

# Israel's left and right fight for power

By David Twersky

TEL AVIV

**A** DRAMATIC AUGUST 21 announcement by the Labor Party prime minister designate Shimon Peres tipped the scales in Israel away from the right. Peres and Ezer Weizman, a former Likud leader and Menachem Begin's first minister of defense, agreed to a new bloc between the Labor Alignment and Weizman's small centrist Yahad Party.

The combined number of Knesset seats now pledged to vote against a narrow coalition headed by the Likud eliminates the possibility of the formation of such a government, but it does not yet permit Peres to form a coalition.

The fact that one month after the national elections there still is no government in sight is a sign of the serious nature of Israel's collective breakdown. If the July elections confirmed anything, they underlined the observation of a discordant chorus singing national anthems at cross purposes, a body politic with multiple—often mutually hostile—personalities.

Weizman publicly announced that he was particularly put off by the threats he received from the Likud's David Levy not to go with Labor. He said it was his talk with Ariel Sharon at his home in Caesaria that pushed him leftward. This was a coded message that the threat to Israel lies on the extreme right, a political arena Sharon is most likely to galvanize into a serious threat to Israeli democracy, if given the chance.

Weizman's move represents the beginning of the break between the moderate right and the far right. The supporters of the "functional compromise" approach to the West Bank problem—the "autonomy forever" scenario once championed by the late Moshe Dayan—are leaving the embrace of Herut, the Likud's dominant group, and its right-wing satellites.

Weizman will add four Knesset seats to the Labor bloc and allow Peres to neutralize the veto power of his left-wing Mapam partner, which had been threatening to walk if Peres "sold out" and moved right into a government of national unity with the Likud. In talks with the Likud, Peres' argument that he be prime minister was based on Labor's 44-41 edge over the Likud. Without Mapam, the Labor Alignment would trail Likud 41-38 and lose the argument. With the four Weizman/Hurwitz seats in hand, even if Mapam splits to the left, Labor still leads the Likud.

The price of the deal was to guarantee Weizman and his colleagues senior positions in any government Peres sets up. Weizman himself will serve as Peres' foreign minister. They were also promised three "safe" seats on the Labor Knesset list in the next elections.

Labor will also have to pay by turning toward the center, even as the moderate right turns leftward to meet them. In turn, this may push Mapam out of the

Alignment. Mapam would then contest the next elections as the party of the democratic socialist/Zionist left, with the Labor/Weizman party drifting to the center.

Yet the Weizman move also opened up the possibility of a narrow Labor coalition that would rest on outside support of the communist Rakah and the pro-PLO and Arab nationalist Progressives for Peace (PLP). Both parties are considered outside of the consensus, and there is a certain measure of political risk involved in even raising the possibility of a Labor minority government that would receive communist support in votes of no-confidence. Peres has said that he is seeking a government with "the active support" of 61 members—that is, not counting the four seats of Rakah and the two seats of the PLP, if the national unity talks with the Likud break down.

But as *In These Times* went to press the bilateral Labor-Likud talks were going forward. (Mapam is not participating, in order to give expression to their opposition. But they are allowing Peres to negotiate "in the name of all 44 Labor Alignment Knesset members.")

The national unity business has received support from all over the political map because it serves many different political functions simultaneously. For the Labor leadership, it gives them a card to play that "legitimizes" them in the eyes of the non-ideological "visceral" Likud voter, a rehabilitation they still require, although there is much internal argument about how to obtain it.

For the Likud official leadership—Prime Minister Shamir, Defense Minister Moshe Arens and Finance Minister Cohen Orgad—the national unity idea is one way for them to preserve their party position. Deputy Prime Minister David Levy and Ariel Sharon have made the talks difficult, Levy in the economic sphere and Sharon regarding settlement in the West Bank. Cohen-Orgad tried to make it easy, admitting in the newspapers that there was no money for any settlement plans anyway, so why bother arguing about the principle.

Both Levy and Sharon, who want the talks to fail but who cannot defend their desire publicly, have kept the heat on. That way if the talks break down over the question of the distribution of cabinet portfolios, the failure can be blamed on the "good Labor" (the one the Likud was trying to "save" by negotiating with it about unity) being a prisoner of its own ultra dovish and left allies, the "bad labor."

For the relatively "moderate" National Religious Party (NRP), support for national unity is a way to buy time to work out its internal problems. It also allows the party to step to the left and hold bilateral negotiations with the Labor Party ostensibly about the participation of their four seats in a Labor-led national unity government. These talks have laid the foundation for the NRP to come over into a narrow Labor coalition once all other alternatives are exhausted except for the opposition. The NRP needs time.

