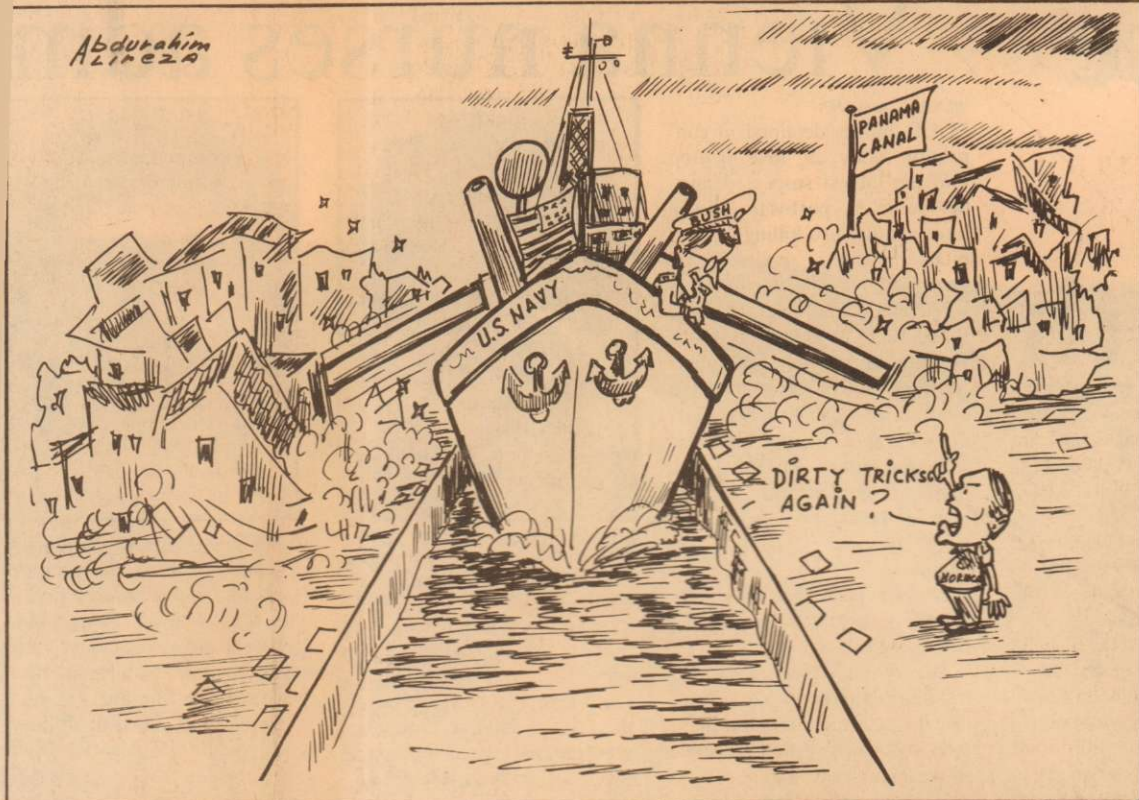
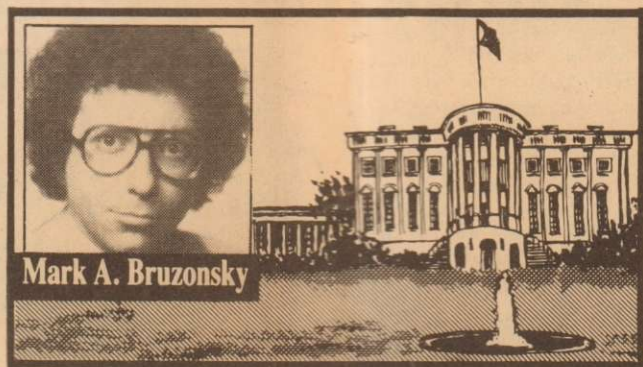


Abdurahim
Almeza



Shimon Peres was all set to meet Palestinian leaders. He backed out at the last moment. He could not withstand heavy pressure from Yitzhak Shamir.

From



Mark A. Bruzonsky

Washington

SI will try again!

