

President's Message

This is the second issue of our newsletter, *Israel Horizons*. If you missed our first, you can find it here.

I do not want to pretend that all is well with the liberal progressive pro-Israel community, here or in Israel, but that is even more reason for us to continue to spread our message and to support PPI. There has been a lot of introspection, soul-and message-searching, and we have to carefully pick our battles.

PPI's strategy is to support the progressive Israeli left, who are fighting, despite the lack of publicity, for a more just and peaceful society for all Israelis. We are working to make Americans who care about Israel more aware of the groups and individuals engaged in this fight and who need our support. Maya Haber's article in this issue gives some more background on this.

If you follow Israeli politics, you will have noticed that Zehava Galon, Chair of the Meretz party, has resigned from the Knesset; her seat has gone to Mossi Raz, a veteran Meretz activist, former head of Shalom Achshav, and a strong supporter of hers in the internecine debates now going on over the party's direction and nature. It is a sign of the times that both Meretz and Labor are now engaged in fundamental debates over ideology and priorities, as well as electoral strategies.

Another resignation is closer to home. We are sorry to announce that Maya Haber, our Director of Programming and Strategy for the last three years, is leaving that post. She has been a continual fount of ideas, inspiration, and strategic thinking for all her time with us. She will stay connected with us – as much as possible, from our point of view. The officers and the Board of PPI – and I personally – owe her a deep debt of gratitude for all she has done with and for us.

I recently saw the film, "Land Without Borders," whose director, Nir Baram, is interviewed in this issue. It is a sobering and disquieting film, filled with uncomfortable questions. PPI is sponsoring two showings of it at the Other Israel Festival in New York on Nov. 4 and 5. I strongly recommend seeing it if you can.

We also want to thank all of those who responded to our recent Rosh Hashanah fundraising appeal. We know that everyone reading this has numerous claims on limited funds, so we are grateful to all who are contributing to keep our work going. If you have not made a contribution, you can do so online at here.

We are also happy to announce that we are in the process of constructing a new, up-to-date website that we expect to go online by early November. Our thanks to PPI Vice-President Karen Shapiro, who is overseeing the process of getting it up.

I hope that you enjoy the articles in this issue. We have tried hard to present serious discussions of important issues that we hope will inform and even inspire you, our readers and supporters. Feedback to PPI or to individual writers is always welcome. We are seeking potential authors for upcoming issues; if you are interested in perhaps writing a piece, contact Dinesh or Paul.

Thank you for supporting PPI and our work to help to make Israel more just, democratic, and peaceful.

b'shalom



PAUL SCHAM
President

Contents

INSIGHTS

- 02 Is there hope for a Progressive Agenda in Israel?
– **By Maya Haber**

- 04 Deconstructing Balfour: The Declaration at 100
– **By Paul Scham**

FROM ISRAEL

- 06 It's time to include Arabs among the decision-makers in Israel
– **By Nasreen Hadad Haj-Yahya**

INTERVIEW

- 07 An interview with Nir Baram, Director of "Land Without Borders"
– **By Peter Eisenstadt**

PROGRAMS

- 10 Partners' outreach in Portland, ME: A dialogue begins
– **By Harlan Baker**

PARTNERS' TRIP TO ISRAEL

- 11 Opening heart and mind
– **By Leonard Grob**

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 12 **Webinar:** The Future of the Iran Nuclear Deal with Brian Katulis, Avishay Ben Sasson Gordis, and Maya Haber
Monday, November 6, 12pm EST

Breakfast Talk with Young Israeli-Left Leaders
Sunday, November 10

Discussion with Laura Wharton
Wednesday, November 29

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Is there hope for a Progressive Agenda in Israel?

By Maya Haber



Roger Hertog and Benjamin Netanyahu

At the end of almost every lecture I give, someone in the audience describes the miserable state of the Israeli left: The Labor Party's failure to offer a progressive alternative to Netanyahu, the rightwing attacks on human and civil rights organizations, and the increasing racism against Arabs and Ethiopians, and asks: Is there hope for a progressive agenda in Israel? For peace? These questions are often followed by another question: Is there anything we, progressive Americans, can do to advance a left agenda in Israel?

Yes there is.