Mapam and others on the moderate left have expressed their opposition to the national unity idea and accuse some circles in the much larger Labor Party of enthusiastically pursuing as a strategic goal what should have been only a tactical step.

The reaction to the implied threat of a turn to the far left in order to execute a later move to the center has drawn some fire. David Levy warned Labor that if the party set up a government relying on the communists, "the people won't forgive you." Knesset member Geula Coehn of the ultra annexationist Tehiya Party attacked the idea of such a government as "illegitimate" and used language implying that such a coalition would not be

considered the legal government of the State of Israel.

The two parties in question, Rakah and the PLP, were quick to announce their conditions for supporting a Labor minority government. Rakah demanded "an immediate withdrawal" from Lebanon and pro-worker economic legislation. The PLP called for an international peace conference to be attended by all the parties, a reference to both the Soviet Union and, especially, the PLO.

But what both parties need is the legitimization that a dialog with the moderate left would provide. They are prisoners of their own electorates' desire to see the Likud ousted, and come next election they would have a tough time explaining why they did not act to help Labor oust them when they had the chance.

## Labor message.

Mapam continues to argue that the central message of the labor movement at this time—that the conservatives are threatening the country with spiritual, economic and political ruination—is blurred by the right tilt. Peres retorts that

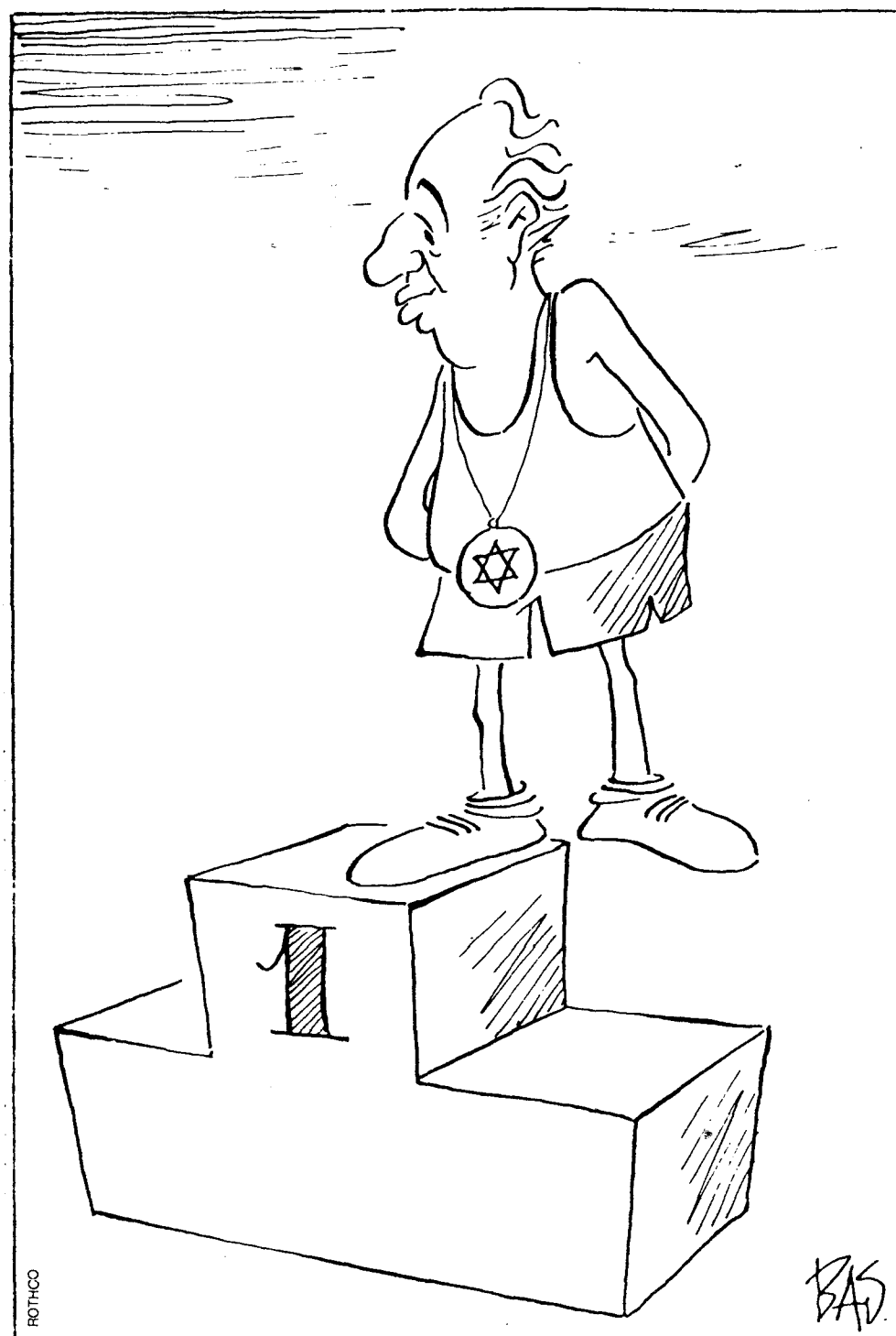
the "road to a narrow coalition runs through the national unity talks."

