FOR A UNITED FRONT

INTERVIEW BY AVI KATZMAN

UZI BURSTEIN is Secretary-General of the Israeli Communist Party's Political Bureau — and the guiding spirit behind the Front for Democracy and Equality, in which participate, besides RAKAKH itself, the BLACK PANTHERS, the Arab Local Councils and SHASI (Israeli Socialist Left).

I&P: How do you read the political map, after next elections?

Uzi BURSTEIN: If we judge by Labor's platform and the Galili program, as well as by the various pronouncements of that party's leadership, the changes needed for this country, as fresh air is needed for the lungs, will not be enacted under the Peres Government. And this, for a very simple reason: Israel's central problem will remain peace and this is bound to the solution of the Palestinian Problem.

This even the regime understands, more or less, and the question then arises: how do they intend to solve the problem? Through the democratic process, as recognized throughout the world, which declares that what your people is entitled to have, the other people also should get, or through the principle: **"yes for us, but no for others"**.

The Alignment leaders reject a Palestinian State, try to find all kinds of alternative solutions, without asking the Palestinians themselves — as if what the Palestinians think is of no importance.

Yet it is well known that the Palestinian people, in the refugee camps, but also and mainly, in the conquered territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip says: **"we want what Israel already has — a state besides their state"**.

Karim Khalaf says it, Bassam Shaqa says it, Milhem says it: **"a State, a good neighbor"**.

What does Peres answer? What does MAPAM's Victor Shem-Tov say? No, no, and no. But if they refuse, they will be unable to solve the problem. And if they fail to solve the problem, this crisis will go on. And if this crisis goes on, they won't be able to handle the second problem, either, namely that Israel must give back all territories conquered in June 1967. Or negotiate, on this basis. But this, too, they reject. They talk about Territorial Compromise — the other people being asked to pay. So, they are unable to solve the problem of peace.

If there is no peaceful solution there is an arms' race ongoining, the Territories are kept, one needs a big army, and then you get an inflated security budget. And with such a budget you simply cannot solve Israel's most serious social problems, caused by the expenditure of billions on settlement and for the sake of the security budget. Their rule won't take Israel out of the present crisis, since it doesn't take into consideration the real, the possible consensus for peace.

I&P: Do you see any basic difference between the Labor Alignment's concepts on peace and concerning the Palestinian Problem and those of the present Likud Cabinet?

BURSTEIN: Not in principle. The Alignment's doctrine (including MAPAM's) isn't a peace-doctrine: they aren't ready to recognize the national rights of the Palestinian People and of its legitimate representative, the PLO, recognized as such throughout the world. They aren't ready, to withdraw from the Occupied Territories, either.

This is not to say there are no differences between the Likud and the Alignment. In the Likud Cabinet we find Arik Sharon, who openly says that a Government that will dismantle the settlements in the Territories cannot last; who threatens us with a fascist revolt. And under this regime we have Gush Emunim troops, well organized and with enormous arms' caches, courtesy of Chief of Staff Rafui Eytan...a whole army, ready to carry out a fascist coup. Not to speak of Kahaneh's hoodlums. This is the beginning of a fascist revolt.

UZI BURSTEIN

I&P: Do you believe a Peres Cabinet would infuse new dynamism into the now-frozen Autonomy talks? Inversely, do you think Geneva-style talks should once more be considered?

BURSTEIN: I don't expect Autonomy talks to get out of the freezer, since the Palestinian People is not going to change its mind about them.

Nobody asks what this people wants, but the Palestinians are having their say anyway. This people has answered "No!", as one man, to the Autonomy deal.

In the midst of this people you find a variety of views — naturally — and even inside the PLO you find various viewpoints, since it's a front, rather than a party. Yet **all** these voices say — No to Autonomy. That's why I don't see any future for Autonomy. They may of course say Autonomy and go in a quite different direction.

If, for instance, they would say today: **"We recognize the national rights of the Palestinian People, we recognize their right to create a state of their own"** — then there would only be a discussion on what steps should be taken in that direction.