To explain my answer, I take my audiences on a trip down memory lane. In 1992, the first time I ever voted, Meretz, the social democratic party, won 12 Knesset seats. Within the next three years, Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo accords, reached a peace agreement with Jordan and negotiated with Syria. At that time, my IDF unit was working on a just and fair distribution of water resources between Israel, the Palestinians, Jordan and Syria. We believed the conflict was about to end. And the Israeli Right, as we knew it, seemed dead in the water. Three years later, after Rabin's assassination, the Israeli Right was at the lowest point in its history. At university, I knew students who removed their kippas just to avoid being identified with the religious Right.

The crisis facing the Right in the mid-1990s was similar, perhaps even worse than the crisis facing the Israeli left today. But the Right refused to accept defeat. Even before Rabin's murder, the Right had devised a strategy to win back public opinion. It was hardly novel. It was taken right out of American conservatives' playbook. The Israeli Right realized that winning hearts and minds required serious engagement

with policy, training leadership for public service and conducting campaigns against their political foes. The Right in the 1990s poured their energy into building ideological infrastructure: think tanks, policy proposals, leadership training, and media. Ironically, it was an updated approach to what the international left had been doing until the 1960s.

The Israeli Right's success gives me hope. It's an almost apocryphal thing to say, I know. But we on the left can learn from their example, or really return to our roots, by adapting their model. This is what it takes to win again.

Shortly after Rabin's electoral victory in 1992, the Right realized the Israeli public was rejecting its Greater Israel plan. Most Israelis, both then and now don't want to live in an apartheid state. The Right realized that they needed an alternative strategy, a roundabout way to build public support. Jewish American conservatives came to their aid. The result was nonprofits like the New York based Tikvah Fund. Tikvah exemplifies the Israeli Right's successful strategy that not only helped propel them to power, but to maintain it for most of the last twenty years.

The Tikvah Fund was created the year Rabin won the election. Its board includes prominent American neoconservatives like William Kristol, founder and editor of *The Weekly Standard*, and Arthur Fried, the former managing director and CFO of Lehman Brothers. Roger Hertog, Tikvah's chairman, served as the chairman of the conservative think tank, the Manhattan Institute, and sat on the board of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). In 2010, the magazine *Philanthropy* described Hertog's philanthropic approach as "interested most of all in the power of ideas, the people who conceive them, the institutions that transmit them, the young minds

that receive (and re-conceive) them, and the social capital they can generate. And, as he did in the business world, he's willing to be patient with his money." Norman Podhoretz, the former editor of *Commentary* and longtime Hertog friend, added "Roger thinks of philanthropic endeavors as investments. The return he expects is long range." Indeed, Hertog's philanthropic awards were for him showing "how philanthropy can go beyond being merely tactical—the relief of immediate want; the provision of bricks and mortar—to become truly strategic." In Israel, as Prof. Nissim Calderon observed, these philanthropic "investments" in Israeli politics were designed to move 20-30 Knesset seats from the Center-Left to Netanyahu's coalition.

The Tikvah Fund's strategy has proven effective in the US domestic politics. The goal was to infuse Israeli politics and neoconservative ideology, train political leadership and provide a media platform from which to attack the Left.

In 1994, the Tikvah Fund established the Shalem Center as an Israeli version of the American Enterprise Institute. Much like American think tanks, the Shalem Center's research informs policymakers, educates the public, and trains future policy makers in its worldview. Since its founding, the Shalem Center has served as a revolving door for positions in the Israeli government. Some of its past fellows include thought leaders like Michael Oren, the former Israeli Ambassador to the US and current Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, former Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon, and Natan Sharansky, chairman of the Jewish Agency.

According to Amnon Portugali, "The Shalem Center imported American neoconservative and neoliberal ideas into the political and social discourse in Israel, as per the model of American rightwing think tanks, and its activity constitutes a classic paradigm of the way these American institutes operate, integrating strategic thinking and a neoconservative perspective with neoliberal social and economic policy." "When the Shalem Center was founded, it was considered a marginal phenomenon in the Israeli intellectual arena," Portugali said. "Today there is no research institute with as much influence on the Israeli government as the Shalem Center."

Along with think tanks, the Tikvah Fund began funding right-wing media. But unlike the casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, it did not expend a fortune financing a free newspaper. Rather, since 2012 it spent \$200,000-400,000 on the website Mida, an Israeli version of Breitbart News. It publishes articles denouncing political correctness, welfare policies, and "the liberal media's" campaigns against Netanyahu and Trump. It imagines itself in a Jewish conservative tradition of thinkers and insists, for example, that Herzl was really a neoliberal entrepreneur.

