

the deadlocked "autonomy" talks, a policy that will probably only exacerbate the current impasse, given the impossibility of coopting the PLO. It is an option that, in time, could lead to war.

The second option—the one favored by Britain—is to adopt a more "moderate," "pro-Arab" policy that can position Britain favorably inside the fast-developing Euro-Arab political axis being shaped by France and its European allies. This option was explicated in a Sept. 18 editorial in the London *Guardian* which admitted that Britain's strategy for the Middle East relied solely on undercutting the growing European-Arab axis for peace. According to the *Guardian*, the British are pitted against two factions in Europe. One, represented by France and Italy, wants a comprehensive peace-and-development alliance with the Arab countries. The second, represented by West Germany and Holland, is opposed to American refusal to deal with the PLO but is less ambitious in overall scope. Britain's counterposition, reports the *Guardian*, is to support a "deal" between Israel and "authentic representatives of the Palestinians"—a typically vague formulation that circumvents the PLO altogether and whose aim is to throw the whole Israel-West Bank-Jordan area into chaos and confusion.

To get their scenario off the ground, the British, in collusion with Anglophile Zionists, feel that Begin must be dumped and a seemingly softer-line government installed into power. A top New York Zionist, in an exclusive interview, insisted that Begin had outlived his usefulness and that Israel needed some kind of governing coalition involving Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, and opposition Labour Party leader Shimon Peres, all of whom, not accidentally, are now touring the U.S. and meeting with top Washington and U.S. Zionist Lobby leaders. Unlike Begin, whose rigid fanaticism on the PLO question has opened the door wide to Europe's peace initiatives, a Weizman-Peres-Dayan configuration is being viewed by London and its allies in Washington as the best vehicle for muscling in on the Europeans and making a deal with the PLO.

During their stay in Washington, back-room meetings were held to discuss engineering Begin's removal from power. According to one Washington insider, a "simple scandal could force Begin to resign within 10 days." In an attempt to give Begin the honorable option of resigning rather than provoke the bloody fight necessary to bring him down, the press is conveniently highlighting stories that doctors have ordered him to work no more than three hours per day.

Given Begin's documentable connections to international drug trafficking, gun running, diamond smuggling, and related activities (Begin befriended the organized crime king-pin Shmuel Flatto-Sharon, wanted in France for his involvement in financial swindles but

immune from extradition due to Begin's intervention), a "simple scandal" would be easy to pull off. The makings of one are already in the works: The Aug. 14 *Jerusalem Post* targets Begin for covering up organized crime investigations in Israel. "When was the last time the Premier asked for a progress report on the implementation of the Shinrom Commission report on organized crime?" the *Jerusalem Post* queried. The article then went on to attack Begin's right-hand man, Interior Minister Yosef Burg, who is heading up the West Bank "autonomy" talks ever since Weizman left the team—a signal that the Begin hard line on the Palestinian question is to be scrapped in favor of the liberal approach of Weizman and company. Finally, the *Post* links Begin and Burg to Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon, whose uncompromising West Bank settlements policy is a chief stumbling block for the British Weizman plan. "Begin and Sharon have demolished the national consensus here and in the Diaspora," charged the *Jerusalem Post*.

The settlements policy is indeed the core issue, and Begin's inept handling of it is drawing criticism from all sides and portends his undoing. Last week, the

'The battle is over settlements policy'

The following is an evaluation by a U.S.-based member of the Israeli Likud Party of the significance of the recent dispute between Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the Jewish Agency over whether the Ministry of Absorption will be put under Agency control or kept under the Ministry of Housing, which is now headed by Likud Party parliamentarian David Levy. This dispute has been widely covered in the Israeli press and has led to acrimonious accusations from the Agency leaders that Begin was reneging on earlier commitments to them as to the fate of the Absorption Ministry. This is an important ministry in Israel since it controls the influx of immigrants from abroad and interfaces key Israeli intelligence activities in western and eastern Europe.

In the context of this analysis, the Herut-Likud source described the outbreak of potentially bitter faction fights throughout Israel, and the attempts by Defense Minister Ezer Weizman and Israeli nuclear-bomb strategist Yuval Neeman to capitalize on them in their bids to succeed Begin as Premier.

