

## 'Sickout' Hit Sharon's U.S. Appearances

In the ten days prior to Ariel Sharon's meeting with President George W. Bush, Lyndon LaRouche's Presidential campaign saturated the Washington and New York areas with nearly 500,000 copies of LaRouche's "Götterdämmerung in Palestine" statement, against the adoption of openly fascist precedents in the Occupation under Sharon. They also intervened in dozens of feeder events for the visit by Sharon and his Labor Party Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer.

Under pressure internationally, and immediately from this shockwave intervention, Sharon's team seemed virtually in hiding in the United States.

- President Bush, after a 45-minute meeting with Sharon in the Oval Office, held a press availability with only a handful of vetted reporters.

- Ben-Eliezer, after meeting with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, cancelled a press conference scheduled at the Pentagon after the meeting.

- Sharon cancelled his pre-announced interview on National Public Radio's evening news program.

- In New York City, Sharon and Ben-Eliezer cancelled all public appearances scheduled. Sharon, reported sick with a cold or the flu, cancelled a joint press conference with Sir Henry Kissinger at a New York City hotel, and failed to appear at another public event open to the press.

- Ben-Eliezer cancelled a high-profile visit to "Ground Zero" in New York, giving no reason.

—Scott Thompson

as if they were dirt. A decent person *just does not do that.*"

The famous Zionist song "Ein li erez Aheret" was sung, in both the Hebrew and Arab languages. The words are simple: "I have no other country to go to. And even if the land is burning under my feet, this is my home."

### Sharon Has Again Split the Nation

Galvanized by the Feb. 9 surprise, the Peace Coalition announced a second demonstration for Feb. 16, and included among the speakers Dr. Sari Susseibeh, the Palestinian representative in Jerusalem. This coalition embraces Peace Now, the Meretz Party, the peace faction of the Labor Party and several other organizations. And 130 of the 225 or so signators of the soldiers' letter met on Feb. 12, to map out how to expand their campaign. The soldiers' spokesman, Amit Mashiah, said, "We will continue to encourage the social discourse on the intolerable price we pay for staying in the territories."

According to one reserve officer, the soldiers are waiting to see what the army will do when the next group of reservists is called up for service, and refuses to go to the territories. If the army command decides to jail them, this would provoke the group to take action, including their own demonstrations or going to the international media, something they have so far refrained from doing. Should senior reserve officers next begin to join this resistance, its impact will grow rapidly. The Israeli press reports that for every reservist who has signed the letter, another ten are finding other "legal" ways not to serve.

In the last weeks, a deepening shift in the Israeli population has been fueled by the growing realization that Sharon's dead-end policy has brought neither peace nor security. This has only been made worse by the collapse of the Israeli economy. The Israeli currency, the shekel, has collapsed by 10% in the last two months, with recurrent linkage between each escalation in the military-security situation, and a succession

of economic disasters.

Polls show that Sharon's approval ratings have dropped in a few months from 70% to 48%. His coalition government lost one of its partners the same week as the peace demonstration: the One Nation party left the government in protest over the passing of the annual budget, which it charged was "anti-social" because of massive cuts in social services. Although the party is small, its leader, Amir Peretz, is the head of the Histadrut, Israel's largest trade union federation.

Opposition is taking hold within the Labor Party rank-and-file, to remaining in the Sharon government, as the policies of Foreign Minister Peres are being seen at best as opportunistic, at worst as Sharon's means to continue his hard-line policies. This opposition is also directed at the Labor Party's new chairman, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, who is currently Defense Minister.

Knesset speaker Avraham Burg leads the Labor Party faction which is now demanding withdrawal from the government. In the second week of February, Burg won the support of the majority of his party's Knesset members, to accept an invitation to speak before the Palestinian Legislative Council, in an attempt to get political talks started. Ben-Eliezer, like Sharon and the right wing, bitterly opposes Burg's visit, but he is undeterred. "How is it possible for me to send my son to fight in Ramallah," Burg declared, "but for me not to be prepared to risk my life if I believe it could bring peace?"

This ferment arose just as Sharon returns from his meeting with President George W. Bush on Feb. 7, and their apparent agreement on what one Israeli commentator called "a rhetorically violent Washington-Jerusalem axis." The European Union took its action against Sharon at that same moment that he was in Washington. The growing ferment against Sharon's fascism, inside and outside Israel, carries a potential for change in the global strategic situation.