The Weizman move also puts pressure on the group of Likud Liberal Knesset members who have flirted with the idea of jumping over to a new center party. According to this scenario, Weizman will combine forces with the Likud dropouts and the Shinui Party to form a new liberal center to the right of the Labor Alignment. (This scenario has Mapam staying together with Labor in the Alignment.)

The new partnership between the moderate right and the labor movement might help prevent the slide into economic chaos and fascism—a possibility no longer lightly dismissed. In order to light a fire under these Liberal Knesset members, Weizman needed to open up another alternative for his party and to hint strongly at new elections this November to coincide with American elections.

This was a coded message: by November, Israel needs a government in place so that it can work out the best deal it can with the newly elected American administration. Only such a deal will enable Is-

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PERES



# IN SHORT

## Laundry protest...

"They're trying to bring back slave days and it's 1984," said Edna Cooper as she capsulized the conditions at the Morgan Linen Company in St. Louis. The river city—according to one informer, known more for complacency than rebellion—was startled by the hundreds of black protesters who showed up at the door of the largest laundry in the city to protest the plantation-like conditions inside. Cooper proved to be an invaluable tour guide as she told *In These Times*: "Upstairs is where the air-conditioned offices are where the secretaries and the bosses work—all white. Downstairs are the laundry rooms, the pressing rooms, the hanging rooms. They're hot and full of flies and maggots. When we want to go to the bathroom we have to raise our hands. Then the supervisor follows you with walkie-talkies and reports on how long it takes you to get back to your job." These and other conditions—last-minute forced overtime, punitive suspensions when employees are sick, a speed-up on the training time for a new job—compelled 34 workers from Teamsters Local 108 to walk out in August, with 11 staying on in the plant. The action came after months of trying to renegotiate a contract that expired last November.

The picket line did not afford respite from racism, however. According to Cooper and Tom Smith of the Teamster Local 108, the white truck drivers at Morgan broke through the picket line—almost running over a protester in their path at one point—even though they belong to Teamsters Local 682. Charles Morgan, whose family has owned the laundry since 1888, isn't saying much publicly, and Teamsters 682 also refused to return *In These Times*' phone calls. But Cooper is loquacious: "We only get \$30 a week from the strike fund, but I told my friends in the plant, we can't go back to being slaves again."

## And a laundered protest

Another Midwest river city was the site of an unusual demonstration as hundreds of Cincinnatians turned out to protest President Reagan's policies last month and were stripped of their anti-Reagan signs. Reagan's August 20 speech to thousands of supporters was given at downtown Fountain Square, which was fenced in for the occasion. As the citizens were herded through metal detectors, men with badges marked "capital police" confiscated all pro- and anti-Reagan signs and gave them signs purportedly readied by the national Republican Party. When the astonished anti-Reagan contingency delved into the legality of such a move, White House aide Mark Hatfield Jr. responded: "Signs slow everything up, so we decided not to allow any in." He added that it was Secret Service policy to confiscate signs at public speeches—which the Secret Service later denied. The muffled protesters are contemplating a suit on First Amendment grounds as soon as they pin down the source of the order.

