

## THE AVNERI INTERVIEW

URI AVNERI, Israeli publisher and leader of the Shelli party, champions the Palestine cause in Israel and believes a Palestine state is a fundamental element for peace in the Mid-east. He publishes *Ha'olam Haze* (This World), a mass-circulation weekly which has become a unique Israeli institution.

Yesterday he discussed why Israeli intelligence is losing confidence in Begin's government. Today he declares that Arafat has done a remarkable job by creating a Palestine consensus.

**BRUZONSKI:** You have just written a rather positive article about Ezer Weizman for *Der Spiegel*. Why does someone like you who's known for advocating Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and creation of a Palestinian state hope for Weizman to take over from Begin?

**AVNERI:** One has to start with the assumption that there's not going to be a revolution in Israel in the near future, that the programme of my party, Shelli, has no chance of becoming over night the majority opinion in Israel. And therefore we are looking inside the existing establishment for the best choice there is.

Now Weizman, to my mind, is now the best choice because he has undergone a transformation since the Sadat visit. I would say that he is perhaps the only one in Israeli government circles who really grasped the historical significance of Sadat's visit, who really understands the historical chance of achieving peace. This is sincere with Weizman.

I'm quite convinced this is neither a tactical thing nor a transient thing. This is a profound change in Weizman's attitudes. For him today the achievement of peace is the main point. And I think all other points are to him today secondary. That doesn't mean he will embrace our opinions. But it means that he will, I believe, do in the end what is necessary to achieve peace.

● Which brings up the question what are Egypt's minimum goals, what is the bottom line for Egypt in making a settlement just supposing there was a Weizman negotiating with Sadat?

■ Exactly. Nobody knows for sure. If

I do not believe that a separate Israeli-Egyptian peace is valuable in the long-term or that it's in Israel's interests to have a separate peace. I don't believe in this at all.

I believe that it's in the interests of Israel to utilise the present situation in order to get a general solution. In this I am a heretic in Israel because the gen-

By **MARK BRUZONSKI**  
reporting from  
Washington

# A separate peace won't withstand the test of time...

solution for the Palestinian problem with which the Palestinians can live.

● Is there a solution short of a Palestinian state?

■ I don't think so. I think a Palestinian state is the solution. And I believe it's a good solution for Israel. This is heretical in Israel to most people, but by no means to all people including to some people in official circles...

● That's interesting. Who in Israel is in favour of a Palestinian state assuming that you will be able to find Palestinians to talk to and to work out security arrangements with?

**Element**

the radicalisation process of the Palestinian people.

Once they have achieved a minimum state in which they can live and solve their problems they will have an interest, like every people in the world, to safeguard their national institutions and their national identity. This will be a normalisation not only of the Palestinian people but also a normalisation of Israel and a normalisation of the status quo in general.

● How many Knesset members, not mentioning names, do you think could be brought to favour creation of a Palestinian state?

■ Depends when. Today, there has been such a demonology created around the PLO and the idea of a



A MAN OF ALL NATIONS: Uri Avneri under the Palestinian flag at the Cairo Conference in December last year.

association of terrorism and the idea of the liquidation of Israel. Then they would be able to advocate a Palestinian state.

I see this more in terms of a process than in terms of who today supports what. If you imagine for a minute that Yasser Arafat for example would or could do something equal to what Sadat has been doing, then you must assume that in the same way as Sadat has totally changed Israeli opinion about Israel-Egyptian peace practically overnight, the same could happen, and probably would happen, vis-a-vis the Palestinian-Israeli peace idea.

● You were one of the Israelis that started meeting with the PLO in 1976.

of Yasser Arafat.

Lova looks at it from the Israeli side only and thinks that if Arafat would have done this or that he would have made our job in Israel much easier. And he is understandably angry at Arafat for not doing these things.

But if you look at things objectively, dispassionately, unemotionally, to think what is the situation of the Palestinian people, what is the situation of the PLO, what is the situation of Fatah inside the PLO and Arafat inside the Fatah — if you take all these practical, political things into consideration you cannot really criticise Arafat.

**A remarkable job done**

## PART II

ship in respect to this achievement.

Of course, I could criticise Arafat myself very much if I look at things purely from the point of view of the Israeli peace movement. They have not made our job easier. In fact their actions have discredited us to a large extent in our own country.

