

A RECENT VISIT TO ISRAEL AND Palestine revealed a sense of despair and cynicism — and on both sides of the divide — even greater than what was expected.

Having visited more than a hundred times in the past couple of decades this particular observer is hardly a stranger to the depth of the confrontation or to the range of emotions that is compressed into such phrases as "Arab-Israeli conflict" and "Mid-east peace process". Still, the magnitude of the underlying tensions and disillusionment is numbing and in all likelihood a clear forecast of still more upheavals ahead.

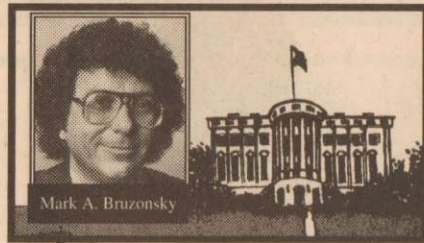
On the Palestinian side things are considerably easier to understand. True enough, there are pockets of hope that have been generated by what Edward Said disparately now refers to as "Arafat and Company". But even so, in most cases if one scratches the discussion surface just a bit much of the professed optimism begins to easily dissolve. Many of those supposedly supporting Yasser Arafat's recent twists and turns do so in a surprisingly transparent manner and with an underlying sense of foreboding.

Crushed by the boot of a generation-long occupation, deserted by much of the Arab World which had for so long championed their cause, the dispirited and demoralised Palestinian society is aware of its predicament, however reluctant though to openly discuss it with outsiders — and increasingly even with each other.

Now, with the collapse of the PLO and the capitulation of Chairman Arafat to the "new world order" imposed by the Americans, with the connivance of client-regimes, a new sense of gloom drapes over what remains of long-fraying hopes.

On the Israeli side of the divide, the situation at the moment is considerably more complex and convoluted. Though they do so often mockingly and derisively, even many of those on the far Left, who have for a long time been campaigning for basic changes in Zionist racist attitudes

From



Mark A. Bruzonsky

Washington

How close are Mid-east to peace and Arafat to Rabin?

The negotiations, whether or not they go ahead, seem increasingly irrelevant to the situation here on the ground.

Dean Reynolds

NBC News; Gaza; March 28, 1994

Despair and cynicism

and a real Palestinian state in the occupied territories, find themselves — however reluctantly and possibly temporarily — backing Yitzhak Rabin. Having opposed him for decades, it is a situation full of political ironies and imponderables. After all, many cannot forget this is "break their bones" Rabin who throughout his career has tirelessly worked to subjugate the Palestinians.

Few on the Israeli Left ever developed any significant ties to either the Palestinian underground that has sustained the Intifada, or to Palestinians in towns and camps. Their ties have been to a dissimilar group to themselves on the Palestinian side — mostly to the Fatah bureaucrats, Faisal Hussein in the lead, who have been easily able to meet with them and who talk their language.

Consequently, and in many cases uneasily, most on the pro-Palestinian state Israeli Left find themselves unable to do anything other than go along with Ar-

afat's new shotgun alliance with Rabin and the Labour Party.

For this reason, and especially for many who make up the intellectual Left opposition, their greatest short-term anxiety is that the days of Rabin — the only Israeli political personality, rightly or wrongly, with the kind of credibility to hold Israel on a course that might, just might, lead somewhere positive — are numbered. In short, their greatest apprehension is that the Israeli fascists from the Right will come back to power, maybe not long from now, and with unforeseeable consequences.

In his 70s now, many feel Rabin is the only Israeli politician crafty enough and respected enough to have pushed even the Oslo agreement on a society more hardened and more racist than ever. After a couple of generations of escalating conflict, fear and foreboding remain central to the collective Israeli psyche.

And even if the Israelis have brought

much of this on themselves, as they indeed have, that doesn't change the basic situation. After all, it was the same Israeli Labour Party that welcomed the first settlers into Hebron way back in 1968; the same Labour Party that demonised the PLO for decades; the same Labour Party that has tried one avenue after another for decades now to get the Palestinians to accept their fate on ghettoised reservations under the phrase "autonomy".

After all, to be brutally candid, this vague Israeli term "autonomy" is more akin to the formal South African concept of "apartheid" than it is to Palestinian self-determination. And this of course is the heart of the current predicament. Having interwoven themselves in totally separate settlements throughout the occupied territories, and all around occupied Jerusalem, the Israelis now find that even should they truly desire to disengage and pursue a real peace with "separate but equal" rights, such an op-

tion is near impossible under prevailing conditions.

Yet the underlying tensions are even deeper. Many on the Israeli Left don't truly believe that Rabin and his Labour Party have actually metamorphosed into the champions of a just and lasting peace and the proponents of Palestinian independence.

Just a bit under the Israeli political surface, opposition to Rabin's style and manner, and more importantly scepticism of Rabin's real intentions are rampant. Fear of (an Israeli-inspired) Palestinian civil war and even of (a terrorism-caused) Jewish civil war is more heightened than ever.

Even more than the Palestinian opposition to Arafat, pro-Palestine state opposition in Israel is badly fractured and nearly totally unfocused at this crucial moment.

That said, it is also an open secret just how desperate Rabin has become. Having promised a major breakthrough to lasting

peace during his first year in office and now recently having promised once again that things would definitely be worked out with the Palestinians by the end of this year, Rabin knows his fall from power is quite possible and that this time there will be no resurrection.

This is precisely why, in the aftermath of the Hebron massacre and just before his latest visit to Washington, Rabin spent so much time and effort juggling his coalition to broaden it by a few Knesset seats

This is precisely why Rabin struggled so valiantly, but unsuccessfully, to prevent the commission of inquiry into the Hebron massacre — realising that the fingers of blame are quite likely to point very high this time and that he is after all the defence minister as well as the prime minister.

This is precisely why there are rumours of a spring war in southern Lebanon to try to further cripple opposition to the "peace process" and to further manipulate the regional situation so that Hafez Assad's Syria, followed by Jordan and Lebanon, might take the risks of deal-making with the Israelis.

And this is precisely why Rabin continues his duplicitous dance with Arafat hoping somehow to keep the flames of positive change burning while at the same time to prevent them from devouring him.

Running harder and harder for their political lives, the leaders of Israel's Labour Party, with their new partner, the rump PLO of Arafat, are busier than ever making paper arrangements. Wise chances of working are slim at best. Cornered by their pasts — in which today's geographic and demographic crazy-quilt pattern of intertwined Israeli settlements and Palestinian ghettos was created — Labour and Fatah keep marching to the same drums even though each hears different music.

Humiliated Russian bear may soon claw its way back to empire



By Jacques Attali

collapse. The oil industry as well as the TV networks are working part-time for

money to meet them. The army is trying to figure out a new conception of Russian

QUICK CHANGES TO THE NEW RUSSIAN CONSTITUTION REFLECT THE EMERGENCE OF WHATSHISNAME ZHIRINOVSKY



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All power is assigned alphabetically

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