Camp David and the Autonomy have failed miserably. They are a closed issue. A change will not result from negotiations between Sadat and Peres. I don't believe in that. Only world pressure can cause a change.

I&P: Do you believe the rise of Peres may cause the Palestinians to change their policy towards the State of Israel?

BURSTEIN: Such a change is occuring right now. If you take the latest interviews of Yasser Arafat you will notice he talks about the possibility of U.N. forces standing guard between the two states. He says so clearly.

Also, I could refer to the statements of other Palestinian leaders, in the Territories, not long ago...this does not mean that they say exactly what I say, that Arafat asks for two states besides each other; in fact, what they say will depend a lot on what happens here.

What is needed on their side, really, is that they should say what RAKAKH has been declaring for a long while now: KHADASH, the Democratic Front, in fact, Sheli too...two states, side by side. That is what is still lacking on their side.

The articles now being published by Sartawi, a member of the Palestinian National Council, are an expression of PLO policy, and state clearly there are contacts with the progressive Israeli forces, and this instead of the former stand, which called for contacts with progressive, anti-Zionist, peace-oriented forces.

The change has occured.

I&P: Are you worried about the possibility of the Alignment getting an absolute majority in the next Knesset, after the elections?

BURSTEIN: It doesn't frighten me. Does it frighten you? Let's suppose the Alignment sets up its next Cabinet by itself..I believe that even if they win, they will get allies to set up their new Cabinet. But let's suppose.

The problems will remain. They exist inside the Alignment, too. The Alignment is divided. And even if it succeeds in uniting its two torn halves, differences of opinion will remain.

I&P: Don't you see any significant changes in the latest Alignment platform? In Labor's stand, over the last few years?

BURSTEIN: This must be decided by comparing the old platform with the new one. And there are no changes. On the contrary. If we compare the Galili document with former stands, I must say there are some points — the Jordanian Option, among others — which are worse than before.

They say the Labor platform is based on the Yariv-Shem-Tov formula*. Suppose this is true. The Yariv-Shem-Tov formula is

* As formulated in 1974 by then Minister of Information and former Chief of Army Intelligence, Aharon Yariv, and as agreed upon by MAPAM leader Victor Shem-Tov: **"Israel should be prepared to negotiate with any Palestinian quarter recognizing the State of Israel and abstaining from taking terrorist action against Israel"**.

one-sided, doesn't demand any change in Israel's attitude, recognition of the national rights of the Palestinian People, a willingness to sit down and negotiate with a Palestinian element. A one-sided formula, and Galili doesn't even say he accepts it.

The only reassuring factor is that Yariv himself now does not believe this formula to be sufficient. He hints that it's now behind the times. Nowadays, one must talk about mutual recognition.

Another thing: I am, of course, for UN Resolutions 242 and 338; but it must be understood that Resolution 242 isn't a solution for the central problem: it mentions refugees, not a Palestinian State.

I&P: Do you expect a change in international pressures on Israel, after the Alignment takes charge?

BURSTEIN: Certainly. I am convinced such pressure will be felt — also on behalf of the United States. Such a change depends upon a variety of forces which, in turn, will apply pressure on the American Administration. It depends upon the Palestinian People's struggle to free itself from occupation, it depends on how significant this struggle will be in the Arab World, it depends upon the Arab States, Arab oil, U.S. trade with the Arab world...all these influence the Administration, which is becoming ever more dependent upon the Arabs.

Add to this Europe and Japan, which are also dependent on Arab oil and now are asking for a Palestinian solution, because they know this causes problems to their trade, to their contacts with the Arabs. European and Japanese pressure on the United States will also be considerable.

Add to this the balance of strength, world-wide...it is well known, for instance, that the Soviet Union, the Socialist States, the Third World — Asia, Africa, Latin America — they all stand fast in solidarity with the Palestinian People. Their struggle against the American trend also influences what happens inside the U.S.

This does not mean there are no opposite forces: the opposite force of Sadat, the opposite force of Peres...take for instance the Socialist International meeting in Madrid.

Peres went, crying, to the leaders of the International, to Brandt and the rest of them, and told them: **"If you recognize the PLO I will have lost in Israel. Begin will be reelected and you are the ones who will have let me down"**.

