

INTERVIEW WITH DEDI ZUCKER

Barbara Taufar: I will start. Dedi Zucker, you met Kreisky a few times and I think, the first time was, when Karl Kahane invited you to come to Vienna with Tzali Reshef to meet the chancellor, because he was also curious to meet the founders of „Peace Now.“ Can you tell me, how your relationship started, how was this first meeting and how did it continue?

Dedi Zucker: First of all, I remember very little. That's quite obvious.

BT: It's a long time ago.

DZ: It's a long time ago. It was seventeen years or something. No, more! More than seventeen. Anyway, I must remember. I have to look in my papers, because I may have some notes, that I have taken. And if I will have that, that will help me, of course, a lot. Anyway, what I remember from this first meeting is a) it was a long one and we were amazed.

BT: So it was, it was in the chancellery, probably?

DZ: In the chancellery.

BT: Okay.

DZ: Absolutely. I'm very sure.

BT: How long was the meeting, more than an hour?

DZ: Like three hours, or something, if not more. It was a very long one, and we were ..., Tzali and me came there, young people. I mean, we get in into this beautiful palace ...

BT: Majestic palace.

DZ: ... and we were dressed like two tramps. I mean, I am quite sure that we did not have ties and anything like that. And we were astonished and flattered that, I mean, this person in his position is accepting us very warmly, very ... and spent like, I think it was even more than three hours. We sat on a couch.

BT: On a couch.

DZ: On a side of it. If his desk was there, the couch was here. And what I remember is that it was very relaxing, a very relaxed meeting. I mean, it was very ..., everybody was relaxed and, I mean, due to the ...

BT: Who was there? Karl and you two and Kreisky? You four, or ...?

DZ: I am not sure Karl was there.

BT: Aha, okay.

DZ: I am not sure Karl was there.

BT: Yes. And was Kreisky sort of ..., did he squeeze you out immediately for news or did he lecture you first about the Middle East?

DZ: He lectured us, what I remember. I don't know what was first, what was next. But he lectured a lot. He also listened. I mean, he was trying to scrutinise it, trying to understand. I remember, he had a very clear look on the Middle East and on the Israeli government. He was, he wasn't so nice even towards the PLO and Yasir Arafat, even though very sympathetic to the cause, very sympathetic to the cause, but he did not spare harsh words against nobody, if he wanted to.

BT: Which means he did not romanticise about Arafat and his role?

DZ: No. During all these meetings - I can't remember now if it was three or four meetings - he was not romanticising at all. He mentioned, I mean, he underlined how much he is trying to help a certain wing within the PLO. He mentioned a few times in few cases Sartawi and helping Issam. You know that his daughter is living here? Kreisky was very critical concerning Israeli policy.

BT: Was he already in that time very critical vis-à-vis the Labour-party, Labour party's policy and Shimon Peres? Because when you met him it was after Camp David or ..., after Camp David or before Camp David? I think it was after Camp David?

DZ: After, after, absolutely. For sure.

BT: Yes? And ... But before the Lebanon war?

DZ: Oh yes, years before. It was in '78.

BT: In '78? So Camp David was on its way?

DZ: It's either the end of '78 or beginning of '79.

BT: Now, what did he want from you? Why did he want to meet you? What did he tell you?

DZ: Except from curiosity that probably motivated him as well, curiosity to meet these people, and so on, he heard a lot from Karl about us. Because you have to remember that we were, especially I was, in very close contact with Karl.

BT: How did it come?

DZ: With Karl?

BT: Yes.

DZ: Karl asked to meet somebody from „Peace Now“, when he was once in Israel. He came to meet Ezer Weizman. And we did not know anything about Karl. We did not know the name. We did not know anything. And he asked for some people to come to see him one Saturday afternoon. And the only people who were ready to give up the Saturday afternoon nap were Tzali and myself.

BT: Which means Weizman called you and told you ...?

DZ: No, no, no. Kahane - I don't know how - contacted „Peace Now.“ Okay? I don't know how. Tzali and myself went to see him. And from that moment, I kept very close contacts with Kahane for years.

BT: And he was immediately ready to help financially?

DZ: Kahane?

BT: After that meeting, yes?

DZ: Oh, amazingly. I mean, we were very cautious and, you know, reluctant. And he, I mean, came all out starting with his critical position at Begin. He said some awful things about him. We were hesitant at first, for many reasons. We did not know, who is the guy? Then he just came out openly. He said, „Yes, of course, ...“ and told us about himself.

BT: But you mentioned said Ezer Weizman. I mean, how did you know that he was a friend of Ezer Weizman?