And therefore it is easy to be bitter if you think about these things in political terms or in terms of your own political interests without viewing the historical process in which all personal fortunes play a very minor role.

I believe that it's very difficult for the PLO to do what we want them to do. But it has to be done sooner or later.

● What is that specifically?

■ The PLO will have to achieve a consensus which makes it possible for its leadership to say that whatever the historical circumstances were, whatever happened in this country, now it is a fact that there are two peoples, two nations, living in what use to be Palestine.

Neither of these two can remove the other and therefore both of them have to live with each other. They absolutely cannot live in the same state and therefore there have to be two states and therefore the national aspirations of the Palestinian people will have to be realised in the framework of an independent Palestinian national state on the West Bank and Gaza.

Since this can only be achieved in agreement with Israel, direct contacts and peace negotiations will have to happen sooner or later. Therefore if they criticise Sadat they should make it clear that they do not do so because he recognises the fact of Israel, and wants to make peace, but because, as Palestinians, they may think that Sadat shouldn't have acted without the Palestinians.

The question then is, could Sadat have acted with the Palestinians? They did not really make it possible for Sadat to start his negotiations with a Palestinian partner.

So I think that they must make clear in the most unequivocal terms that it

who really understands the historical chance of achieving peace. This is sincere with Weizman.

I'm quite convinced this is neither a transient thing nor a transient thing. It is a profound change in Weizman's attitudes. For him today the achievement of peace is the main point. And I think all other points are to him today secondary. That doesn't mean he will embrace our opinions. But it means that he will, I believe, do in the end what is necessary to achieve peace.

● Which brings up the question what are Egypt's minimums, what is the bottom line for Egypt in making a settlement just supposing there was a Weizman negotiating with Sadat?

■ Exactly. Nobody knows for sure. If Ezer Weizman could make a separate peace with Egypt leaving the West Bank in Israeli hands he probably would. But if Weizman comes to the opinion that the West Bank cannot remain in Israeli hands if he wants a peace with Egypt he will become flexible on the West Bank and look for solutions which to his mind safeguard Israeli security while not keeping the West Bank as Israeli territory.

## A real solution

This raises the question what will Egypt really do, how far they are committed in not making a separate peace in practice as distinguished from theory and rhetoric. That they are looking for some statement of intentions in order to bring the West Bank in theory into the framework of an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty is clear.

The question is, is this enough, will they be satisfied with this or will they really want to make an Israeli-Egyptian peace conditional on a real solution for the West Bank and the Palestinians?

I hope they do because, as an Israeli,

## By MARK BRUZONSKY reporting from Washington

I do not believe that a separate Israeli-Egyptian peace is valuable in the long-term or that it's in Israel's interests to have a separate peace. I don't believe in this at all.

I believe that it's in the interests of Israel to utilise the present situation in order to get a general solution. In this I am a heretic in Israel because the general opinion is, of course, the opposite. But I really do believe that I'm talking about the interests of Israel here. It would be stupid for Israel, I think, to make a separate peace solving only one thing, because this one thing will not withstand the test of time if the conflict itself is not liquidated.

To put it in practical terms. Assuming for a minute that we do achieve a separate peace but that the general turmoil in the Arab world continues, can one really believe that Egypt could stand outside of this process, or do we have to believe that Egypt will be drawn into it sooner or later whether it wants it or not.

Let's not forget that Egypt was drawn into the whole thing in 1948 because as Arabs they could not stand aside. All the pressures of the Arab world are operating on Egypt and in Egypt.

This will happen again, even if not tomorrow. It will happen in 5 years or 10 years — the whole thing will start again.

I believe it's in the interests of Israel to have a general peace. It's certainly to my mind in Israel's interest to find a

solution for the Palestinian problem with which the Palestinians can live.

● Is there a solution short of a Palestinian state?

■ I don't think so. I think a Palestinian state is the solution. And I believe it's a good solution for Israel. This is heretical in Israel to most people, but by no means to all people including to some people in official circles...

● That's interesting. Who in Israel is in favour of a Palestinian state assuming that you will be able to find Palestinians to talk to and to work out security arrangements with?