But its main successes have been in orchestrating smear PR campaigns against left-leaning organizations like the New

Israel Fund, Molad: the Center for the Renewal of Democracy, and Breaking the Silence, and others. Mida seeks to expose leftist organizations as fifth columnists, i.e., traitors, by identifying foreign sources of funding. One article reads:

Since time immemorial the fight against the "occupation" verged on subversion against the State. The actions of Breaking the Silence, B'tselem, Peace Now and their like flirted with the dark side of international Israel hatred. It's sufficient to examine the donor list of Breaking the Silence, most of whom also stand behind the BDS campaign, to understand [the real motives of the fight against the occupation].

So Breaking the Silence activists can argue that they are former combat soldiers who have Israel's interests at heart, but their donor lists supposedly reveal their real motives. Regardless of how baseless are its smear campaigns, Mida has effectively penetrated mainstream media to delegitimize the Israeli left. Today every interviewer asks peace activists: "who funds you"?

Ironically, we know that neoconservative Americans have been funding Ran Baratz, the founder of Mida, with the explicit intent to take over the Israeli political sphere. But no one asks Baratz who pays his salary. In 2015, Netanyahu appointed Baratz, who had called President Barak Obama an anti-Semite, as his media tsar. Using Mida's logic we could accuse the American neocons on the Tikvah Fund board of trying to brainwash the Israeli public with anti-Obama propaganda.

Given such dire circumstances and the uphill battle, why do I think there is hope for a progressive agenda in Israel?

Simply put, the Israeli left is in a much better place than the Right was in the mid-1990s. Most of the Israeli public supports a two-state solution, social democratic economic reforms and religious pluralism. Largely below the radar, the left has already established the building blocks of a new and potent political infrastructure. In recent years, progressive Israeli organizations are investing in education, leadership training, and informing policy-makers. They have identified the vulnerabilities of the Right and started fighting back. Now we need to learn from the successful experience of American neocons like Roger Hertog and start thinking of "philanthropic endeavors as investments." Like them, we too should invest in Israeli politics, maximizing the impact of our contributions. ■



Maya Haber is Director of Programming and Strategy at Partners for Progressive Israel.

Deconstructing Balfour: The Declaration at 100

By Paul Scham



If you follow news concerning Israel, it's been pretty hard to miss the spate of anniversaries that are being celebrated this year and next. The next one, coming up on November 2, is 'Balfour Day,' the date in 1917 on which British foreign Minister Arthur James Balfour sent his famous letter to Lord Rothschild, known forever after as the Balfour Declaration. In the undergraduate course I teach every year on the conflict, I parse every sentence and demonstrate how a lot is packed into those 67 words.

The operative part reads (emphasis mine):

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

Traditionally Zionists have celebrated it as the entrance of Zionism onto the world stage and as one of the most important steps leading

to Israel's establishment 31 years later. Conversely, Arabs and Palestinians have opposed it from the moment of its announcement as a "promise of who doesn't own to those who don't deserve." More recently, Palestinians have started a movement to get Britain to apologize for its issuance, a suggestion HMG has sharply rejected. A more idiosyncratic view was recently expressed by Anshel Pfeffer in Ha'aretz, decrying the purported importance of the Declaration and asserting that it really made little difference in the course of history because Israel would nevertheless certainly have come into being.

No one can ever know whether the Balfour Declaration was essential or superfluous; most likely something in between. But even without coming to a straightforward conclusion on that – which is inherently in the slightly disreputable realm of counterfactual history – anyone who wants to understand the origin and nature of the conflict needs to understand what the Declaration was, what it wasn't, and what it led to. It is also essential to see what assumptions were explicitly or implicitly included in its phrasing. This is, of course, a synthesis and summary; innumerable articles and books have been written about it.

The Declaration itself is a masterpiece of ambiguity but there is no denying that it was understood at the time, and subsequently, as conferring (or recognizing, according to Zionists) a “national” connection between the Jewish people as a collective entity and Palestine (the word generally used then both by Jews and non-Jews in a geographical sense). This was still the age of imperialism and colonialism, and major European nations were used to determining the disposition of territories around the world. So Britain understood and was understood, as a matter of political and military fact, to have committed itself to the principal Zionist aim of securing Palestine as a ‘national home’ for Jews, an obligation recognized by HMG until the White Paper of 1939, which rejected that commitment.

