

Defying growing state repression, 100,000 Israelis rally against war

David Cohen in Israel
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More than 100,000 Israelis gathered in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv on May 11 for a Peace Coalition rally. Yossi Sarid of the social democratic party, Meretz, who is the leader of the opposition in the Knesset, and former Justice Minister Yossi Beilin spoke at the rally, as did entertainer Dudu Topaz and writer Amos Oz. The demonstrators held up signs calling for the withdrawal of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the creation of “two states for two peoples.”

In his speech, Sarid stressed the “unity of the left.” Writer Amos Oz called for the building of a new “peace party” based upon social democratic principles.

The Zionist left forbade the anti-Zionist left from raising Palestinian flags or anti-Zionist banners. When a group of demonstrators held aloft a banner reading “Stop IDF terror,” a few stewards attacked them and tried to force them to take it down. Only when supporters of the Communist Party defended their right to free speech did the stewards back down.

Yoni, an anti-Zionist activist, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “If Sarid is talking about this kind of unity of the left, I think we should not accept this kind of hooliganism. The real unity is the Jewish-Arab unity of the workers, and we must place ourselves as the leftist opposition.”

The Peace Coalition is seeking to corral rising opposition to Ariel Sharon’s war against the Palestinians behind an alternative nationalist agenda for the preservation of Israel. But its insistence on a program of patriotism and national unity is in conflict with the growing opposition to the ruling elite and reflects the increasingly repressive reaction of the Israeli state and the Zionist right.

Yaffa Yarkoni was known for years as the “voice of the wars.” Her songs provided a soundtrack to most of

the wars Israel has carried out against the Palestinians since 1948. But two weeks ago, in an interview with the Israeli army radio, the singer said that the massacre carried out in Jenin’s refugee camp reminded her of the crimes of the Nazis. Yarkoni repudiated Prime Minister Sharon’s policy and asked whether Jenin reflected the morality of Israeli society.

Her words created a public outcry, with many people calling for a boycott of the veteran singer. The Israeli union of performing artists (EMI) decided to cancel a public event planned to honor Yarkoni.

Last week the newspaper *Haaretz* reported: “An extreme right-wing organization ... threatened Friday to assassinate singer Yaffa Yarkoni if she performs at Saturday’s peace rally at Tel Aviv’s Rabin Square. The threat was made in a telephone call to the Peace Coalition, which is organizing Saturday’s rally. A Peace Coalition activist reported the incident to police, who have begun investigating.”

Haaretz reported that the organization “has claimed responsibility for a series of anti-Arab terror attacks last year, including the shooting attack in which a Palestinian truck driver was killed near Mishor Adumin.”

The ever more frequent resort to intimidation, violence and censorship is a measure of the political and social tensions wracking Israeli society. Many leftist broadcasters are being victimized. Carmit Guy, a veteran leftist broadcaster who came from the ranks of the Communist Party of Israel in the mid-1960s, was suspended from his post.

Other leftist journalists have also been sacked. The government has subjected Channel 1, Israel’s official TV channel, to censorship, including orders not to broadcast interviews with senior members of the Palestinian leadership or radical leftists. Tamar

Gozanski, a member of the Communist Party faction in the Israeli parliament, is permanently excluded from all the talk shows and news programs.

Amnon Dankner, editor of the daily *Ma'ariv*, has fired most of the leftist journalists who refused to solidarize with Israel's policy in the occupied territories. The administration of the Israeli official radio station decided to cancel its subscription to the liberal newspaper *Haaretz*, in order to prevent its staff from being influenced by the leftist opinions of some of the newspaper's journalists, such as Gideon Levi and Amira Hass.

Many curbs have been placed on the Arabic section of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority, in order to "crystallize a line of news that will serve Israel's goals in the propaganda campaign against the Arabs." A new lexicon has been composed in order to "serve Israel's goals." For example, the word "occupied territories" is banned, as is any questioning of the veracity of announcements made by IDF spokesmen.

These repressive measures are provoking increasing disquiet among Israeli intellectuals. In an article entitled "On totalitarian democracy" published April 28 in *Haaretz*, Zvi Bar'el wrote on the Yarkoni affair:

"The Israeli union of performing artists (EMI), the court for offenses against state security in Turkey and the association of journalists and writers in Egypt could have signed a twin-brains agreement," Bar'el wrote. "The law in Turkey stipulates that no material liable to undercut the unity of the nation may be published; in Egypt, the journalists' association bars the publication of anything that smacks of normalization with Israel; while in Israel, EMI, along with some youth movements, is sanctifying the emergency consensus."

Bar'el continued: "In Egypt, the politics of the arts are dictated by state-controlled professional associations, as is the case in all the other Arab countries, as well as Iran and Turkey. In Israel, the government doesn't even have to intervene.... The term 'intellectuals of the state' has taken root in the Arab countries and refers to members of the intelligentsia who toe the government line. Syrian President Bashar Assad defined the intellectual as someone who makes use of his knowledge for the good of the state, meaning, for the good of the government. In Israel, toeing the line is a voluntary act, as befits a democratic society. But as soon as the 'line' becomes totalitarian,

breaching it becomes treason."

Sharon's regime is seeking to expel his leftist political opponents from any senior positions in politics, journalism and the arts. Education Minister Limor Livnat (Likud) has promised to purge the education system of any "anti-patriotic" phenomena. She has issued orders for students to sing Israel's national anthem every morning and for an end to the use of what she termed "non-patriotic" books. Livnat also conducted a shakeup of the Council for Higher Education in order to install representatives who will be more "patriotic."

One of her nominees, Rabbi Mordechai Alon, recently gave a lecture against homosexuality. Livnat has also awarded the Israel Prize to a scientist who spoke out sharply in condemnation of homosexuals.

On the Israeli universities, Arab students are denied the right to demonstrate. Right-wing students have abused lecturers who spoke out in favor of the "refusniks"—military reservists who will not serve in the occupied territories. Livnat called for the lecturers to be tried for "criminal incitement against the state."



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