

Only New Thinking Will Bring Peace

Mr. Ben-Aharon, one of Israel's founding fathers, is a founding member of the Labor Party, and a trade union leader. He served as a minister in the government of Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion. He was one of the first Israeli leaders who called for the return of all the territories occupied by Israel in the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967. At 96, his counsel is sought by many political leaders, including current opposition leader Amram Mitzna, chairman of the Labor Party. Dean Andromidas conducted this interview through written correspondence in early March.

EIR: Could you please briefly tell our readers about yourself, and the role you played in the founding of the State of Israel and in its first decades?

Ben-Aharon: I came to Palestine in 1924 as a leader of the Zionist youth movement in Romania, and to some extent in Germany as well. I joined the kibbutz [communal farm] in Haifa and we worked for three years on the drainage of the Kishon swamps, stretching from Haifa to Akko. It was there that I started [to play] a leading role in the Jewish labor movement, in its two-pronged presentation via the Histadrut [labor federation] and the Labor Party.

[Earlier], With the founding of the State of Israel, I became a member of the Knesset [parliament], and pursued that activity for 22 years in succession. I was also the Minister of Communication in Ben-Gurion's Cabinet in the 1950s, as well as Secretary General of the Histadrut. With the outbreak of the Second World War, I joined the volunteer pioneer formations, received a commission, and then was drafted from the western desert to Greece. That move was a terrible failure of the British, and in no time, we were captured by the Germans, and I spent the duration of the war as a POW in Nazi Germany. Unexpectedly, I survived, and upon reaching my home, I was in no time declared a leader of the Haganah underground and was put on a military court trial. That was obviously the British way of remuneration for my military service, and without lauding myself, I was also a very active member of the underground intelligence.

I have been a member of my kibbutz, Givat Haim Meuhad, from its founding until today.

EIR: What is your assessment of the political situation within Israel and the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians?

Ben-Aharon: The current political situation concerning the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians appears to be a

tragedy with no immediate solution in sight. Both sides appear to be reluctant to commit themselves to far-reaching compromises, which in my view is the only chance for peace and understanding. The Sharon government, as of today, is unfortunately, in its composition, unable to act to initiate negotiations.

EIR: Amram Mitzna has sought your advice and has won your endorsement. What is your assessment of this man and the political path he is struggling for?

Ben-Aharon: Labor Party Chairman Amram Mitzna is, in my mind, a new face within the political establishment of Israeli democracy. He is a man of perfect integrity, and it appears that ahead of him awaits a painful struggle for the recognition of his leadership.

EIR: What is your assessment of Ariel Sharon? Will he launch a new regional war?

Ben-Aharon: I am not aware that Ariel Sharon will ever launch a regional war; therefore, he should not be charged with aggressive intentions against our neighbors. What can be said fairly is his belief in the ultimate power of arms. He appears to expect total surrender from his opponents, and yet I would not exclude the possibility, that in this last political leadership, he might open himself to President Bush's dictates. When all is said and done, the real and decisive power lies with the Americans, and Mr. Sharon is a dutiful partner in the American hegemony.

EIR: What is your vision of a just solution to the conflict, not just between Israel and the Palestinians, but the region as a whole?

Ben-Aharon: I have already formulated above some principles for the end of the bloody conflict. A just solution must be of a political nature, and there can be no solution by an Israeli policy of an unconditional surrender by the Palestinians. Therefore, although the Palestinians, for the past century, have rejected all attempts at a solution, Israel is bound today to assist the Palestinians to establish their own state . . . albeit with a delay of more than 50 years.

EIR: Prior to the Jan. 28 elections, the Labor Party was a full partner in Sharon's government. Many of our readers were surprised by this fact, especially by the role of Shimon Peres as Foreign Minister, who was so much identified with the Oslo Accords and his vision of a "New Middle East." How would you explain this phenomenon?

Ben-Aharon: The participation of the Labor Party in Mr. Sharon's government for the past two years was almost its undoing. Your remarks about Mr. Shimon Peres are correct, but it must be admitted that his obsession for collaboration with the religious [parties] and the right is a precondition to lead Israel back to the negotiation table. Shimon Peres is also a riddle to me, but there cannot be any doubt about his idealistic view of a New Middle East. From a practical view,

he should have retired to a position of the elder statesman of Israel.

EIR: You were a participant in the founding of the State of Israel. You no doubt embarked on this lifelong struggle with many hopes and a mission for the State of Israel you envisioned. Do you see that something has gone terribly wrong? If so, could you discuss the when, where, and how?

Ben-Aharon: With the founding of the State of Israel, there were three dark holes left open. The first was the surrender to the Orthodox [Jewish denomination] and giving up the moves for a constitution, thereby empowering a theocratic establishment under the umbrella of the state and its finances. The second was the giving of concessions to the wealthy, in the hope of attracting foreign investment by such anti-social surrender. From the start, Israel took upon itself a role as a fore-runner for capitalism in the Middle East. The third was the failure to realize the national and religious entities of the Arabs. There was a belief that the new Israel's bounties would pacify the Arabs' desire for national independence.

Therefore, I acted almost throughout my political activity, in opposition to all governments' social policies. I still believe that socialism is not just a Utopian dream. With its adaptation to reform, including private initiative, it can be and should be materialized. The collapse of the Soviet Union is a clear indication of how even progressive ideas can be abused.

EIR: You have played a leading role in the kibbutz and labor movements. I can imagine that you are critical of the liberal economic system and how it has been adopted in Israel.

Ben-Aharon: As a member of the kibbutz movement, and as a veteran leader of hired labor and of creative collective systems, I am naturally opposed to the present liberal economic system of the Sharon governments.

EIR: The founder of *EIR* is American statesman Lyndon LaRouche, who has been a life-long critic of the British liberal economic system. He has called for dramatic reform of the international financial system, which at this point is bankrupt. Premised on the theme "peace through development," LaRouche has drafted a proposal for Middle East peace, to be centered around the development of water and transportation systems on a regional basis.

Ben-Aharon: I regret to confess that I am not familiar with Mr. Lyndon LaRouche's philosophy and his political platform. Certainly I view favorably every struggle to at least reform the globalization of the world economy. As far as your question about the importance of the water problem in our region, there is certainly a great contribution to a regional peace settlement by developing all water resources on a trans-national basis. The Middle East has very limited water resources, but technology can give the proper answers to the problem. From this point of view, the approach of Mr. LaRouche can be very helpful.