## Earth to Reagan...

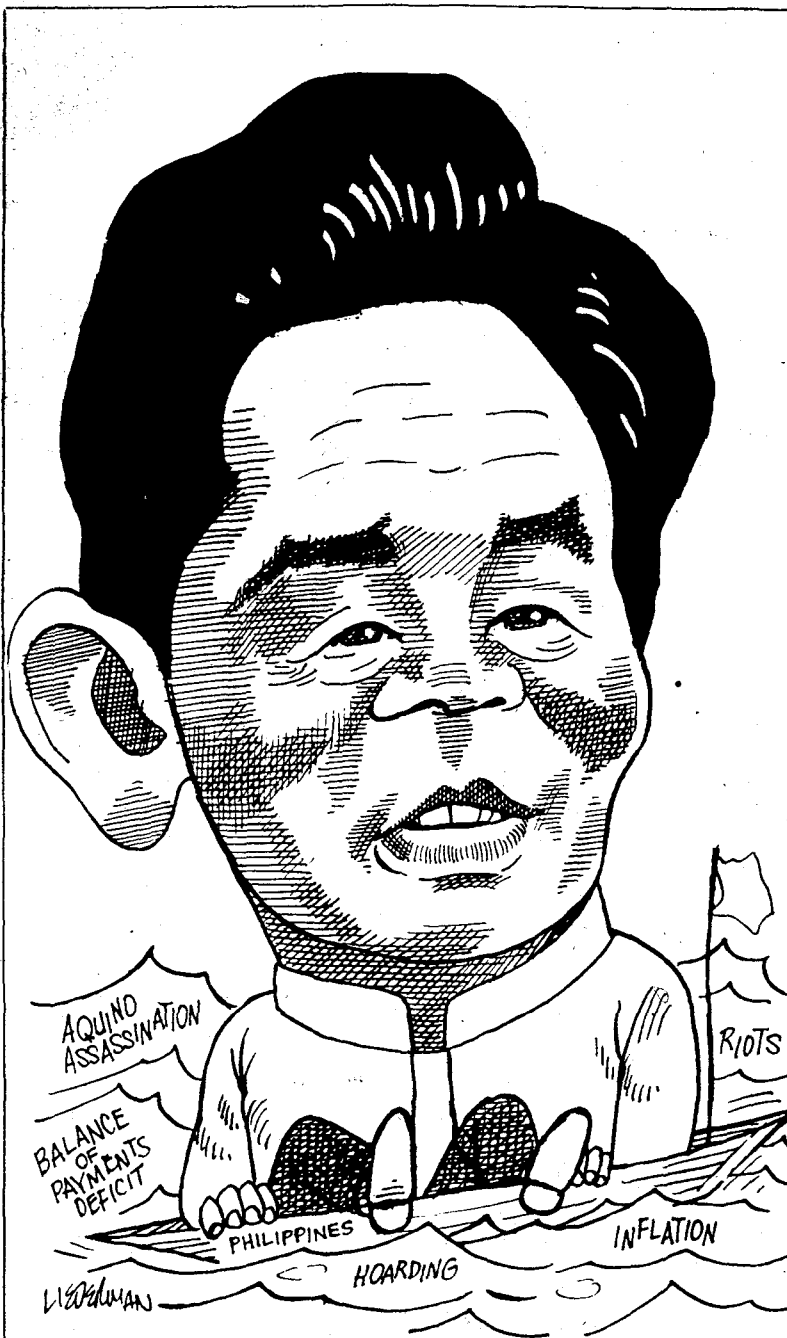
While Ronald Reagan wants to put a teacher into space to inspire students, Ben Richards has a better idea. Last year the eighth grader from Stone City, Iowa, started the Children's Campaign for a Positive Future, reports Dave Fogarty. Richards wants to involve kids in the problems that count: curtailing hunger in the U.S., stopping the nuclear arms race and cleaning up the environment. Taking a sabbatical from school, the 14-year-old stumped the country, speaking at the Iowa Peace Chautauqua, the California Assembly and numerous radio and television talk shows. In December, he'll lead a group of 15 other like-minded youth to the Soviet Union to exhibit poetry and art expressing their concept of a positive future. The exhibit will be displayed with other children's art from around the world. Incidentally, Richards welcomes adult participation in his campaign. For more information contact: The Children's Campaign for a Positive Future, RR 1, Stone City, Iowa 52205; (312) 462-4733.

And meanwhile, back in the capital Reagan was reassuring the students at the Jefferson Junior High School that the reports on the recent decline of education shouldn't be taken so seriously: "I went to six different grammar schools and one high school—and none of them had libraries."

## Move over, Cubbies

The abuse would have stopped a lesser team: a force feeding of beer, bratwurst and brownies, unfamiliar turf downwind from the Madison zoo and heckling from a small but spirited band of *Progressive* staff offspring. But the *In These Times* softball team managed to pull out the last of three games in the annual ITT-*Progressive* softball match with a head-turning 14-9 victory. It was the first *In These Times* win, and possibly another sign of Chicago's baseball turnaround. The staff was aided by the unified spirit that only fashionable attire can give (ITT T-shirts emblazoned with cryptic variations of the number 8—our anniversary year), a barrage of homeruns from art director Miles DeCoster, the wicked bats of a finger or two (including a valiant Madison subscriber who rose to the call), fantastic glove work at 2nd and 3rd base by our bookkeeper Grace Faustino under calamitous circumstances and the steady pitching of editor Jim Weinstein. The absence of *The Progressive* editor Irwin Knoll, fast in the past with quips from the sidelines, gave our heroes a psychological edge. *The Progressive* may be ahead four to one in the overall softball standings, but last year the Chicago Cubs were in fifth place. Wait 'til next year.