However, the words “national home” have no history or meaning in international law; so it was deliberately unclear what, if anything HMG was promising. Moreover, by employing the phrase “in Palestine” (and not, for example “Palestine as a national home”), the Declaration clearly meant to express that not all of Palestine was reserved for Jews. On the other hand, the use of the word “national” was definitely a signal victory for Zionists. Zionism’s primary goal was to reframe Judaism in national terms – and this framing was clearly accepted by the Declaration. A religion does not get or need a “national home.”

Equally important was the mode of reference to the vast majority of the inhabitants of the land at the time, the Christian and Muslim Arabs who constituted approximately 92% of the population. They (understandably) were incensed by being unnamed and referred to simply by what they were not, i.e., Jewish. At the time they were generally called “Arabs,” as the term ‘Palestinian’ wasn’t used until the 1920s. Moreover, they were promised simply “civil and religious rights,” in clear and stark contrast to the national rights granted to Jews. It is true that Palestinian Arab nationalism was barely a dream at that time; most Palestinian Arabs would have thought of themselves as located in “Greater Syria” (bilad al-sham). This perception changed in the subsequent few years as Britain and France carved up bilad al-sham in various ways, which now comprises Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Palestine (however understood).

Why did the British issue the Declaration – and why then? This is the subject of even more books, and space precludes an adequate, let alone full discussion. Among the reasons were:

- British imperial objectives, especially vis-à-vis their French allies. Britain and France had already divided up the Middle East in the secret 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement (though Britain had the previous year promised to support an Arab empire under the Hashemite family in the Hussein-McMahon correspondence). But now Britain was staking its

claim to the area just north and east of the Suez Canal, its vital lifeline to India. The Middle East was the last major part of the world not yet colonized by European Christian powers and rectifying that was an explicit post-war aim.

- The assumption that a Jewish presence in Palestine would be supportive of British interests, and that Jews would regard Britain as a necessary counterweight to the Arab population. In other words, the British hoped to use the Zionists for their own imperial interests. In retrospect it is obvious that the Zionists were far more successful in using the British than vice-versa. Both Zionists and Arabs see the British as the villains of the period.
- An overestimation of “Jewish power”, hoping especially to influence both revolutionary Russian Bolsheviks and rich American capitalists to support the Allies in the world war. This is a fascinating miscalculation for many reasons.
- Genuine sympathy for Jews, sometimes called (anachronistically) ‘Christian Zionism’. This was certainly a factor for the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George.
- The persuasive diplomacy of Chaim Weizmann, the primary Zionist leader in Britain. Some denominate it as a ‘thank you gift’ to him, as in his day job as a chemist he was the principal inventor of synthetic acetone (guncotton), a major contribution to the Allied war effort.

The British strategy initially worked (helped along by the presence of a British army already busy conquering Palestine). The Allies won the war and Britain received the ‘Mandate for Palestine’ from the League of Nations, making it a British colony in all but name. The Mandatory document incorporated the Declaration in its entirety, though some British officials were already dubious that the Declaration had been a wise idea.

Thus, from 100 years out, it is clear that the Balfour Declaration both reflected and furthered British ambitions at the time of its issuance. It was not a conspiracy, but rather a manifestation of imperial assumptions and objectives during a horrendous war. Obviously, it benefited the Zionists and disadvantaged the Arabs, but to draw a straight line between the Declaration and 1948, let alone today’s reality, would be a distortion and over-simplification of both the Declaration and the history of the last 100 years. ■

Paul Scham is President of Partners for Progressive Israel and a Research Associate Professor of Israel Studies at the University of Maryland.



It's Time to Include Arabs among the Decision-Makers in Israel

By Nasreen Hadad Haj-Yahya



Recently, an advertising campaign was launched in the Arab media that calls upon Israel's Arab citizens to learn about their rights as employees and avoid being exploited in the workplace. But, wonder of wonders, the employees who appear on the screen are not only construction workers or cleaners. The characters depicted in the ads are mostly young people, women and men wearing button-down shirts who work in offices. As such, this is a most unusual campaign, and not a trivial one.

Why did the people who created this campaign, which is directed primarily toward low-status employees who may well be unaware of their rights, depict Arab employees in this way? In order to get to the root of the matter, we should bear in mind that the employment rate in the Arab sector is roughly 70 percent among men and 33 percent among women. Among the unemployed, 28 percent of men and 54 percent of women are interested in working.