SOME weeks ago, with the personal intervention of the president of Tunisia and enthusiasm from the PLO, an official of the Israeli Labour Party, travelling on an Israeli passport, was expected in Tunis to attend a meeting including Palestinian officials.

But when the plane arrived the Israeli wasn't on it. Just before the plane left Europe, Labour Party leader Shimon Peres had backed out, under heavy pressure from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and ordered the Labour Party official not to go. And thus a long-planned effort by the Socialist International to help bring about direct Israeli-PLO contact was consequently aborted at the last moment.

But in a few weeks the Socialist International is going to try again — this time in Brussels.

Unable to do very much these days to seriously impact on the tense situation created by the eruption of the Intifada, Europeans still want to feel they are involved and helping.

Clearly that is the motivation behind the plan of the Socialist International to hold a kind of de facto international conference about peace in the Mid-east late next month in Brussels.

Unable to do more because of internal disagreements within the organisation and natural bureaucratic resistance to being too far out front, the idea is that representatives from the PLO will be in attendance as guests, as will representatives from the US, the USSR and other UN Security Council members, while member parties of the Socialist International hold a conference about the urgency of peace in the Mid-east.

Since among the Socialist International's 46 full member party affiliates are two Israeli parties — Labour and Mapam — the thinking is that bringing the various parties into the same room to discuss the same subjects,

and with the involvement in one way or another of both Superpowers and UN officials, will in itself be a worthwhile step on the tortuously long road to direct Israeli-PLO negotiations.

The deeper reality is that the Socialist International is both a bit behind the times and not very bold. Stimulated by the Intifada many private and various public meetings — including those in Paris, the Hague, and New York already this year — have brought Israeli Knesset members, including Labour Party and Mapam Party representatives, into various forms of contact with PLO representatives.

Furthermore, while the Soviets are eager for obvious reasons the Americans are not enthusiastic about this effort. Bush administration officials said just this to Socialist International general secretary Pentti Vaananen of Finland when he recently visited the State Department in a valiant attempt to try stimulate interest.

Nevertheless the Socialist International is going ahead and is expecting some kind of American presence at least to take notes — possibly the American ambassador in Brussels or, if Washington decides against even that kind of presence, maybe a consultant working with the State Department's policy planning team.

Like so many organisations, SI has been active on many subjects in recent years but not specifically the political minefield surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian quagmire. Arms control, North-South dialogue, economic development, human rights, energy issues, employment problems, and environmental concerns have all been among subjects the organisation has been involved in.

Support for national liberation organisations and solutions to regional conflicts are also of concern according to literature distributed by SI. In fact, the organisation has sponsored meetings in recent years in Latin

America, the Caribbean, Africa, and the Asia-Pacific region about issues affecting those areas.

In recent years SI's council has met in Rome on the theme of peace, democracy and human rights in the Mediterranean; in Dakar on problems in Africa; in Madrid on issues of European development; and last December in Paris with the world economy as the theme.

But when it comes to the Arab-Israeli problem SI has been very hesitant and insecure, no doubt at least partially because of membership in SI of the two Israeli parties. The meeting next month in Brussels is a very small step, long-overdue of course; still it seems destined not to break any new ground.

SI members will be the participants with an audience of select guests that will include the PLO. The meeting likely to be promoted as an important step toward an international peace conference on the Mid-east — a timely subject of course — but it is likely to be little more than one more gathering held primarily to fulfill organisational needs.

The task SI has set for itself is not very visionary and thus it's likely it will be a success by their own standards. The Israelis will be able to say the PLO wasn't a member of the conference, only a guest, and they were unable to control whom the SI secretariat invited as guests. The PLO will be able to say they were invited as guests on equal footing with representatives from other countries. The SI will be able to say the PLO was invited not as a country but just as other groups and other guests from liberation organisations.

What will go on behind-the-scenes, of course, that is difficult to foresee and more likely to depend on developments in the Mid-east between now and then than on anything SI is planning, or able, to do. My own suspicion, however, is not to expect very much.

By

A
v
v
of
and
wel
I
wit
the
do
lik
pro
fre

for
pil
of
a
"t

th
sa
no
th
w
"

ta
n
d
a
v

Fi
is

C

T

y

fr

v

w

t

J

F

/

/

I

m