During 1989, three powerful political forces came together to express their outrage and rejection of the vicious Shamir-Rabin regime's unwillingness to pursue genuine peace in the Middle East. These forces included the Israeli peace movement -- such as Peace Now, Hadash, etc.; the Palestinian national liberation movement in the Occupied Territories; and the international peace movement, especially the Italian Peace Association, and various solidarity organizations such as The Palestine Aid Society, etc.

As new winds of change, peace and democracy manifest themselves in the socialist world and elsewhere around the globe, the intransigence of the "National Unity Government" in Israel and its patron, the Reaganite Bush administration, is increasingly anachronistic if not downright archaic.

The peace and liberation movements decided to demonstrate their rejection of the Shamir-Rabin pigheadedness at the close of 1989. This was to initiate, as they put it, a "Time for Peace." The political platform they worked out included Two States for Two Peoples, Peace Negotiations with the PLO, an End to the Occupation, an International Peace Conference, Self-Determination for the Palestinian People, Peace and Security for Both Peoples, among other planks. Plans were laid for a show of solidarity with the Israeli Women in Black on Friday, December 29, and for a Human Chain around the Old City on Saturday, December 30.

The Time for Peace events began on Thursday, December 28 with convocations at the Al-Hakawati Theatre in East Jerusalem, then at the Michtal Ha-Knesset Hotel in West Jerusalem. Both these events were attended by overflow audiences comprised of Israelis, Palestinians, a large Italian delegation, and a number of other Europeans and Americans.

On Friday, a number of Americans were briefed on the Intifadah by Ibrahim Dakkak, a prominent progressive Palestinian, at the Arab Thought Forum. Then several thousand peace activists converged on Paris Square at the center of West Jerusalem. For several years, this has been the site of the Women in Black vigil, where about a hundred Israeli women dressed entirely in black demonstrate silently on behalf of "Lo Kibbush" -- End the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Now! On the 29th, more than a thousand women in black joined these gallant demonstrators and they were accompanied by an equally large number of other supporters.

After an hour or more of the silent vigil, the entire group marched down to Suleiman the Magnificent Street by the Old City and from there up Saladin Street to the Hakawati for some cultural events and speeches. When we arrived at the theatre, we were joined by women from Ramallah who had been prevented by IDF [Israeli army, ed.] roadblocks from coming earlier to the Paris Square. Just as the expressions of unity were becoming intense, the assembled troops began to beat Palestinian -- and Italian -- women and throw them into vans to be taken away.
Then as the peace people began to surge, US-made tear gas canisters were fired into the crowd, with predictable results. This event closed with scenes of Italian and Israeli women vomiting into trash barrels around the Hakawati and an ambulance crew picking up a Palestinian who had collapsed on the street outside. Some concern was expressed about what this forebode for the next day.

Saturday dawned with an absolutely clear sky -- such as only seen in Jerusalem. The Human Chain around the Old City walls, a total distance of two and a half miles, was to form around two o'clock. About an hour before this, a few peace people were beginning to cluster at the Damascus Gate of the Old City, while many Palestinians who had completed their Saturday morning shopping were heading home. Suddenly the IDF and police forces appeared, along with a large white truck with two remote-control water-cannons mounted atop. With absolutely no provocation from the people and without warning, the vehicle began to blast the people on the sidewalk outside the Damascus Gate. Many were flattened, and those of us who were merely soaked raced about trying to extricate women with screaming babies from the melee. With terrified children clinging to them, some of the trapped women seemed to be immobilized by the surprise and fury of the attack.

Then the truck and many of the troops seemed to vanish, as thousands of Israeli, Palestinian and Italian people began to circle the Old City walls. By three o'clock, an estimated 25,000 people had in fact encircled the Old City. The crowd included Tawfik Toubi and Emil Habibi (Hadash), Haim Oron (Mapam) and other eminent Israeli political figures. Soon, balloons were released, then everyone joined hands in an electrifying gesture of unity for peace and justice. Where I stood near the Jaffa Gate, Israeli and Palestinian children joined hands on my left and Sephardim and Ashkenazim joined hands on my right. We all faced towards the back of the King David Hotel -- peace today gazing at a scene of Menahim Begin's terrorist violence of a few decades earlier.

Then the people began to disperse -- in peace. But this was not to be. After most of the Israelis and Italians had left, many of the Palestinians remained -- after all, they live there. The troops and the water-cannon truck reappeared and renewed the attack. Tear gas was fired, as were plastic bullets. Many civilians were clubbed to the ground. This time the water-cannon fired green-dyed water; before it had been clear water.

The attacks were unrelenting. All up and down Nablus Road and along Suleiman the Magnificent Street from Damascus Gate to Herod Gate, the attacks continued. An old woman wandered out of her house and was knocked flat by the water cannon -- it was such a pitiful sight that even some Israeli policemen momentarily came to her assistance. A journalist waved his passport and cried "je suis francais" while being dragged for the same two blocks back down Nablus Road. A Palestinian commented "There are no 'Europeans here today -- we are all Palestinians."

The troops and police also attacked hotels in what was becoming a replay of the "Days of Rage" police riot in Mayor Daley's Chicago twenty years ago. In a water-cannon attack on a hotel near Herod Gate, an Italian peace activist, Marisa Manno, lost her right eye. At the National Palace Hotel, farther up Saladin Street, troops coldheartedly fired tear gas canisters into the building which contained not only men and women, but children as well. It was estimated that more than sixty people were treated at Al-Makassad Hospital in East Jerusalem.
But overall, the Time for Peace events must be judged a success. The Israeli peace movement was energized by these events, the first major show of Israeli-Palestinian unity on behalf of Two States for Two Peoples. Many Palestinians expressed their enhanced morale due to the show of international support for their Intifadah.

As might have been expected, Israeli right-wing and fascist parties complained loudly about the Time for Peace events and Israeli death-squads ("Sicarii," etc.) called for the immediate assassination of Knesset members such as Shulamit Aloni who had supported the Time for Peace. But this is the price which history exacts for decades of Israeli militarism, ethnic chauvinism, and pandering to U.S. imperialism.