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A crowd in Tel Aviv demonstrates for peace

Middle East

ISRAEL

The emergence in recent weeks of a movement in Israel that favors more flexible peace proposals, and the government's sponsorship of a counter organization, have had the effect of undermining the solidarity that the government has sought to foster and may give rise to a more substantive national debate on the Arab-Israeli peace process. Until now, public discussion has tended to focus more on Prime Minister Begin's tactical blunders and on strains in US-Israeli relations, than on the issues themselves.

The leaders of a "Peace Now" movement, which launched a campaign on 1 April with a large outdoor rally in Tel Aviv, are continuing their efforts to bring pressure on Begin to reassess his peace proposals. They have initiated signature and letter-writing campaigns and plan to hold another rally on 30 April in Jerusa-

lem. Leaders of Mapam—the leftist ally of the opposition Labor Party—appear to be deeply involved in the nascent movement, but the Labor Party itself is keeping a discreet distance for now.

After some hesitation, leaders of the Herut Party—Begin's faction of the dominant Likud bloc—organized a counter organization called the "Movement for a Secure Peace." The hesitation reflected concern in Herut that a countercampaign would focus greater public attention on the "Peace Now" group and invite unfavorable comparisons if the "Secure Peace" movement failed to match the public support its rival has attracted.

Herut leaders apparently concluded that leaving the field entirely to the "Peace Now" group could have far worse consequences. The Herut-sponsored group has launched its own letter-writing and signature campaigns in support of government policy and plans to hold a rally on 15 April in the same square in Tel Aviv that was used for the first "Peace Now" demonstration.

The "Peace Now" movement is almost certain to step up its own efforts in

response and is likely to become more shrill in its criticism of Begin and his policies. But the activities of the two groups may give impetus to a fuller public debate on the specifics of principles involved in a negotiated settlement.

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