In July 2016, the Prime Minister's Office, Finance Ministry, and Social Equality Ministry published a report titled "A System-Wide Plan for the Economic Integration of Arab Society." According to this report, the gap between Arab and Jewish workers manifests itself in lower income levels for educated employees from Arab society. The average hourly wage for an Arab worker with sixteen years of education is NIS 54 as compared with NIS 82 for a Jewish worker with a similar educational background. Accordingly, the average gross monthly income of employees from the Arab population was NIS 6,571 — roughly two-thirds the average wage of Jewish workers.

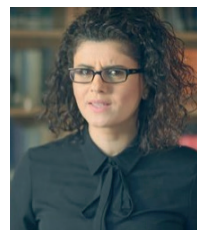
A quick check shows that the campaign was conceived by two agencies: the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Minorities Sector Economic Development Authority. This seems to be no coincidence, as the heads of both agencies are members of the Arab minority.

The campaign's indirect message is twofold. First, it is aimed at younger members of the Arab community, who are now attending college in increasing numbers, and in particular young Arab women, among whom the percentage of college graduates (the percentage of women aged 25 to 34 who have 16 years of education) tripled from 10 to 30 percent between 2000 and 2014. Second, the campaign also informs the non-college-educated population, addressing them as equals so that the ad doesn't seem like a government propaganda campaign that just pays lip-service to society's most vulnerable citizens. In this way, of course, the campaign can also be effective in terms of its original intent: to raise awareness of employment rights among all employees, from construction workers to physicians.

However, this is just one example of the path that Israel needs to take. What we should learn from this campaign is that the state and its Arab leadership — not only the political leadership — must work together to bring as many Arab citizens as possible into the decision-making echelons. While this will not solve the ideological conflicts regarding the future of the occupied territories, it will help to create an infrastructure for a more egalitarian and tolerant society, strengthen the Israeli economy, and enable the implementation of a policy of narrowing gaps and enhancing equal opportunity.

In addition to improving the economy, Arab representation in the public administration decision-making process, as shown by the unusual decision made in the recent campaign, plays a vital role in promoting substantive equality in Israel. ■

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An Interview with Nir Baram, Director of “Land Without Borders”

CONVERSATIONS



A Scene from “Land Without Borders”

“Land Without Borders” is a sobering film since the future of peace between Israel and Palestinians is a sobering subject. The present situation is untenable, a positive way forward seems impossible. The current status quo is rickety and untenable, though it has lasted for decades. The two state solution increasing seems like a chimera, a beautiful idea that refuses to be captured by reality. And it is failing to even inspire the faithful. The alternatives are either worse—apartheid by another name—or seem even less likely of realization than two separate states. None of the various alternatives for shared Jewish and Palestinian sovereignty seem remotely within the realm of political possibility. Increasingly, when thinking of the Israeli and Palestinian morass, I am reminded of the famous remark by Sherlock Holmes: “Once you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.” But even the celebrated Mr. Holmes would have problems solving a case when all the solutions seem impossible. And yet the situation is far too dire to lapse into inaction or cynical despair. This is the state of affairs that Nir Baram explores in his film “Land Without Borders.”



Nir Baram comes from impeccable Labor Zionist stock. His grandfather, Moshe Baram, was in the Knesset from 1959 to 1977, and served terms as Minister of Labor and Minister of Welfare. His father, Uzi Baram, was a prominent Member of Knesset from 1977 to 2011, and served as Minister of Tourism and Minister of Internal Affairs.

Nir was born in 1976, and while he is intensely interested in politics, he has chosen a different path. He has made his reputation as an award-winning journalist and novelist, the author of *The Remaker of Dreams* (2006), *Good People* (2010), winner of the Prime Minister’s Award for Hebrew Literature, and *World Shadow* (2013.) *Good People*, his only novel available in English, is a complex and somewhat sympathetic account of government collaborators in Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union, exploring “how we can go out into the world and live and work in a society we consider unjust?” There are parallels to his anti-heroes in every country, he believes, including Israel.

His film, “Land Without Borders,” is an adaptation from a book of the same name, *Land with Borders: My Journey Around East Jerusalem and the West Bank*, published in Hebrew in 2015 and in English the following year. It was a journey of meetings with Palestinians and Jews, in refugee camps and settlements. The people interviewed in the film all had passionate political convictions, but none of them were politicians. Although Nir asked the occasional pertinent question, for the most part he just listened. What follows is an edited version of our conversation.

PPI: The two state solution does not come off very well in the film; at least no one in the film supported it. Was this by design?

