

## THE AVNERI INTERVIEW — PART I

THE creation of a Palestinian state, Israeli publisher and political activist Uri Avneri believes "will terminate the radicalisation process of the Palestinian people."

Since 1948 Avneri has advocated the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation. In 1950 he purchased a then family magazine, *Ha'olam Hazeh* (This World), and turned it into a unique Israeli institution. Today this weekly is a combination mass-circulation news-magazine combined with a forum for aggressive political exposes of economic and political corruption. *Ha'olam Hazeh* has also become the champion of the Palestinian cause in Israel.

Avneri established contact with senior PLO officials as early as 1974, the year when the PLO's posture began noticeably to shift toward the two-state approach. He became one of the leaders in the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace which established official contact with the PLO in mid-1976 and whose members often reported to then Prime Minister Rabin.

In March 1977 Avneri helped create the Shelli party which gained two seats in the May 1977 elections. As the third candidate on Shelli's list, Avneri will return to the Knesset later this term under a rotational scheme adopted by the party. When he was last in the Knesset, from 1965 through 1973, he was a troublesome political thorn irritating the Israeli establishment.

Avneri's political insights are respected even by his acknowledged enemies. Attesting to his perceptive commentaries, Germany's most popular weekly, *Der Spiegel*, has featured Avneri's articles on both Menachem Begin and Ezer Weizman this year. Here he answers the questions of Mark Bruzonsky, Washington Correspondent of the *Saudi Gazette*.

**BRUZONSKY** • How do you characterise Israel's political environment today? What is the strength of Likud and of the Labour party?

**AVNERI** ■ Begin has lost the confidence of the upper-class in Israel, by which I mean the well-educated, established people. These people are becoming extremely disillusioned by Begin — not only by his politics, but also by his personality.

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As long as things go on as is — there's no real American pressure, and people still are not quite conscious of a crisis with Egypt — then Begin can go on as he does. He's being attacked and he reacts. A lot of people have their doubts about his mental stability now, but this can go on.

But if any of these things assume crisis proportions things may happen. There can be a kind of civilian public uprising. This has happened in Israel before. It's one of the characteristics of Israel that in certain situations the public becomes disgusted with the political establishment and starts to make peaceful, non-violent protest demonstrations which sometimes have a very interestingly big impact on polit-

# Why the thinking Israeli

# says Begin must go

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What happened was that Dayan resigned and then Golda resigned and the whole government an establishment broke down. Yitghak Rabin and a totally new generation took over.

No one can quite explain how this happens. These are psychological things which happen outside the established political mechanisms. And it only happens when there's a real feeling of crisis in Israel, when people feel that the government cannot cope with the situation and something has to be done. Then in some mysterious ways these things happen.

nothing happened to change this. There is no new leadership in the Labour party at all. Nothing new is emerging there — not one new leadership personality has emerged since the defeat. There are no new groupings or realignments inside the Labour party. Everyone has been totally demoralised, even ideologically.

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URI AVNERI (right) with Mark Bruzonsky — "Israel needs a new policy."

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promise is nonsense by itself but still looks more moderate than the Begin stand. It's nonsense because not one single Arab whom I know would agree to what the Labour party calls a territorial compromise. But it's not nonsense in the sense that this might be a step forward in getting negotiations going again.

**Do you mean that once Labour agrees to the concept of territorial compromise then it's open to negotiations leading to nearly a complete return to the 1967 lines with proper security arrangements?**

■ That is what they don't want. This is certainly not what the Labour party has in mind when it talks about territorial compromise. But as a negotiating device, it's all right. As a solution

and negotiations begin they will still break down if Labour doesn't come around to accepting nearly a complete return to the 1967 lines.

■ Well, as Begin says, not without justification, this has been the Labour party policy for 10 years — between 1967 and 1977 — and they have not brought any negotiations and certainly no solutions.

They have not been even brought the possibility of negotiations with King Hussein. They brought instead the 1973 war.

