

The Shamir Plan

Obstacle to Peace

The US administration salvaged the Shamir plan and the unity of the Israeli coalition, after the challenge of the Likud Central Committee's decisions in early July. However, the Shamir plan remains in the intensive care unit, requiring new animation, as most recently attempted by President Mubarak with his ten-point plan.

Sooner or later, the Shamir plan is bound to die - not only because it represents the Israeli denial of the Palestinian people's legitimate rights, but also because it is no more than a reaction to the PLO's peace initiative, designed to foil it. In essence, it is a maneuver aimed at gaining time in order to terminate the uprising and reduce international outrage at Israeli brutality against the Palestinian people in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. This was tangibly proven by events on the Israeli political scene in July.

On July 5th, Shamir himself announced the decisions adopted by the Likud Central Committee. These made the true intentions of his plan all too obvious by explicitly ruling out not only the PLO and a Palestinian state, but any negotiations before the elimination of «violence» (meaning the uprising), as well as the participation of Palestinians from East Jerusalem in the elections. On the other hand, settlement-building would continue.

These conditions made it impossible for either the Labor Party or the US to credibly market the Shamir plan as a «peace plan.» The Shamir plan was in trouble, particularly after the Labor Party's Executive Bureau, by a vote of 45 to 2 on July 10th, recommended withdrawal from the coalition government. However, instead of the Shamir plan being declared dead or the coalition dissolving, the Israeli government met to renew its commitment to the plan without any amendments. Why?

US SALVAGES THE PLAN

On July 10th, the US State Department declared its intention to send a

delegation to Israel in order to get clarification on the future of the government's «peace initiative.» The US also stated that the Likud decisions did not help the peace process; that the Israeli government was not bound by the decisions of one party; and that the US was not willing to change its policy according to this or that Israeli party's position.

To show its seriousness, the State Department declared that the US might look more closely at the possibility of advancing the peace process via an international conference, especially after the Likud Central Committee's hard-line conditions. At the same time, it was reported that the White House pressured the Labor Party not to withdraw from the coalition government. This was the background for Shamir's retreat, whereby he assured the US administration that the Israeli plan remained valid, without any changes, as previously approved by the government on May 14th. Thus, the US cancelled the planned delegation and urged the Labor Party to remain in the coalition. This paved the way for a compromise, whereby the Israeli government reconfirmed the Shamir plan as is, on July 23rd.

Shamir thereby agreed that the Likud decisions were internal party positions, non-binding on the government, even though part of the Likud Central Committee's decisions was that they were binding on all Likud representatives in the government and Knesset, as a guideline for any future negotiations or implementation of the Shamir plan. This makes it doubly obvious that Shamir considers his «peace» plan as no more than a propaganda ploy. He

declared that the government decision to adhere to the plan as originally adopted did not affect the Likud Central Committee decisions one millimeter. He wants to say that his plan exists as it is since, in his view, there is no Arab response to it anyhow.

This compromise was acceptable to Shamir and the Likud because it averted the problems which would have arisen if the government had fallen - a return to new elections or the establishment of a minority government lacking in national consensus and effectiveness. In view of the problems Israel is already facing due to the uprising's daily achievements, it is to the advantage of both Likud and Labor to avoid further problems.

LABOR'S DILEMMA

It was obvious that the Likud Central Committee's decisions increased the Labor Party's dilemma. Sections of the party have long questioned the advisability of remaining in government with the Likud. On the other hand, past election results indicate that Labor would not improve its position in the case of new elections; nor would going into the opposition. In view of these factors, Labor agreed to the US administration's advice and stayed in the coalition, even though the essence of the Likud position was exposed to be somewhat different than the plan the Labor Party purports to promote. In order to complete the game, Labor's leadership met on July 10th and decided to remain in the coalition. They also confirmed a series of decisions which conform to Likud policy, such as: No to a Palestinian state, no to elections before the intifada is «exterminated,» no to negotiations with the PLO; and «United Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Israel.» However, other decisions were adopted which contradict the Likud position, such as: territorial compromise based on UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 228, the possibility of international observers ►