DZ: Because, when we came to see him, Ezer just left the room.

BT: And Karl told you that he heard about you from Ezer Weizman?

DZ: No.

BT: But I mean, when you saw Ezer Weizman leaving his room, you knew that this man was kosher, no?

DZ: Yes, yes. It helped a lot. It helped a lot. Ezer was there with Reuma, with his wife and we came into the room. Ezer was about to leave, they were shaking hands.

BT: And it was also Karl who made the Shiduch (Hebrew for contact) with Kreisky?

DZ: Yes, yes.

BT: Now, we are still in the meeting with Kreisky. Kreisky, I suppose, gave you his view about the Middle East?

DZ: Yes, he gave us a whole lecture.

BT: And then? What did he want at the end of this first meeting?

DZ: To know.

BT: Just to know?

DZ: To know.

BT: He did not want you to meet Sartawi or Arafat, or to make a gesture?

DZ: I can't remember. First, he had suggested to meet Sartawi, but I probably mix up the meetings. I mean, I cannot remember exactly ...

BT: Tzali told me that in the first meeting already he wanted you to meet Arafat and that you both rejected, because it would not have worked out. Arafat had not yet recognised Israel ...

DZ: Israel, yes.

BT: ... and he had not yet given up terror, etc. So that did not work.

DZ: Very possible.

BT: When you rejected that request from Kreisky, was he angry that he did not succeed with it? Or did the meeting end in a very harmonious way?

DZ: At least he did not show it. And the fact is that we met him again. I met him more after that meeting. So, no, I don't remember him angry, I can't remember him angry at something or ... He was very convinced, I mean, very selfconfident. I mean, he knew what he wanted. But he was not aggressive in a way that „either you do it or we don't meet anymore.“ No, that was not the way.

BT: So how did the first meeting end? By saying we should meet again. We should stay in contact or ...?

DZ: He gave us all the telephone numbers. He called, I think it was Margit at that times.

BT: Margit, yes.

DZ: Margit. And he had an assistant. He had an assistant which he called in. I have all the dates, because I still have the cards that he gave us.

BT: Probably Georg Lennkh?

DZ: Georg Lennkh, sure.

BT: And?

DZ: And then I remember me, calling the bureau several times after that. I can't remember now why.

BT: He probably told you, „Whenever you need something or want me to do something, just give me a call!“

DZ: Yes, yes, He was very, I mean, very warm and ... Just give me a call. And this is mine, this is yours ...

BT: You speak about Georg Lennkh?

DZ: Yes.

BT: Yes. Now the point is you met him other times and later on also in Paris. I remember you met there with Sartawi.

DZ: First, I met Kreisky again in his home.

BT: The next meeting was alone, without Tzali?

DZ: Yes, at home, at his home.

BT: In Vienna, in Armbrustergasse?

DZ: Ken (Hebrew for yes).

BT: Yes. How was that?

DZ: I remember only one thing. And this is the huge library he has and how proud he was according to what he said about the fact that he owned the largest library of the Bund.

BT: Really?

DZ: He said, „You will not be able to find any bigger library about the Bund,“ I mean, in Europe. „This is the biggest collection of Bund material.“ He was so proud. I mean, it was very clear what he was trying to say. He was trying to say, „Listen, I am ..., yes, I am Jewish. Okay, Bund, Yiddish. But I am Jewish. I am not a Zionist.“ And it

was very impressive, I mean - that's the one thing that I remember better than anything else. He showed me around. Then I saw it alone, and then he talked and he was so proud about this fact.

BT: Did you have a conversation with him about Israel as a Jewish state or the Jews coming to Israel and making this state. And his Jewish identity ...?

DZ: Yes, Jewish identity.

BT: ... if there was any?

DZ: Yes, I guess it was during this meeting, when he defined his Judaism as - except from the biological fact - as something spiritual that does not need sovereignty, that does not need a land, or country or state, but something that was meaningful for him, but in a very different way...

B.T: ... moral way. Which means, of course, not in a way of law and religion and halacha (Hebrew for jewish, religious laws).

DZ: Sure, sure, I mean that something spiritual which you don't ignore, you don't want to ignore. But it had for him a very different meaning than for most other people. And that meaning is spiritual, moral, something that has a moral lesson in it. Nothing to do with religion, but also not with sovereignty or country or state or something like that.

BT: Did he talk to you about anti-Semitism, how it is to be a Jewish chancellor in Austria?

DZ: Not that I remember.

BT: And was he, was he ever mentioning that he was hurt by the fact that the Israeli media ...?