## Element for security

■ Without mentioning names I know of 2 or 3 extremely important Army officers — present or past. Some of the most important strategic thinkers believe that this is the best solution for Israel — that an independent state which will have to safeguard its own independent interests will be bound to be an element for peace in the Middle East and an element for security.

● I assume you are talking about negotiating for such a state with Fatah?

■ I mean a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip which I believe would have to be negotiated with the PLO, which means practically Arafat. And I believe that such a state will terminate

the radicalisation process of the Palestinian people.

Once they have achieved a minimum state in which they can live and solve their problems they will have an interest, like every people in the world, to safeguard their national institutions and their national identity. This will be a normalisation not only of the Palestinian people but also a normalisation of Israel and a normalisation of the status quo in general.

● How many Knesset members, not mentioning names, do you think could be brought to favour creation of a Palestinian state?

■ Depends when. Today, there has been such a demonology created around the PLO and the idea of a Palestinian state that very few people would be willing publicly to admit that they are in favour of it. Today you have only the five communist members and the two Shelli members.

● You will at a later date have one of those Knesset seats of Shelli, won't you?

■ Probably yes. And there are a small number of people in Mapam and the Labour party who would subscribe to this half-heartedly today. But when you speak with people seriously and privately you find that there are a much greater number of people who are open-minded about this, who say that if the PLO really changes its public stand it can make it possible for people in Israel to mention the PLO without immediately involving the

association of terrorism and the idea of the liquidation of Israel. Then they would be able to advocate a Palestinian-state.

I see this more in terms of a process than in terms of who today supports what. If you imagine for a minute that Yasser Arafat for example would or could do something equal to what Sadat has been doing, then you must assume that in the same way as Sadat has totally changed Israeli opinion about Israel-Egyptian peace practically overnight, the same could happen, and probably would happen, vis-a-vis the Palestinian-Israeli peace idea.

● You were one of the Israelis that started meeting with the PLO in 1976. Lova Eliav, the former secretary general of the Labour Party was another and he now feels very negatively about Arafat's leadership of the PLO. He has even called him a "petty, little man." What do you think about Arafat and the present state of the PLO?

■ I started to have contact with the PLO long before this. I had contacts with the late Said Hammami in London since late 1974. And of course for me this was not the beginning of something but the continuation of something because I've been in favour of a state since 1948. In the 50s I drew up and published a plan for a state.

Now with all respect of my friend Lova, I don't think that he's an expert on the Palestinian question. I think he doesn't realise the terms of reference

of Yasser Arafat.

Lova looks at it from the Israeli side only and thinks that if Arafat would have done this or that he would have made our job in Israel much easier. And he is understandably angry at Arafat for not doing these things.

But if you look at things objectively, dispassionately, unemotionally, to think what is the situation of the Palestinian people, what is the situation of the PLO, what is the situation of Fatah inside the PLO and Arafat inside the Fatah — if you take all these practical, political things into consideration you cannot really criticise Arafat.

## A remarkable job done

I think he's done a remarkable job as a person who has created some kind of Palestinian consensus in the most incredible circumstances. And he has further been up against the manoeuvring of all the Arab states, each one of who has promoted a different section of the Palestinian people in order to achieve different aims.

Holding things together is a remarkable achievement. Surviving as the leader of this consensus for such a long time is a remarkable achievement too. And of course for the Palestinian people the consolidation or recognised and accepted national institutions in the situation they are in is such an important and overwhelming thing that one has first of all to judge leader-

Since this can only be achieved in agreement with Israel, direct contacts and peace negotiations will have to happen sooner or later. Therefore if they criticise Sadat they should make it clear that they do not do so because he recognises the fact of Israel, and wants to make peace, but because, as Palestinians, they may think that Sadat shouldn't have acted without the Palestinians.

The question then is, could Sadat have acted with the Palestinians? They did not really make it possible for Sadat to start his negotiations with a Palestinian partner.

So I think that they must make clear in the most unequivocal terms that the historical objective of preventing Israel from coming into being and then to destroy Israel is not relative anymore and has to be openly abandoned and a new objective adopted.

This is not easy. I'm extremely conscious of the fact that this is a most difficult thing to do for any nation, especially for a nation in a situation of dispersal as the Palestinians. But sooner or later it has to be done. And I hope it will be sooner.

**TOMORROW:  
Zionism lost  
its definition**

characters in mosques will stress the