

# Israe

**TWENTY** South Africans from organisations involved in electoral issues recently spent two weeks in Israel at the invitation of the Israeli government. They found that most Israelis support the peace process under way in their country, IDASA staffer Geoff Brown told SHIREEN BADAT.



**A** CLOSE look at the Israeli electoral and political system, rather than the peace process, was the main purpose of a recent visit there by a group of South Africans.

The Matla Trust, the Independent Mediation Service of South Africa, the Consultative Business Movement, the ANC and Azapo were among organisations who sent representatives on the visit, which coincided with nation-wide municipal elections for mayors and city councillors.

The South Africans found that, despite party differences, most Israelis support the peace process. It was also found that the elections

A notable feature of the system is that it forces parties to form coalitions. The municipal elections offered a concrete example.

In Tel Aviv prior to the election, the Likkud Party formed an alliance with the far left against the Labour Party. Likkud went on to win five seats as well as the mayoral seat. But Labour won 10 seats. The Likkud mayor then formed an alliance with the Labour Party in order to have a strong council.

"The similarity with South Africa in this respect is very great," Brown said. "We have already agreed to the principle of coalition. The major political players are committed to a commitment of coalition."

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## Kibbutzim, unions and 'demo corner'

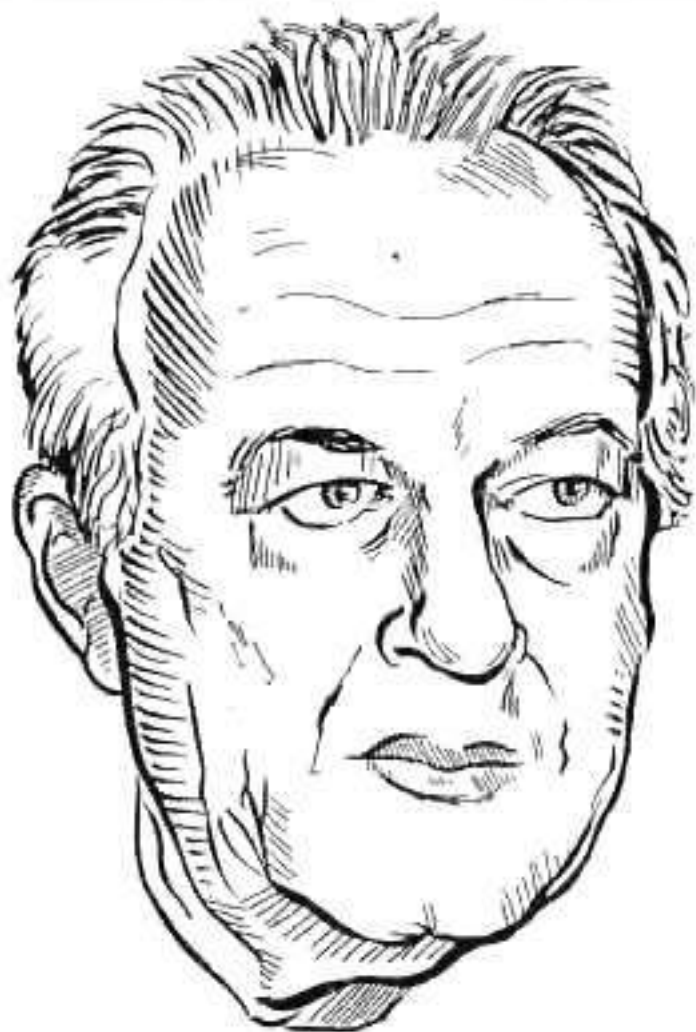
How democratic is Israel?  
GEOFF BROWN responds.

ISRAEL is a mature, well-developed democracy. Israelis enjoy freedom and a vibrant civil society exists where a great deal of lobbying, facilitation and education for democracy takes place. Among Israeli citizens there is a noticeable degree of equality.

Some 80 percent of the population belongs to trade unions. Unions own 20 percent of the national economy. Kibbutzim, where people live communally in a system guided by socialist principles, own 20 percent of the national economy.

*'There is a vast discrepancy between Israeli and Palestinian standards of living'*

It is an exciting, vibrant political system to which the people of Israel are very committed. People participate actively in



Yitzhak Rabin



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