DZ: Yes. Exactly, he mentioned it several times.

BT: ... that they did not understand his point of view?

DZ: He mentioned it several times. Complained several times of how critical or insulting or ignorant the Israeli press was. „It does not misunderstand only me,“ he said, „but the whole issue.“ And he considered himself several times as a victim of a brutal Israeli press.

BT: Did he understood that the press was in a way manipulated in these years. Not only by the government but also by the intelligence agencies? Which means that there was a total trust of this generation in the political and security establishment.

DZ: Not that I remember. I don't remember such a thing.

BT: What did you tell him, when he complained?

DZ: Listen, I liked him very much, because ... I mean, I found in him, in his character something which I liked very much, probably because it was more what I thought about myself. I mean, he was very direct. He was blatant. He was not going around the bush. He said it very clear. He was radical. He was brave. And he knew exactly what should we - we in a broader sense - do in order to solve such a thing. And no doubt, it was very impressive to recognise the fact that there was a moral basis for all his deeds. I mean, he saw it like a Socialist and he thought like a Jew. I have no doubt in my mind that the moral dimension of his deeds, of his words, had a lot to do with the fact that he considers himself a Socialist, ideologically, and some cultural responsibility to Jews or Judaism or Israel, because it's a state, actually.

BT: You think there was a certain solidarity there with him and - let us be blunt, Jews, not Israelis. But Jews, per se?

DZ: I don't know if I now interpret or remember. But definitely „Jews“ is a much more important notion than „Israel“.

BT: For him?

DZ: Yes. For him. Listen, I may mix it up with what Karl is thinking.

BT: They thought quite the same. Yes. I suppose with Karl you could have more esoteric talks about it than with Kreisky.

DZ: I saw Karl many more times than I spent with Kreisky.

BT: Kreisky was not exactly a patient person. He could become very impatient, because, when he was convinced about something, he wanted to push forward. Didn't he understand that with his speed he could not, or hardly, influence the things in the Middle East? That the timing in the Middle East was going differently, let's say, that his watch was not the same watch as the Middle Eastern watch?

DZ: Listen, we were younger than thirty. You don't understand all this at that time. I mean, it was impressive to meet somebody who wants to push very much. The tactics that you are now mentioning, which now are very clear to me, were not clear to me then. The impressive thing about him was for me the fact that his mentality was very much like a young man. Okay, so let's do it! Forget about constraints! Let's do it!

BT: But wasn't that maybe one of the reason why the political establishment here felt so horrified. Whenever he opened the mouth? Because he was young and they were old?

DZ: Could be that he irritated them psychologically, because he was a radical and he knew exactly and he was sure about himself and he was very self-confident, very much so. And he told them the truth in their eyes, I mean.

BT: As a reserve officer - what you are I think - I would like to know how you reacted, when he called the Israeli army „a bunch of bandits“ in an interview? I mean, did you ever discuss with him these things, that there were certain things which annoyed the Israeli public? I remember, sometimes I would have had a certain success with my public relations for him here in the Israeli media and suddenly he would give an interview and would say so horrible things and my whole success would break down again.

DZ: But you see, the fact is that I never considered myself as part of these circles that were offended of such phrases.

BT: Which means ...?

DZ: I myself thought that in too many cases we behaved like bandits.

BT: Today as member of the establishment, do you think that you would have reacted towards him differently?

DZ: I would dare more.

BT: You mean you would have countered more?

DZ: I would try to be closer to him. I would try to back him more than maybe in that time.

BT: When you say, „I would try to be closer to him,“ did you have a father-son relationship with him?

DZ: Listen, the fact is, I never thought about it.

BT: I would like to go a little bit into it.

DZ: Okay, listen: No.

BT: Did you feel something? Did you feel from his side that he liked to pamper you?

DZ: Listen, he was the first ..., for me the first senior statesman that I was exposed to. Now that is very impressive for a young man. It is very, very impressive. Now you are exposed to somebody who is expressive, vivid, full of energy, I mean, not a dull moment. And for the first time, I mean, somebody who looks at the world. I was confronted for the first time with somebody who was exposed to a macropolicy. I mean, he did not look only on the Israeli-Palestinian, not only on the Israeli-Egyptian, on the Middle East problem, on Europe.

BT: He gave you a tour du monde?

DZ: Yes, so more teacher rather than ...

BT: Father?

DZ: ... a father. You know, I remember, it was very striking! I mean, it was very interesting or attractive to me when he started to talk about how he defended, for example, Sartawi and other people who were trying to reach contact with the Israelis. And the fact that he told us about the deep involvement of the Secret Services. Now, there is something ...

