



*He may not have threatened Israel's existence, but he helped bring down the government.*

a departure from official US policy.

In reality, it was neither the Bush-Baker statements, nor the imagined US pressure that actually brought down the government. Peres had put an ultimatum the last week in February that the government must take steps vis-a-vis the peace process, or else Labor might withdraw. This was as Foreign Minister Arens was in Washington D.C., excusing the Shamir government from making even minor concessions on the composition of a Palestinian delegation, on the grounds of the current political situation. (By this, Arens was mainly referring to the internal problems in the Likud after Sharon challenged Shamir's leadership. Soon afterwards, Economy Minister Modai and four other MK's, all former Liberals, moved to reconstitute themselves as a separate faction, breaking their merger with the Likud and forming the Movement for the Zionist Ideal.)

It is hard to imagine that the Bush Administration intended to provoke the downfall of the Israeli government, but it did hope that Shamir would go along with Baker's efforts to promote the Israeli prime minister's own plan. The Labor Party, for its part, had been ready to cooperate with Baker's tactic of implementing the Shamir plan in a

way that would allow Egypt to lure the PLO into authorizing Palestinians from the occupied territories to meet an Israeli delegation.

However, Likud balked on the details, claiming that agreeing to include one or two expelled Palestinians in the delegation was tantamount to talking to the PLO, and would open the way for the right of return for three million Palestinian refugees. Similarly, for Likud, agreeing to meet a Jerusalem resident was seen as tantamount to conceding the city itself. In fact, these were just the most refined of Mr. Baker's tricks to lure the PLO into negating its own role in the peace process and, last but not least, undermine the intifada politically.

The irony of the matter is that Likud and Labor disagree not at all on Jerusalem being the «united and eternal capital of Israel.» If one can imagine a scenario in the future where the US would press for negotiations on the city's final status, the two major Israeli blocs would certainly stand united in defending this principle. In fact, the Likud and Labor positions on the 1967 occupied territories as such are not so different as often intimated. They concur on the necessity of retaining the Syrian Golan Heights. While Likud refuses withdrawal from one

inch of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Labor Party position for eventual withdrawal actually envisions retaining major parts of the West Bank.

### New immigration

The situation is somewhat the same regarding the new wave of immigration to Israel of Soviet as well as Ethiopian Jews. Both Likud and Labor are acutely aware that this presents Israel with an historic opportunity to bolster its hold on occupied Palestine, and resolve the demographic balance in favor of Zionism. Almost 10,000 Soviet Jews came to Israel in the first two months of 1990, after which the government slapped military censorship on press reports about immigration. By late March, the Ethiopian government had confirmed that hundreds of Ethiopian Jews had settled in Israel in recent months. Based on estimates of the size of the Jewish community remaining in the Soviet Union and Ethiopia, 1.8 million (in 1979) and 9,000 respectively, the Zionist state has the chance of increasing its Jewish population by one-third if the immigration continues.

Both Likud and Labor are well aware that the US played a crucial role in facilitating the Soviet Jewish immigration, and that its financial aid is pivotal in efforts to absorb the new immigrants. Yet statements by Likud leaders seemed almost designed to provoke an international reaction. Following on his statements about the need for «Greater Israel» to absorb the new immigrants, Shamir also publicly insisted that the government will direct Soviet Jews to settle in Jerusalem, including the eastern part of the city. On March 9th, Housing Minister Levy announced the start of construction of 3,000 apartments for new immigrants in East Jerusalem, declaring that «this decision was meant as defiance» of US President Bush (*International Herald Tribune*, March 15th). In contrast, the Labor Party has not been prone to flashy statements about the new immigration, though it is working equally diligently to exploit this new opportunity to the maximum. The Labor policy seems based on the premise that if Israel cooperates in the