

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

Peres bends with the winds

The Labour Chairman sings a different tune in London and Paris, leaving open the question: what policy for Israel?

Shimon Peres, Israeli Labour candidate for prime minister, has just performed his first major diplomatic act prior to his likely designation as Israel's new leader when elections take place later this year. Beginning Jan. 22, Peres began a several-day tour throughout Europe, stopping over in France, Great Britain, Austria, and Germany.

Insofar as this trip should provide insights into the leadership qualities that Peres is likely to bring to bear in Israel, the trip must be regarded as a disappointment. Rather than providing bold policy initiatives, Peres accommodated to the particular audience of the moment that he was addressing.

Peres's first policy formulation was made on the eve of his departure for France, in a Jan. 21 interview with the Agence France-Presse in Jerusalem.

His comments in this case were made in anticipation of his Jan. 22 meeting with French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. The comments reflected Peres's stated desire to initiate a close Israeli relationship with France, in the face of harsh criticism from various Zionist groups who regard Giscard as anathema because of his support for an overall Mideast settlement.

Peres told AFP, "I am convinced we must look for a political and territorial compromise. Today, peace is as necessary to Arab countries as to Israel. For this, we want to establish contacts country by

country in the perspective of a global peace."

Then, after chiding Europe for its specific policies toward the Middle East, Peres stated that nonetheless Israel wants "a dialogue with Europe. . . . In spite of disputes, there must be a dialogue." He suggested that Europe could play an important role in "regional economic cooperation."

Peres next flew to London, for meetings with Foreign Minister Lord Carrington, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, opposition Labour Party leader Michael Foot, and deputy opposition leader Denis Healey. Following these meetings, his disorientation was evident.

In an interview published in the Jan. 25 London *Observer*, Peres endorsed the plan authored by the Royal Institute for International Affairs and British intelligence Islamicist Bernard Lewis for chaos and war in the Middle East.

"There is a wind of disintegration not necessarily connected with Israel," Peres avowed. "There are wars and conflicts between Iran and Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, South and North Yemen, Morocco and the Polisario, Libya and Chad." Further, the Middle East will soon witness the nightmare combination of introduced nuclear weaponry, increased Russian penetration, and growing alliances between Muslim fanaticism and communist ideology. If all this is combined with Arab-Israeli tension, Peres warned,

"It will become very demanding." Peres's proffered "solution" at that point was further extension of the same Camp David accords that have triggered the disintegration process in the region and a warning of imminent war delivered to Jordan's King Hussein!

Addressing King Hussein, Peres asked: "Do you want a confrontation, or do you want to talk?" Then he turned to the reporter and stated: "If he continues to threaten, he may become a victim of his own threats, particularly when basic changes have taken place on the ground."

It is possible that Peres was blackmailed by the British into making these statements by the threat of a major "civil war" in Israel and the activation of Israel's ultra-fanatic Zionist factions.

On the same day as the *Observer* piece, the *Sunday Times* of London ran a feature "scenario" involving an insurrection by elements in the top command of the army and the Gush Emunim group under the control of Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon if a new Labour government tried to dismantle settlements on the occupied West Bank when it becomes to power later this year.

As the *Times* coyly noted, such a scenario would prevent Peres from "concentrating on Israel's stricken economy and the sky-high inflation" during this year's electoral campaign.

Such perspectives for destabilizing Israel were probably also a prime subject of discussion during Peres's Jan. 24 meetings with Austrian Prime Minister Bruno Kreisky, a top Socialist International operative and controller of left "Jacobin" movements in the Middle East.