

# The other Israeli

Clive Bradley and John O'Mahony spoke to Adam Keller during his recent lecture tour of Britain

The Palestinian *intifada*, the uprising that began in December 1987 and shows no sign of abating, has left deep marks on Israeli society. Commentators often dwell on the growth of the far right and Jewish fundamentalism. But there has been a parallel development on the left, as Adam Keller, an Israeli socialist who visited Britain earlier this year, was keen to point out.

Even five years ago, the 'two states' option to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was supported only on the margins of Israeli politics. Now, more and more, even prominent sections of the Israeli Labour Party are looking to a 'two states' solution, even including negotiations with the PLO.

For Keller this gives grounds for immense optimism. A solution to the conflict could be in sight, he thinks — in the next two or three years.

Keller represents a particular strand in Israeli left opinion. Traditional left voices range from the Zionist left, including the old Mapam kibbutz-based party, now in opposition, to various anti-Zionist groups. The strongest anti-Zionist party has always been the pro-Moscow Communist Party and its coalition group (or front) Haddesh.

Keller is a member of the Progressive List for Peace, formed for the 1984 elections, which brings together Arabs disillusioned with the CP (which, in an Arab town like Nazareth, is the Establishment), and Jews from left-Zionist or, like Keller, ex-Zionist backgrounds.

*The Other Israel*, which Keller edits, is produced by the extra-parliamentary Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, a group that has long advocated dialogue with the PLO, although it has been closely associated with the somewhat maverick figure of Uri Avnery. Avnery is a former



Adam Keller



Knesset member, and editor of a popular muck-raking journal.

So the political groups Keller works in are broad, and in the PLP, an attempt to hold together Jewish and Arab activists. "There are problems," Keller admits. But he sees the PLP as a brave venture.

Keller and the PLP are typical of the activism of the Israeli minority that openly campaigns for talks with the PLO. Since the *intifada*, there has been a proliferation of peace groups, often finding ways to have joint action with Arabs on both sides of the 1967 'Green Line'.

In a society where everyone has to do military service, and men have to do up to 60 days every year, peace movement activity can lead to personal risks. Adam Keller has been imprisoned several times for his actions against the occupation.

Last year, he was imprisoned for three months for spraying tanks with anti-occupation slogans.

Keller, like many on the Israeli left, is a member of Yesh Gvul, 'There is a Limit', originally formed during the 1982 Lebanon invasion, a group of those who refuse to do their military service in the occupied territories.

"There are others less radical," Keller notes. "Some people think it's important to serve in the territories, so that they can intervene against acts of repression." But Yesh Gvul believes that firmer action against the occupation is necessary to end it.

Much of Keller's time is devoted to *The Other Israel*, a digest of news and information about the current situation, peace activities in Israel and events in the occupied territories. He believes that the *intifada* has forced big changes on Israel.

"There are many forms of resistance to the occupation, including among Israeli Arabs. For example, Arab fruit pickers sabotage Israeli production of oranges. They swap the worst oranges, meant to be thrown away, with the oranges intended to be exported." This is just one example of the many small methods, as well as dramatic ones, that are being used to undermine Israeli occupation.

He believes the occupation's days are

numbered. But he admits that the left has problems dealing with the right's general domination of poorer, working class Jews. Israeli society, says Keller, is warped by the national question, full of what his book, 'Terrible Days', describes as "political paradoxes". People on the 'left' in social or economic policy can be on the right on the Palestinian question, and vice versa. Class-conscious struggle — certainly joint struggle by Arabs and Jews — is very difficult to achieve.

There have been attempts, and the left Zionist party to which Keller used to belong, Shelli, saw its role as to try to bring about such unity. More recently, he feels that work in the army can be useful. In prison, he met many working class Jews, mainly defectors, who began to listen to his ideas on the Palestinian question.

Socialism, he feels, is not on the agenda, and the priority is to achieve peace. But issues do not stop there. "Israelis need to see that their country is a colony of the USA, and we need to end that relationship if we are to achieve freedom ourselves."

Although the signs are good, the obstacles to peace are formidable, in particular the growth of the Right. Keller sees Israel as heading down the road of South Africa.

But is it already an apartheid state? Keller thinks not. "If there was a direct parallel, if you could swap Jew for white, and Arab for black, surely it would be the Israeli government that wanted two states, and the PLO that was firmly against it. In fact, the PLO wants two states and the Israeli government rejects it. So either both the PLO and the Israeli government are out of their minds, or it is a different situation from South Africa."

The tour of Britain in February was a success, Keller thinks. He was able to speak in many colleges, to share platforms with PLO representatives, and to appear on radio phone-in programmes. Among Jewish students, especially, he detected a growing eagerness to know about the 'peace camp' — and an openness to be convinced.

Whether Keller's optimism proves well-founded or not, the current on the Israeli left that he represents is clearly a growing, and vocal, force.