This dispute will have no effect at all on Begin's control over the Herut, which is the faction which

Israeli cabinet voted to allow purchases of West Bank land by Israeli Jews, a decision that enraged Deputy Prime Minister Yigael Yadin, who walked out of the cabinet session in protest threatening to pull his Democratic Movement for Change party out of the coalition. In addition, at a recent parliamentary meeting of Begin's Herut faction, the hard-liners led by Ariel Sharon won what the *Jerusalem Post* called a "unanimous" victory in affirming the construction of new settlements and the announcement by the government of a "master plan" for the West Bank that would formalize the process of establishing Jewish settlements into a long-term grand strategy.

A pro-Begin source in New York welcomed a recent Begin decision to put all control over the location of new settlements in the hands of the government, as a means of neutralizing the Jewish Agency, which had been trying to grab control over these decisions. If the British-dominated Jewish Agency had gotten the upper hand, this source stressed, settlements would be diverted from the West Bank to the Negev, and the Begin faction's dream to annex the West Bank would be seriously set back. Now, however, Begin's annexation

process is rolling along, and all deals are off in respect to the Palestinians.

The number one problem for the British in building up the Weizman option is the fact that Weizman and Dayan have no political base. According to top Zionist Lobby sources, the Sephardic community in Israel, traditionally pro-Begin, is being courted to become Weizman's base. To counter these efforts, Begin is working desperately to build up support from the Sephardim by favoring them on economic policy. The ongoing rabbinical dispute between the Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews in Israel plays right into the Weizman effort. Last month the chief rabbi of the Sephardic community publicly asserted his conviction that if it is a matter of avoiding war, the occupied territories should be given up. The chief rabbi of the Ashkenazi community took the opposite stance. Although a laudable position, the Sephardic community is now being wooed by the British with the Weizman option, to pull them behind a "liberal solution" to the West Bank/Palestinian problem—a solution that will lead not to real peace but to a cosmetic facsimile of it.

—Nancy Coker

runs the Likud because it is the majority faction. The Herut is very much in the hands of Begin and even powerful people can't stand up to him. So the Jewish Agency dispute cannot in itself cause great problems in Israel—unless the government falls. If Begin were to resign, an issue like this could create all sorts of backbiting.

The problem with the Jewish Agency is simple. A very vital, absolutely vital issue is at stake: who will control the direction of settlements policy? Unless the government decides on the future of where the settlements go, the future will be very bad. We, the Herut people, want to strengthen Judea and Samaria [i.e., the West Bank—ed.], and also the area of heavy Arab population density in Israel, Galilee. The Agency, by contrast, wants us to settle the Negev, which we reject. This is a critical issue, which bears upon the whole future of what Israel will be.

The Jewish Agency wouldn't put settlements where Begin wants them; the Agency has its own policy. They have a top guy named Raanan Weitz who alarms me, and alarms Begin, since he publicly advocates the creation of a Palestinian state. Begin is aware of all this, and has no desire to turn to the Negev.

The Israeli situation could become very volatile internally. Begin could resign soon, or, possibly, the Liberal faction of the Likud could pull out. The

Liberals are extremely disaffected, since, on the one hand, they are being blamed for all the economic problems of Israel, and, on the other hand, they feel they are not being given the right to implement their own economic ideas. In this context, Neeman is scoring points with the Liberals. They are the key group which seems to be attracted to his appeals, they are looking to him as an alternative.

At the same time, Weizman definitely has popularity, and *thinks* he can be the next Prime Minister. He has ambitions, but he knows he can't fulfill them as long as Begin is around, and he cannot at present win any points *within* the Herut, which is all for Begin. What he is *trying* to do is to build a power base because of the dissatisfaction felt among the Oriental Jews at the country's economic problems, which is an obvious tactic since the Orientals are Begin's power base. But this is not working for two reasons. First, Begin is skewing economic favors, such as housing investment, *toward* the Orientals and *away* from the younger middle class, which is a Labour Party constituency. Second, the Orientals are most strongly appealed to on the basis of nationalism; they are the most anti-Arab constituency in Israel. To them, settling the Judea and Samaria area is more important than anything to do with the economy.