



A baby, killed by Israeli bombing in Lebanon, is carried by her father. What will the new government do to the peace process?

Israel under Netanyahu

Adam Keller, an Israeli socialist and peace activist, spoke to *Workers' Liberty* on 30 August.

Is Netanyahu trying to stall the peace process, or reverse it? I am not sure that even Netanyahu himself knows. He is a weak person, pushed in different

directions, not only on the Palestinian question but also on others, for example privatisation, where he has retreated after the trade unions' one-day strike.

He does not want to break with the extremist hard-line settlers — he does not want a confrontation with them — but nor does he want to have a con-

frontation with the whole Arab world and with the Israeli business community, which wants the peace process to continue. Most of Israel's industrialists, bankers, and so on, openly supported Peres for prime minister. So Netanyahu shifts back and forth.

One of the ideas going round in Netanyahu's circle is to try to get the Jordanians back into the picture as a replacement for independent representatives of the Palestinians, but I don't think that it can succeed.

There is much frustration among the Palestinians. Their economic situation is terrible, with enormous unemployment, and now we see the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the demolition of Palestinian houses. There is a drive, which went on under the previous Labour government, too, to clear out Palestinians from the areas which are still under complete Israeli rule in the West Bank.

Arafat moved very strongly against Hamas after the terrorist bombings in March. He imprisoned many Hamas people. There was also some popular anger against Hamas, because Palestinians felt that the closure of the border and the resulting economic hardships were a result of the actions of Hamas.

"Likud are freezing the process"

WALID Salem, a Palestinian journalist and writer working at the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem, spoke to *Workers' Liberty* on 29 August.

The Palestinian Authority has to be seen to achieve something for the Palestinian people.

However the Netanyahu government is refusing to cooperate. The Palestinian Authority wants a peaceful mass mobilisation, of limited duration and under its control, to put international pressure on the Israeli government.

There is an idea among the Authority that the current Israeli government has some weaknesses. They want to press the centre of this

government and play them against the genuine far right in Likud — people like Ariel Sharon.

Unfortunately there is no genuine, real left amongst the Palestinians. We have institutions for elites not the Palestinian masses.

The Israeli authorities are beginning to close off Jerusalem. I have just come here from Bethlehem, and the road from there has been closed behind me. All West Bankers are refused entry, including those who have Israeli entry permits.

In my opinion Likud want to freeze the peace process. They want to return to the Madrid formula, rather than the Oslo agreement. In other words they want to tie the Palestinians to Jordan.

In Hamas, the the more pragmatic leadership within the territories is at odds with the external leadership, in Jordan, Sudan, and Iran, which is much more intransigent and fanatical. It has some supporters inside the territories, which it manipulates against the internal leadership.

There is also a growing opposition, not yet organised, to Arafat from Fatah activists. They say Arafat is making too many concessions to Israel and that the Oslo agreement has turned out to be a failure, and they accuse the Arafat leadership of corruption, inefficiency, violations of human rights, and arbitrary behaviour. The fact that there is now a Palestinian parliament which has a considerable element of, if not opposition, then dissidence, creates tensions with Arafat's wish to have the administration centred round himself, for example, the fact that he has several different police forces, all competing with each other, and accountable only to him.

I do not know of any forces among the Palestinians offering a concrete programme on unemployment and the economic situation. The problem is that the Palestinians are not allowed to go to work in Israel, the sale of Palestinian products in Israel is restricted, and the Israeli army checks on the crossing points from the Palestinian territories into Israel, Jordan and Egypt lead to agricultural produce, for example, very often being spoiled. It is difficult to sell products from Gaza in the West Bank or vice versa because they have to go through Israel. Many of the places of employment in the territories are closing down or losing work.

There have been quite a lot of small-scale activities by the peace movement in Israel, involving dozens or hundreds of people. Peace Now has become more active. On 28 August Gush Shalom had a demonstration for a Bedouin tribe under threat of being evicted for a Jewish settlement to be built.

As yet we have not been able to mobilise big demonstrations of tens of thousands. I think we will be able to, within a month or two, the way things are going now, but the people who make up the broad support for the peace movement are still in a state of shock and confused after the election. For example, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Hebron has been a big issue, and the government says "yes...", then "but...", then "perhaps...". And there is the question of when Netanyahu will meet with Arafat.

We are already in a crisis. It is going to develop, and at some point bring tens of thousands of Israelis onto the streets.