So, I would say, Labour has gained a new respectability because people are fed up with total stagnation and immobility of Begin. They think that maybe with a new policy like Labour's

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This by the way, finds its statistical expression in public opinion polls where Begin, while still commanding a great majority, is steadily declining. The popularity rating of Dayan as Minister of Foreign Affairs is around 60 per cent, of Begin as Prime Minister around 65-67 per cent, and of Ezer Weizman as Minister of Defence is near 80 per cent.

If you analyse who does support Begin and who does not you'll find that the less educated people are the more the majority for Begin grows. The higher you go in income and education the less popular Begin is.

### Difficult to forecast

What this means in political terms is difficult to forecast. Likud has a majority in Parliament — together with its allies — and this is reflected in Knesset votes. But this doesn't really mean anything at all beyond day-to-day practical politics. Because the question is how will this majority stand up in a real political crisis?

For example, if public opinion in Israel reaches a point where enough people realise that Begin has personally become an obstacle to peace how will this influence his standing inside the Likud bloc, inside the government coalition and inside the country at large?

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But if any of these things assume crisis proportions things may happen. There can be a kind of civilian public uprising. This has happened in Israel before. It's one of the characteristics of Israel that in certain situations the public becomes disgusted with the political establishment and starts to make peaceful, non-violent protest demonstrations which sometimes have a very interestingly big impact on political life.

● When has this happened before?

■ Twice before. It happened in May, 1967, when there was already a war atmosphere. During several days the impression gained ground in Israel that the government of Levi Eshkol did not function, couldn't cope with the emergency, couldn't make the necessary decisions.

Dayan came back because there were demonstrations throughout the country. Not big demonstrations by the way. But because everybody felt that these demonstrations reflected public opinion, Levi Eshkol had to give way and bring Dayan in, and also Begin by the way.

The second time was the exact opposite. In April, 1974, when the so-called Agranot Report was published (a report by a government-appointed Commission of Inquiry into the causes of the Yom Kippur War headed by the Chief Justice it exonerated Dayan of all responsibility for what happened on the eve of the war.

The public was deeply upset against this report. There was a general impression that this is an injustice, putting all the blame on the wrong people — the Chief of Staff and the military people.

was a public outcry against the report, against Dayan.

What happened was that Dayan resigned and then Golda resigned and the whole government an establishment broke down. Yitghak Rabin and a totally new generation took over.

No one can quite explain how this happens. These are psychological things which happen outside the established political mechanisms. And it only happens when there's a real feeling of crisis in Israel, when people feel that the government cannot cope with the situation and something has to be done. Then in some mysterious ways these things happen.

● It's generally argued that if the U.S. were to create or let be created a political crisis with Israel — try to push Israel or impose on Israel — that this would unify Israelis behind the government, not bring down the government.

■ Either thing can happen. You can't plan. It depends how it looks to the public and how the public reacts to this. If its done in a brutal and harsh way the public may say we can't let our government be pushed around.

### The impact of events

The peculiarity of this kind of thing is that it's quite impossible to calculate what will happen in advance because of the many imponderables. First there is a cry-stallisation of public opinion in a certain direction under the impact of events. Then politicians react to the public opinion.

Everybody thinks its now popular to do this and not to do something else. And then the political establishment in some way not easy to forecast adjusts itself to the new public climate.

Now you can say if Sadat does this and this or if the Americans do that and that it may happen. But it may also

public perceives it, how different media of mass communications (who also are pushed by public opinion at the same time that they are forming public opinion) report and analyse what is happening. It's a political process, a democratic process which is not easy in any way to forecast.

For example, when this new movement started, the "Peace Now" movement, it looked like the beginning of this kind of process. It had a big momentum. Then, for some reason which is very difficult to analyse, it suddenly somehow got bogged down. And today it is bogged down. It's not the same as it was 2 or 3 months ago. Now tomorrow this may change again.

