

Peace demo likely to have little impact

THE "forces of peace" in Israel and the occupied Palestine are alive, but it is questionable if they are well.

The long-planned demonstrations for the "two-state solution" are about to take place today and tomorrow, but there is little optimism here they will be either massive or effective.

In a very real sense the Shamir elections gambit and the American-Israeli-Egyptian-PLO manoeuvres that dominate the headlines have rendered the panoply of peace groups here rather impotent. They continue to try to make a showing, but with little serious effect and rather small numbers.

Moreover, through a clever policy of partial restrictions the Shamir government has managed to keep the planners of this series of week-long meetings and demonstrations — overall called "1990: A Time of Peace" — in a state of uncertainty and confusion.

For instance the two primary international co-ordinators of the impending demonstrations — Jean Marie Lambert, who heads up the International Co-ordination Committee of Non-Government Organisations on the Question of Palestine (ICCP) and Mikko Lohikoski, representative of the European Co-ordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organisations on the Question of Palestine — both were not allowed into the country.

In the case of Lambert he was told in Geneva by the Israeli embassy not to even bother trying to come. And in the case of Lohikoski he was immediately turned back at Ben Gurion Airport on Wednesday.

Furthermore, obstacles of various kinds are being put in the way of the demonstrations by the Israeli authorities. This is the case even though the demonstrations were always designed in co-ordination with the mainstream Peace Now organisation in a way to minimise friction with the government.

Indeed leading personalities here such as Matti Peled of the Progressive List For Peace have been critical of the organisers for being naive and for not asserting themselves far more forcefully.

Nevertheless, *The Jerusalem Post* reported in a page 2 headline story on Wednesday that the "Time For Peace" events meet opposition from the prime minister and foreign ministry."

The forms of this opposition are beginning to become apparent. For instance buses full of foreign participants — about a thousand have arrived here, the majority from Italy — were on Wednesday turned away from Qalandia Camp as the camp was at the last moment declared a "Closed Military Area." And TV crews and journalists were prevented from accompanying another group which visited Beit Sahour.

In protest to what is happening, the organisers of this multi-day series of visits and demonstrations hastily issued a poorly written press release on Wednesday.

"The Israeli military policy which aims at preventing the foreign delegates from free access to the occupied areas and laying obstacles in the path of meetings with the Palestinian people" is focussed on in the release.

"This policy affirms that the Israeli authorities are depriving world opinion from overlooking what is really happening in the occupied territories," the organisers asserted in the release. "Such a policy is also aimed at preventing Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip from taking part in the planned peace event while this policy is draining the channels of communications between Israelis and Palestinians. It is also aimed at reflecting the illusion that there are no Palestinians to speak to."

Consequently the organisers — a coalition of Israelis associated with Peace Now, Palestinians associated primarily with Fatah, and Europeans dominated by the large Italian delegation — concluded the press release saying they "deplore this policy and call upon Israeli peace forces and all those who believe in co-existence to pressure the Israeli authorities to reconsider such a policy. We call upon them to prevent the Israeli authorities from laying obstacles in the path of the peace event on Saturday in the occupied Jerusalem."

Yesterday's events were primarily visits to such sites as Yad Va Shem (The Holocaust Museum), meetings between European Members of Parliament and sympathetic Israeli members of the Knesset, and visits to Palestinian towns and camps.

Then later in the day there were to be opening ceremonies

From



Mark A. Bruzonsky



Washington

for the entire week-long event, first at the Al-Hakawai Theatre in the occupied east Jerusalem, and then at the Knesset Tower Hotel in the Jewish part of the city.

Today, is a day largely co-ordinated by women's groups. A Women's Conference begins at 9 am and at 1 pm the "Women in Black" organisation holds their weekly non-violent protest, this time followed by a women's march from occupied west to east Jerusalem. Later in the day, at 4 pm there is scheduled a Women's Cultural Event in the occupied east Jerusalem.

But the main event, and the one the Israeli authorities are working hard to either disrupt or render ineffective, is scheduled for tomorrow — Saturday. That afternoon all of the peace groups — both local and from abroad — have combined to hold a "hands around the old city" demonstration.

The symbolism involved is pretty innocent really. Nothing more than Israeli Jews, Palestinians, and concerned foreigners making "a human chain in a firm political statement to support the cause of a just and durable peace." The organisers have all along attempted to work totally within Israeli laws by obtaining the necessary permits and eschewing all forms of civil disobedience.

Still, the authorities are intervening. According to Professor Galia Golan, one of the leaders of Peace Now, the Prime Minister's office has applied considerable pressure to cancel the "Human Chain" event altogether.

And though the organisers have resisted this pressure, there is little they can do about the plan of the authorities to close off the territories from the occupied Jerusalem and not allow Palestinians to participate.

To this the organisers have issued another feeble plea saying that they "strongly protest the announced policy of preventing Palestinians from the occupied territories from participating in this peace event and we demand that the Israeli authorities reconsider this unjustified decision."

But the realities here are that the peace groups are in no position to demand anything at all; they are barely organised sufficiently to even get out press releases.

On the other hand, there is ferment among some of the activist groups of the Palesti-

nians in the occupied Jerusalem. I have personally overheard them quietly discussing that they don't want all their peace friends to be leaving the occupied Jerusalem without smelling tear gas and experiencing rubber bullets.

Though the Israeli police and army presence has been very visibly stepped up in the past days in anticipation of attempting to totally control the situation, and though it is quite clear the Israeli government wants to avoid any confrontation with the foreigners that would result in press coverage, still it is possible that tomorrow the Palestinian "strike forces" as they are called here might take some steps to heat up the situation.

And so things here are confused and uncertain in anticipation of the first international peace demonstrations of this kind to take place in the occupied Jerusalem.

It's a bit too early to tell with any certainty whether the whole affair might backfire into a non-event and thus suggest to the Israeli government that they have little to fear from the broad coalition of peace groups involved in these undertakings, or whether what is taking place will be felt as pressure for a more forthcoming attitude on the part of the Israeli government.

The first possibility seems more likely to some of the more seasoned veterans here; but the second is clearly the goal of the demonstration organisers, especially the Peace Now group.

Whatever, the political temperature here continues to rise. In yesterday's *Jerusalem Post* an advertisement vehemently condemning the upcoming demonstrations appears.

"Jeremiah warned of those crying 'peace, peace when there is no peace'," the advertisement begins under a headline "Be Not Ceceived: A Critique of the War-Inciting Peace Now Demo Around Jerusalem."

"Defeat, not peace, is Peace Now's agenda; and war is its fruit," the ad continues signed by a group calling itself Genesis 12:3 Committee.

"As if they hadn't deluded enough Israelis," the ad concludes, "they have now betrayed Israel abroad, by recruiting a thousand European hypocrites for their latest caper, to link hands around Old City walls of Jerusalem. They will be justifying encouraging and inciting a PLO and Hamas Islamic jihad to destroy Israel!"