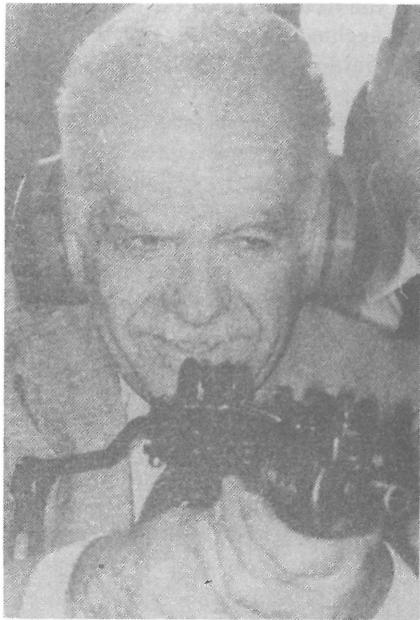


Elections Under the Gun

On May 14 the Israeli government overwhelmingly passed the Shamir plan, making it the first time the coalition government has united around a political program.

Perhaps this facade of «unity» explains the gimmickry of this plan in light of the differences which exist between Likud and Labor around a settlement. Labor's real position on the Shamir plan surfaced during an interview conducted by the Israeli radio with Shimon Peres on April 13 in which he described the plan as an «illusion» and that «it does not present a solution to the Palestinian problem.»



Peres and the rest of Labor members of the cabinet with the exception of Ezer Weitzman voted in favor of the plan however with the realization that it is designed first and foremost to buy time for the Israeli government in order to allow for more room to maneuver, and not to be implemented.

The twenty point plan is predicated on three Israeli No's: no to negotiations with the representative of the Palestinian people (PLO), no to withdrawal from the territories occupied since 1967, and no to a Palestinian state. The plan includes four main points: elec-

tions in the West Bank and Gaza, resolution of the refugee problem, normalizing relations with the Arab states, and the reaffirmation of the Camp David agreements.

According to the Shamir plan, the elections in the West Bank and Gaza, are designed to produce Palestinian representatives from these territories who would be ready to negotiate with Israel on an interim period of three years of «self-rule,» to be followed by a second stage in which a final settlement would be negotiated.

The second point of the plan is a resolution of the refugee problem whereby Shamir calls on the international community to extend help, claiming that «Israel has done its share.» Indeed Israel has done more than its share towards the Palestinian refugee problem when they forcefully evicted hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their country.

If Shamir and Rabin are genuinely interested in solving the refugee problem, they should allow those refugees whom they uprooted and displaced to return to their homes instead of asking for charity in their name, they can also help by stopping the demolition of homes in the refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza, in addition to allowing international humanitarian organizations to conduct their work without the usual obstacles.

The third point is normalizing relations between Israel and the Arab countries. This issue is of utmost importance to Israel, normalization of relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors could relieve the chokehold on the Israeli economy, whereby Israel would be able to sell its products to Arab markets without the strain of the high cost of transportation incurred in exporting goods outside of the Middle East.

And the fourth point is the reaffirmation of the Camp David agreements. Although this last point is considered a very important point of the plan, the plan as a whole is in reality a reaffirmation of the ten-year-old Camp David

agreements, which dealt with Egypt and Jordan and did not deal with the Palestinians.

The election plan calls for conducting «free and democratic elections, free from violence, terrorism and threats.» «If Palestinians are not prepared to seize the golden opportunity offered by elections, they will face a tougher security crackdown.» This direct threat by Rabin underscores the dilemma of the Israel government and particularly the military in light of their failure to quell the intifada, and it unveils the true nature of their sham «democracy.»

The idea of conducting elections in the occupied territories was originally Rabin's. He declared his plan on January 20 which aims at «putting a wedge between the PLO in Tunis and the PLO in the [occupied] territories.»¹ Hence the Shamir plan has been often referred to as the Shamir/Rabin plan.

These so-called free elections are not without conditions. The two main conditions are ending the intifada, and forbidding Palestinians in East Jerusalem which has been occupied and officially annexed since 1967 from taking part in the elections.

Moreover, Rabin threatens once again that he «will send to prison any elected Palestinian who declares loyalty or affiliation to the PLO.»² This threat by Rabin which was also reiterated by Shamir is to be taken seriously in light of Israel's record vis-a-vis elected Palestinian officials.

Since 1968, five elected mayors from the West Bank have been deported: Rawhi Al Khatib from Jerusalem, Nadim Al Zarro from Ramallah, Abdel Jawad Saleh from El Bireh, Mohamad Milhem from Halhoul, and Fahd Kawasmeh from Hebron (Al Khalil).

This is not to mention the deportation of union leaders, journalists, scholars, and clergymen like Archbishop Hilarion Capucci and President of the Islamic Council Sheikh Abdel Hamid Al Sayeh.

After the deportation of the mayors of Ramallah and Al Bireh, the new elected mayors Kareem Khalaf and