—Beth Maschinot



## Filipinos: How to oust Marcos

MANILA—August 21 was the best of days for the opposition movement in the Philippines. In Metro Manila one million Filipinos participated in an anti-government demonstration commemorating the first anniversary of the assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino. Thousands more marched or rallied in provincial cities throughout the archipelago. It was thought to be the largest demonstration in the history of the Philippines.

The protest came at a time of increased government action against dissident political and religious groups and as the nation became more and more impatient with a delay in the government's report on the Aquino assassination. It also came at a time when tensions between the moderate parliamentarians and the more militant labor unions and mass organizations were high.

The parliamentarians—elected a little more than three months ago—continued to argue that

they are the most important segment of the anti-Marcos opposition. Members of the militant mass organizations, however, called for more demonstrations as the route to deposing Marcos.

In the last few months as the demonstrations have grown larger and more militant, and the parliament has succeeded in only delaying, but not preventing, the appointment of Prime Minister Cesar Virata and the approval of the national budget, the protest movement has managed to steal the headlines from the elected officials.

However, it was different immediately after the May 14 election, when attention was focused on the successes of the opposition leaders, especially members of the United Nationalist Democratic Organization (UNIDO). UNIDO and smaller opposition groups eventually succeeded in winning about 30 percent of the 200 seats in the assembly (17 seats are appointed).

But lately it has been the "parliament of the streets" that has taken center stage, largely through the work of the revitalized student movement that has

organized almost daily demonstrations since mid-June.

During recent weeks, President Marcos has taken to naming organizations allegedly controlled by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), including the Coalition of Organizations for the Restoration of Democracy, the Justice for Aquino, Justice for All and numerous religious groups. This strategy began with the late June raid on the headquarters of the Nationalist Alliance and the arrest of its deputy-secretary general Father Jose Dizon for allegedly heading the Communist-founded National Democratic Front, an outlawed coalition of organizations that includes the CPP. In addition, Communist infiltration has been the reason given for the recent series of police attacks on peaceful demonstrators.

Prior to the government crackdown, parliamentary members of the Philippine Democratic Party (PDP)-LABAN had been forming links between the mass movement and the parliamentary opposition—links that had been severely strained by the election participation-boycott split. But the leadership of UNIDO continued to keep its distance. After the various attacks on the protest movement, the UNIDO leadership issued statements condemning the assaults, and in early August UNIDO also decided to back the August 21 mass action.

Despite the current cooperation, relations remain strained between UNIDO and the mass organizations. UNIDO is fundamentally far more conservative than the left-influenced mass movement. Its leadership consists of many pre-martial law politicians and members of elite families, some of whom (including its president, Salvador "Doy" Laurel) were members of the ruling New Society Movement until as recently as last year. The CPP is influential within the mass movement and the UNIDO leadership views that organization with as much trepidation as it does the Marcos regime.

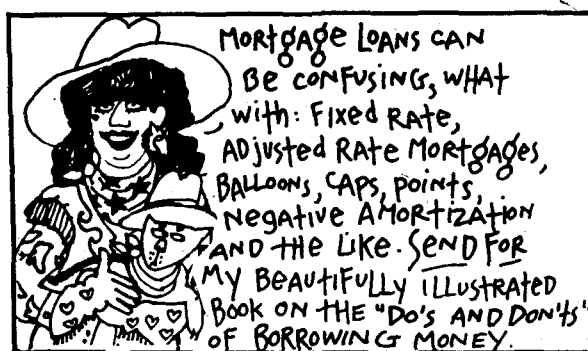
Other leaders refused to see a necessary split between the moderates and the left.

Nene Pimentel, a member of parliament from PDP-LABAN emphasized that pressing for the resignation of Marcos was the most important activity at this time—and one to be pursued both through the parliament and on the streets. In Pimentel's mind, if Marcos continues to hold on to power a bloody revolution becomes a greater and greater likelihood.

"We have rejected the idea of a bloody revolution, but others ...," said the MP from Mindanao.

—James Goodno

## SYLVIA



## by Nicole Hollander