Nir Baram: It was not exactly by design; I didn’t know what people would say beforehand. But when you’re speaking to settlers and Palestinians on the West Bank, you have a general idea about where the conversations will go.

An Interview with Nir Baram, Director of “Land Without Borders”

PPI: Do you think the two state solution is dead?

Nir Baram: Look, I want two states, an Israel and a Palestine. But I also don't want Donald Trump to be president of the United States. But my wishing it were so won't make either happen. To say that the only way forward is the two state solution is intellectually irresponsible; just repeating the words “two state solution, two state solution” doesn't get us anywhere. I once was invited to speak to a group in New York City, they told me, “We only want you to speak if you support a two state solution.” I told them to go screw themselves.

PPI: One of the most provocative statements in your film is that Israelis must think in terms of 1948, not 1967.

Nir Baram: The story of the Nakba was hidden from us. When I told this to people outside Israel, they sort of laughed at me. “What do you mean it was hidden? It wasn't hard to find. Why didn't you look?” It's more that we never considered it seriously. There wasn't much to say about it. My father wrote for Ha'aretz for 15 years. He never wrote about the refugee problem. I asked him why. He really didn't have a good answer. There wasn't just a political gap; there was an empathy gap.

PPI: Several Palestinians in the film speak of the need for Palestinians to return to their ancestral homes. But as you say in the film, about 1% of (Jewish) Israelis would support an unlimited right of Palestinian return.

Nir Baram: No doubt, but the call for Palestinian return that has to be the beginning of the dialogue, not the end. Look, any solution is going to be messy. How can we consider a solution in which the majority of the settlers get to stay without allowing substantial numbers of Palestinians to return to Israel, along with a comprehensive system of reparations? When I spoke to Palestinians on the West Bank, again and again, the right to return to Israel was the issue that most mattered to them. There is no solution without taking this into account. If Israelis are serious about addressing this, they will find a way.

PPI: In her recent book, *City on a Hilltop: American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement*, Sara Hirschhorn has the following to say: “The locus of today's debate is no longer about the occupation after 1967, but about the legacies of 1948—the dual narrative of Jewish nationhood and Palestinian Nakba.” Do you agree?

Nir Baram: Sort of, but in the end it's not a choice between 1948 and 1967, but accepting and recognizing the legacies of both years. The “occupation” cannot be addressed outside of the broader context of Israeli and Palestinian history and both societies going back to 1948 and the Nakba. And we can only view this through the lens of 1967.

When I say, “Think about 1948,” I mean in large part, listen to the Palestinians and take their desire for return seriously. Probably 95% of left wing Israelis do not regularly talk to Palestinians. How could they know what they want? Instead they play games, define parameters of a two state solution, argue over petty details. They are living in a ghetto of knowledge and empathy. Talk to the Palestinians! Go the West Bank. Have your basic assumptions challenged. What you will discover is that the wound of 1948 has not healed, not at all. It won't be papered over by the terms of an unrealized peace settlement. Who knows how different things might be if a viable Palestinian state had been created by the Oslo process. But it wasn't, and here we are.

PPI: What did you think of the settlers you met?

Nir Baram: I talked to them about my politics before we started filming. And I told them to speak frankly. But in the end even the most reasonable among them have nothing to offer but a racist, apartheid state, in which Palestinians would not have equal rights or full citizenship.

PPI: The well-to-do real estate lawyer in the film was particularly chilling.

Nir Baram: Yes, he is a specialist in purchasing Palestinian land for settlers. It's a very complicated process, filled with subterfuges and middle men.

PPI: When you asked him what happened to Palestinians who sell land if the transaction is discovered, he said “Well, we always try to protect them, but we're not always successful.” But that just seemed to him to be an acceptable risk for the Palestinian. When you asked what should happen to Jews that sell land to Palestinians, he replied that if he was in charge of things, they would be hanged.

Nir Baram: Yes, it was chilling, but I appreciated his candor. I think most settlers would agree with him, perhaps except for the part about hanging. The settler view is that Palestinians can (or should or must) sell land to Jews, but Jews should never, and never be allowed to sell land to Palestinians.

An Interview with Nir Baram, Director of “Land Without Borders”

PPI: I guess its obligatory at this point to ask what you think is the future of Israel and Palestine.

