

# Socialist International will try again to talk Mideast peace

By Mark Bruzonsky  
Special to Sada Alwatan

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Some weeks ago, with the personal intervention of the President of Tunisia and enthusiasm from the PLO, an official of the Israeli Labor Party, traveling on an Israeli passport, was expected in Tunis to attend a meeting which included Palestinian officials.

But when the plane arrived, the Israeli wasn't on it. Just before the plane left Europe, Labor Party leader Shimon Peres had backed out, under heavy pressure from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and ordered the Labor 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 intifadeh, 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 Middle East late next month in Brussels.

Unable to do more because of internal disagreements within the organization 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 U.S., the U.S.S.R., and other Security Council members, while member parties of the Socialist International hold a conference about the urgency of peace in the Middle East.

Since among the Socialist International's 46 full-member party affiliates are two Israeli parties — Labor 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 U.N. officials, will in itself be a worthwhile step on the tortuously long road to direct Israeli-PLO negotiations.

The reality is that the Socialist International is both a bit behind the times and not very bold. Stimulated by the intifadeh, many private and various public meetings - including those in Paris, the Hague, and New York already this year - have brought Israeli Knesset members, including Labor 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 Penetti Vaananen of Finland when he recently visited the State Department in a valiant attempt to try to 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 Department.

Like so many organizations, 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,

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employment problems, and environmental concerns have all been among subjects the organization has been involved in.

Support for national liberation organizations and solutions to regional conflicts are also of concern according to literature distributed by SI. In fact, the organization 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 is likely to be promoted as an important step toward an intentional peace conference on the Middle East - a timely subject of course but it is likely to be little more than one more gathering held primarily to fulfill organizational 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 organizations.

What will go on behind the scenes, of course, is difficult to foresee and more likely to depend on developments in the Middle 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.

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