### Ideologically demoralised

● Assuming there were a crisis and Likud and Begin did lose public confidence completely, what is the state of the Labour party? Is it capable of taking over and asserting a more flexible leadership?

■ First of all, losing confidence in Begin and rising confidence in Likud are two different things. In the Likud you have Ezer Weizman, you have the Liberal party. The Likud is not a unified party, it's a block with many different components and the change may first of all try to take expression in the Likud itself.

For example, if Begin for some reason, let's say for reason of health, is compelled to lay down power, the whole process will happen differently than if Begin is there in full command.

● Before talking further about Weizman and other potential Likud leaders, what is the state of the Labour party?

■ The Labour party was in a very sorry state after its tremendous election defeat — totally demoralised and disjointed. During the first year after

Labour party at all. Nothing new is emerging there — not one new leadership personality has emerged since the defeat. There are no new groupings or realignments inside the Labour party. Everyone has been totally demoralised, even ideologically.

There was no real criticism of Begin during this year. Some poked at Begin from the left, others from the right. As a matter of fact, the Labour party has criticised Begin for being too eager to give back Sinai to Sadat, for being too ready to give up the Jewish settlements in north Sinai.

They've even criticised Begin's so-called "Administrative Autonomy" proposal for the West Bank as being dangerous because it might lead to a Palestinian state!

It means they have tried to outflank Begin on the right, something absolutely ridiculous! And they are still continuing with this line. It shows the total disorientation of the party. They thought that the country has been shifting to the right and that they must shift to the right with it otherwise they'll lose even more.

● But you've implied Labour's improving now.

■ Yes, all this has been partly changed by the recent Kreisky initiative. Kreisky brought Peres to Vienna and got him to meet Sadat. And when Begin reacted the way he did the Labour party became, to a certain extent, revitalised. It got a new confidence. Peres himself, who is a very shifty kind of fellow, suddenly sees himself in the role of an elder statesman with a new political life.

This concept of territorial com-

looks more moderate than the Begin stand. It's nonsense because not one single Arab whom I know would agree to what the Labour party calls a territorial compromise. But it's not nonsense in the sense that this might be a step forward in getting negotiations going again.

Do you mean that once Labour agrees to the concept of territorial compromise then it's open to negotiations leading to nearly a complete return to the 1967 lines with proper security arrangements?

■ That is what they don't want. This is certainly not what the Labour party has in mind when it talks about territorial compromise. But as a negotiating device, it's all right. As a solution it's nonsense.

What they have in mind is something like the old Allon plan which means giving back to Jordan Nablus, Jenin, Ramallah and Bebron but keeping not only East Jerusalem but all of the Jordan Valley, great parts of the Hebron area and some parts along the former Israeli border.

### Return to 1967 lines

Now, no Arab could possibly accept this. But as I said before, compared to the Begin line it looks moderate and at least makes negotiations possible. And therefore the Labour party has gained a new stature of respectability as somebody who has an alternative policy to Begin which they did not have even months before.

● But you're suggesting that even if Labour puts forward these policies

break down if Labour doesn't come around to accepting nearly a complete return to the 1967 lines.

■ Well, as Begin says, not without justification, this has been the Labour party policy for 10 years — between 1967 and 1977 — and they have not brought any negotiations and certainly no solutions.

They have not been even brought the possibility of negotiations with King Hussein. They brought instead the 1973 war.

So, I would say, Labour has gained a new respectability because people are fed up with total stagnation and immobility of Begin. They think that maybe with a new policy like Labour's maybe negotiations can really get started.

This has given the Labour party a shot in the arm. And they are starting now to look again as a viable alternative force even though absolutely nobody in Israel has any nostalgia for the old Labour party rule which was defeated not because it had the wrong foreign policy but because everybody was fed up with this old governing establishment. This hasn't changed. But since this Viennese intermento engineered by Kreisky the Labour party is again in the market as a political force.

**TOMORROW:  
Pinning hopes  
on Weizman**