Nir Baram: I don't know, of course. Nothing will happen in the short run. Netanyahu has shown to the world that no one will force Israel to do anything that it doesn't want to do. The United States has no power when it comes to the occupation. The settlers won't leave. For most Israelis today the occupation simply doesn't matter; it's not relevant to their lives. They don't care, and aren't interested in hearing about it. I still support a two state solution, but we can't wait for it to happen, or not happen. That is why I've become active in the 'two states, one homeland' movement. There won't be change next year, in two years, in five years, but change will come.

PPI: What do you think of BDS?

Nir Baram: I'm an Israeli. I've lived my entire life in Israel. My novels and other writings are in Hebrew. As long as I think Israel is changeable, I will try to change things here, as an insider. On the other hand, if I wasn't an Israeli, especially if I was a Palestinian, I might well feel different. I understand the logic of BDS. But Israelis and Palestinians need to talk and listen to each other. That is the purpose of my film, to stop using old, inherited clichés as a crutch, as a way of not thinking seriously about the present and future. Too many people on the Israeli left just talk to themselves. It's why the left is so weak.

PPI: What can or should American Jews do?

Nir Baram: They can do a lot. They have done a lot. It's interesting that so many of the younger generation of American Jews are alienated and don't relate to Israel. I'm not surprised. Look, Israel is not a small, poor beleaguered country anymore. We don't need your sympathy. What we need are brutally honest discussions about Israel's future. American Jews can help prevent Israel from becoming an apartheid state, or help to make an Israeli apartheid state more likely. Things are stark. ■

Peter Eisenstadt is an independent historian, living in Clemson, South Carolina.



Partners for Progressive Israel is sponsoring a Special Film Screening of *A Land Without Borders* by Nir Baram at the Other Israel Film Festival.



Saturday, November 4, 6:45pm

JCC Manhattan

334 Amsterdam Ave at 76th Street, New York



Sunday, November 5, 4:00 pm

King Juan Carlos Center

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Partners' outreach in Portland, ME: A Dialogue Begins



Maya Haber giving a talk in Portland, ME

The great state of Maine is (justifiably) not known as one of the centers of American Jewish life, with an estimated 14,000 Jews.

Metropolitan Portland, the capital, has four congregations in three active synagogues, a brand new Jewish Community Center and a Campus Hillel that includes several colleges and universities in Southern Maine. There are no left Zionist organizations in the community, but representatives from AIPAC and the Israeli consulate in Boston visit frequently. On the other side of the spectrum, there has been some promotion of BDS in area colleges. It was clearly time for some dialogue and outside input.

It was with this lack of alternative voices in mind that I contacted Partners for Progressive Israel to organize a speaking engagement for Maya Haber. I was hoping to attract a mixed audience from among the Jewish community, students, and political activists.

Getting support was not easy. The Jewish Community Alliance had its own timetable for programming and declined to help promote the event. On the positive side the staff and rabbi of Congregation Temple Beth El and its Tikkun Olam committee sent out emails to its members. On the left, the local chapter of the Democratic Socialist of America (which supports BDS) declined to send out a notice to its members, though half a dozen DSA members did attend the forum. Unfortunately, Southern Maine Hillel also refused to help organize or publicize the discussion.

Nevertheless, on Tuesday, October 17, Maya arrived and spoke to an audience of University of Southern Maine students and members of the Jewish community at the University's campus

center. Most of the students had probably never heard a speaker from Israel or a Zionist organization before.

While the evening talk was not as well attended as that at the university, there were a number of political activists in attendance, including two candidates for Portland City Council and a state representative. In between the events, Maya met with the program director of Temple Beth El, who is very sympathetic to the Israeli left and peace camp.

Unlike many presentations on Israel that deal solely with the question of the occupation, Maya concentrated on social justice issues inside the Green Line. She made the connection with how they affect Israeli attitudes towards civic participation and empathy towards treatment of Palestinians.

One of the attendees commented afterward that he was surprised to learn that the once-vaunted Israeli welfare state has dwindled to the point where it spends a lower percentage of its GDP on social welfare than does the United States, and that Israel uses the settlements as a de facto welfare state where everything from housing to bus fares are subsidized for the settlers.

Another attendee, Craig Dorais, a candidate for the city council and a DSA member said, "Her talk helped me to crystallize some of my thinking regarding how economic pressures harms the level of empathy that even good and moral people have towards the plight of others."

A particularly poignant comment came from a young DSA member who wrote to me afterwards, "It is not often that my understanding is challenged at the core. Talking with her (Maya) definitely adds some important details to the way we approach BDS (while still supporting its intent)."

