



PARLIAMENTARY REPORT / Lea Ben Dor

IN THE SANDS OF MAALEH ADUMIM

THE MAALEH ADUMIM project provides for an industrial development area 15 kms. east of Jerusalem, in the direction of the Dead Sea, beyond the old "Green Line," and deep into the Judean desert. Some work has been done on levelling the area, but only optimists believe that any housing will actually be ready during the current year. The settlers who moved out there early on Sunday morning knew very well that they would be back in town by night-fall. At the moment, the politics rattle far more loudly than the industry.

Wednesday's mini-debate, in the form of motions to the agenda for and against Maaleh Adumim was a total flop. For one thing, all the thunder had been stolen the previous night by a riotous Labour Party caucus at which two labour party members, one for and one against the new settlement, had had an opportunity of blowing off steam. Labour has provided the main weight of the government for so long, and the Likud — and formerly its leading Herut section — such opposition as there is for equally long, that it is taken for granted that they will always be on the opposite sides of any question short of war. In 1967 a brief moment of amity was really brought about by the destruction of the Egyptian airforce on the ground in the first hours of the war, with the amazing sight of Ben-Gurion and Begin, ill-matched in size as in views, tottering around the Knesset arm-in-arm. That is why our political conflicts only become of interest when they take place within a party, hinting at its internal conflicts.

The whole business of Maaleh Adumim has not only caused conflict in the government and Labour Party, it has illustrated most uncomfortably the paralysis that can set in when a coalition government is patched together in disregard of yawning ideological gaps. People pay lip-service to the view officially held by the government and then say "yahad im ze" — "together with this", and then comes the exact opposite. Mapam has most often had to do this because it is a minority party that cannot afford to go out into the cold world of the reluctant voter, but cherishes a well-defined ideology on almost every subject.

Within the Labour Party there have since 1967 been two clearly defined trends. There are those who wanted to return to the more perilous, in some ways perhaps

more promising open conditions of before 1948, but with all the weight of the state behind them, to build conditions for co-existence in the West Bank that might lead to peace. On the side were those who wanted their small, tightly seated Israel back.

Today there is some degree of contact between the two economies. The bridges stayed open and hundreds of thousands of Arabs from neighbouring countries came across them, many of them to see Israel for themselves. There is not only coexistence with Jordan but some considerable degree of common political interest. Only, this common interest — to keep out the PLO, for instance — has made Jordan doubly wary about the faintest hint of peace with us, for fear of attack in the Arab world.

"We will not make peace even if you return East Jerusalem," an Arab spokesman said to a leading Israeli personality recently. Did we really offer them Jerusalem? No, he just said he wouldn't take it.)

Coexistence suggests powerfully that peace is possible, but by itself does not bring peace. This paradox is matched by an equal and opposite one. A large township in the West Bank, such as Kiryat Arba on a hill near Hebron, with its tall blocks of flats, military guard and barbed wire perimeter appears totally alien in the ancient, crumbling Hebron landscape, an eyesore that should be a political disaster, but in fact causes no conflict. Most of the occupants busy themselves either with the yeshivot they have set up or commute to work in Jerusalem, and only a few are concerned with the affairs of the Machpelah and its holy graves and the small number of tourists that visit them.

Sheikh Jaabari, the Mayor of Hebron, makes no political statements and places a few students in technical schools in Holon. Perhaps he thinks that worse might have happened to his town than the alien, self-sufficient settlers on the hill. There is a whole string of "security settlements" along the Jordan Valley, but there has been no indication that they add fuel to the fire. The terrorists attack Nahariya, or Maalot, and Tel Aviv, not these small, vulnerable settlements within a few hundred metres of the Jordan.

NEVERTHELESS there are always strident voices to claim that one stone, one house, and the last

chance of peace will be gone, that pressure for settlement in the West Bank comes from those who do not want peace and the likelihood of an accommodation with Jordan concerning the West Bank that might involve loss of sovereignty over the area. Meir Pa'il (Moked) was doom-laden on the subject again on Wednesday, as though there were not already a dozen different forms of settlement on the West Bank. "They want to close off all the options for peace."

On the other side of the fence, almost literally, are those who prefer the small, enclosed Israel. Golda Meir fears for the future of Jewish labour, of genuine, internal independence and self-dependence, the concept for which she has fought all her life, and this is probably the most valid reason for seeking to bring back the closed border. The building trade in Jerusalem is almost totally back in Arab hands. What shall we be, the traders, the middlemen, the professors, like abroad? Do the Jews despise manual labour again, after no more than one generation of diggers and builders?

Pinhas Sapir, as Minister of Finance, feared shock to the economy from contact with an area with a lower standard of living and greater pay differentials, and would have liked to seal off the West Bank behind a customs barrier, manned along its entire length, presumably by the Israel army. Abba Eban tended to lose himself in calculations of birth rates and population statistics in 20 and 30 years' time, a form of futurology even more liable to error than most.

Nevertheless the government committed itself several years back to holding an election before the West Bank was cut off again from Israel, and for good measure threw in a commitment to settlement in the area. It is a fair suspicion to say that about half the government at any time agreed to this on the assumption it would not be carried out, but that it would save argument to accept the principle. Agreement on settlement in theory began such futile moves as the attempts to settle at Sebastia, opposite Israel's narrow waist, where there might be good reason for a military position but settlers with wives and children could easily become an added burden for security forces.

The real compromise was Maaleh Adumim, in a deserted area, mostly on government lands, on a site that fits into the elaborate design of the Allon Plan to give Israel security on the West Bank, and a Jordanian population there freedom of movement. Housing Minister Avraham Ofer, a warm Sapir supporter, did not want to oppose the plan, just to drag his feet a little and assume the housing would only be barracks for workers going home at the week-end. Trade and Industry Minister Bar-Lev could legitimately occupy himself with other priorities. But the Maaleh site and plan had been carefully selected with a view to all requirements and obstacles, military, political and strategic. A more convenient site at Anatot, much closer to the town, has been dropped for the time being because there privately-owned land would have had to be expropriated. The settlers knew they would not stay at Maaleh Adumim, but that they could provoke enough argument to force attitudes into the open. Health Minister Shemtov said he thought the plan had never been intended seriously. The Housing Minister agreed that he had not intended to supply housing. Shulamit Aloni, in the debate, said there was no approved planning. It may be something to do with the fact that the three leading opponents of West Bank settlement are no longer in the government, and their supporters orphaned, but the Labour Party suddenly realized that the obstacles were self-made and could be disposed of without difficulty. Prime Minister Rabin sent a message to say he supported the plan, and it was the debate that got lost in the sand.