So, for the sake of Peres' tears, these opportunists in Madrid not only failed to pass a Resolution supporting the PLO but there was this lukewarm formula, the Peres formula.

This, too, is a temporary development. Local pressure inside Europe may influence Kreisky and Brandt, let them give a temporary sweet to Peres. It will remain temporary.

I would like to mention one very positive realist, who also looks in this direction and cries out that they have lost their chance. I mean Dr. Nahum Goldman, who wrote in LE MONDE complaining about the great opportunity lost by the People of Israel, the State of Israel, when Begin's Government foiled the beginning of an understanding between the Soviet Union and the United States, concerning Geneva talks in which the PLO was to participate. Such talks could have led to real peace.

Goldman isn't a Communist and isn't pro-Soviet. He writes thus because he believes this to be a chance for, and the interest of, the State of Israel.

I&P: How do you evaluate the chances of the Israeli peace-camp, in next elections?

BURSTEIN: We would be able to mobilize much stronger forces if we'd create a front of all those who, in effect, accept the program of KHADASH, the Front for Democracy and Equality.

Take a body like SHELI, certain forces in MAPAM, who agree to our platform and yet, for the time being, do not join the Front: this weakens and divides all of us.

I believe that, even out of purely electoral considerations, it would be worthwhile for all these forces to join the Front.

But the main thing is not whether this is worthwhile. More essential are political considerations. If you wish to strengthen the forces of reason, you must go with us.

As far as I know there are doubts, a debate is ongoing, inside these forces. I do not believe our Front, or the Communist Party, have exclusive rights on peace or on the right solution leading to peace.

What is the difference between the solution propounded by the Front and that proposed by SHELI? No difference. The ideological problem? I'm not asking them to become anti-Zionists. Let them just refrain from asking me to become a Zionist.

No, this is not a problem. Of course, we do not propose to create a front concerning the Soviet Union nor concerning the Communist movements. On the other hand, we have proved, I think, that we do not ask our partners to go beyond the basic points of the Front's program:

(1) Peace based on withdrawal, a Palestinian State besides Israel and negotiations with the PLO; (2) Defense of workers' rights; (3) civil and national equality for the Arab citizens of the State of Israel; (4) Opposition to all discrimination against certain (Jewish) communities; (5) Defense of democratic rights, and opposition to Fascism; (6) Equality of rights for women.

In such a Front, with such a program, there is place for Zionists and anti-Zionists alike. ■

FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF THE TELEGRAM SENT BY DR. ISAM SARTAWI TO THE ISRAELI COUNCIL FOR ISRAEL-PALESTINE PEACE:

31 DECEMBER 1980

On the occasion of the fifth Anniversary of the foundation of the ICIPP, I extend to you my heartiest congratulations and best wishes. Your valiant struggle for a just peace in the Middle East, and your enormous courage in recognizing and advocating that such a peace can only be reached through the implementation of Palestinian National Rights under the leadership of the PLO, has earned the respect of peace-loving forces all over the world.

I realize that the price which you paid for your courageous position was a heavy one, but so do all pioneers and visionaries whose sacrifices are so vital for orderly progress of history and the evolution of more mature and responsible social order as well as more advanced models of inter-human relationships.

But the suffering was not on your part alone; your Palestinian counterparts had to pay an even heavier and more painful price. Precious lives were lost in the long arduous road toward peace. Said Hamami and other comrades gave their lives so that our two peoples might live together in peace and co-existence. Let those noble examples be an incentive for all of us to continue our difficult struggle for peace until we achieve our common goal and the flags of peace fly proudly over our holy land.

Slow as our progress may seem to be, we must admit that, by historical criteria, we have come a long way. Chairman Arafat states that the ongoing peace talks with Sheli have for their purpose the creation of new political facts in the Middle East. And the world takes this astonishing declaration in its stride, because peace through your valiant efforts and ours, has come to stay.

Sooner than all our combined enemies think, peace shall and must reign between the Palestinian and Israeli states and their peoples.

Bless you all,

Isam SARTAWI