and West Bank control.

*Mr. Bruzonsky was on assignment in the Middle East for two months for World View and Politics magazines.*