I'm very hopeful that this is just the beginning of a continuing relationship and dialogue between Partners for Progressive Israel and the Maine Jewish and political activist community. ■



Harlan Baker is a former Maine state representative and Vice Chair of the Cumberland County Democratic Committee.

Opening Heart and Mind

By Leonard Grob



Participants in the 2011 PPI Symposium

In January 2017 I embarked on my ninth consecutive Partners for Progressive Israel Symposium/Study Tour in Israel and Palestine. Over a period of more than two decades, the annual tours have afforded an opportunity for participants to learn, first hand, many of the political, socio-economic, and security concerns of key Israeli and Palestinian leaders and activists. Each Symposium's schedule is jam-packed; we are on the move from early morning to 9 or 10 at night: The intensive nature of each day's programming has allowed me to learn in one week's time what might otherwise call for a visit of much greater duration. And what is learned during a tour speaks to both the intellect and the heart. I have come away from each week's set of experiences with greater compassion for those Israelis and Palestinians--both within and outside of government—who courageously confront seemingly intractable problems on a daily basis. I have come to grasp the tragic paradox that is the existence of conflicting narratives, each of which contains elements that accord with "the truth" as some historians have come to see it. Each tour has reminded me to empathize with the suffering of two peoples in one homeland, while at the same time recalling that Israel, as the stronger party

to the conflict, must take the initiative to move toward its resolution

PPI tours inspire participants to work for an end to the Occupation upon their return home. I have come away from these visits with a renewed commitment to work for a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians and for the advance of human rights in the nation, Israel, that speaks in my name as a Jew. In 2017, for example, our meeting at Ofer military prison and court in the West Bank led us to understand anew how the Occupation dehumanizes Palestinian youths while, at the same time, the Occupation back upon itself to foster dehumanizing behavior back in Israel. After such a visit one cannot but return to the U.S. with new dedication to play a role as American Jews working to end the Occupation.

While aiming to educate participants about the many facets of the situation on the ground in this region, each tour has its own focus. The 2017 tour, while exposing us, as usual, to the thoughts of Meretz Knesset members and other members of the party leadership, took us on a journey that helped launch an important set of initiatives upon our return to the work of PPI in the U.S. We tour

participants met with leaders of six NGOs that believe that only a shift in the Israeli electorate will end the Occupation, and that this shift will only occur when constituencies that have traditionally—and often in knee-jerk fashion—voted for the right and center-right come to vote for the left/left-center. We met with NGOs such as the graduates of Hashomer Hatzair who work with underserved youth in economically depressed areas; we sat down with the head of The Social and Economic Academy, dedicated to training a new progressive leadership that will address the huge gap between haves and have-nots in Israel. These meetings taught us that electoral change can only come about when the left understands that many who live in Israel's social and geographical periphery are deeply concerned with socio-economic issues; we learned how the Occupation and Israel's socio-economic ills are integrally linked. Inspired by these meetings, several of us on the January tour have proposed that PPI emphasize the need to educate American Jews about the work of these NGOs.

The January 2017 study tour also brought us to meet with individuals from the right—Yehuda Glick from Likud comes to mind—as well as a member of the Arab Joint List in the Knesset and, of course, our natural allies in Meretz. Activists from the Movement for the Future of the Western Negev helped expose us to the trials of those living on or near the border with Gaza. Bedouins attempting to return to homes repeatedly destroyed by the Israeli government spoke poignantly of their plight. We met with leaders of an NGO devoted to the cause of religious pluralism and those committed to protecting the environment. After a week of such meetings, we participants in the 2017 tour returned home filled with new ideas and a renewed passion to further the work of PPI to support those in Israel who want to end the Occupation. We hope many of you will consider joining the June 14-21, 2018 tour. ■

Leonard Grob is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Fairleigh Dickinson University and a Vice-President of PPI.



Upcoming Events



**Monday, November 6,
12pm EST**

The Future of the Iran Nuclear Deal: (Re)considering Israeli and US Interests

Brian Katulis, Avishay Ben Sasson Gordis and Maya Haber



**Friday, November 10,
8:30 am**

Next Generation of Progressive Political Leadership in Israel

Bar Gissin (National Chairperson of Young Meretz)

Ido Stossel (Former Advisor to MK Stav Shaffir)

Partners for Progressive Israel Office, New York



**Wednesday, November 29,
Time TBD**

Dr. Laura Wharton of Hebrew University, Jerusalem Discussing Religious-State Relations in Israel In New York City



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Published by Partners for Progressive Israel

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