BT: Of his Secret Services?

DZ: Yes. There is something ...

BT: In protecting Issam?

DZ: Yes. This is something for somebody who comes from a province like Israel. All the things were, you know, enlightening and you know, you open your eyes and you, I mean, you lift your eyes and you see that the world is not constructed around the Arab-Israeli conflict, with all due respect to this conflict. So if you will ask me what was the main, the one impact that he left? I would say, that was the impressive, intelligent and broad spectrum-look.

BT: The second time when you were with him, did he use you in a way to get to know the new generation in Israel, or the young generation in Israel?

DZ: Could be. That's possible. Because he asked a lot of questions. That's what I remember. I can hardly remember what questions, but he asked a lot. He tried to get some information, some data, some knowledge.

BT: About the new generation?

DZ: No. I remember about Israel. I can't remember a specific question, but he got the answers from a young Israeli. And maybe it was important for him, but here I am not a good witness for it.

BT: So also with the second meeting he wanted to see you? And it was not a meeting, let us say, which considered Shalom Achshav, "Peace Now", as a movement. Or where you needed money from the SPÖ, or things like that?

DZ: No, never, never.

BT: Never?

DZ: Money, we got only from Karl.

BT: But did you ask Kreisky? The second meeting was still before the Lebanon invasion, I suppose?

DZ: Yes.

BT: The third meeting, was that in Majorca already, when you met Issam Sartawi?

DZ: I never met him in Majorca.

BT: In Paris?

DZ: Yes.

BT: You speak now about Kreisky or about Issam?

DZ: Issam.

BT: But the third meeting with Kreisky was in Vienna, or?

DZ: I must go back to my papers. I am quite sure I'll have some stuff. I do not want to give you an answer, which I am not sure about.

BT: Basically, it is not so important. What I would like to know is ..., try to remember, where was the third meeting?

DZ: Maybe in the parliament.

BT: Again in Vienna?

DZ: Because I remember once ... Yes, because I remember that once I met him not in the ...

BT: Chancellery? ... You were already well acquainted with each other. Were there letters in between or telephone calls sometimes?

DZ: There were. I can't remember about what. There were. Because I remember that I talked several times with Margit and I talked with Georg. And I came to Vienna several times to Karl's. So there was some contact, but I don't remember why.

BT: Kreisky was very spontaneous by contacting people. When there was something, then he probably called you and he wanted to know, what is that what I just heard, or things like that. What is going on in Israel?

DZ: I can't remember about any example for that.

BT: That's bad.

DZ: No, I have to go back to my papers, because I wrote down even telephone calls from various people.

BT: But from the essence of your talks now, I mean, here is a chancellor, who meets Dedi Zucker, who was then a private person. I mean, you were a leader of a peace movement, not yet a parliament member and, of course, the question is how did this relationship continue? It was his wish, I suppose, when he asked you to come to Vienna, no?

DZ: Yes, yes. I don't know, besides these long three meetings and few times that I called ... Ah, I remember there was another meeting, when Lowa and Sartawi got the prize, got the prize.

BT: The Kreisky-prize for Human Rights.. And you were there?

DZ: Yes.

DZ: Not then. I think it was before.

BT: In Paris?

DZ: The meeting was ..., with Sartawi, yes, in Paris.

BT: Organised by Georg Lennkh?

DZ: I don't know. It was in Kahane's place.

BT: In Paris?

DZ: No, in Vienna. Sartawi came from Paris.

BT: And you knew that you would meet Sartawi at Karl's place?

DZ: Yes, he asked before. It was not a set-up. He asked and then I said ken (yes). He asked us. We said, "Go ahead."

BT: Which means, it was discussed before ...?

DZ: Ken, ken, ken (yes).

BT: You were not alone at this meeting, I think?

DZ: With Yuli Tamir.

BT: Tzali told me that there were a lot of problems afterwards in „Peace Now“?!

DZ: Why did we do it, without consulting, asking ...

BT: Exactly. Why this crisis?

DZ: They would not let us, really.

BT: They didn't? „Peace Now“ actually, with all due respect, was not ready in that time that its leaders would meet even with Issam Sartawi? This is absurd!

DZ: But this is true. That is why Yuli and myself said, „Fuck off. We are going to do it. I mean, we are not going to play this game.“ And there were a lot of problems, troubles with the members.

BT: But many Israelis actually in that time had already met with Issam.

DZ: Don't exaggerate. Not so many. Several.

BT: Several Israelis. So, what was the discussion afterwards then in „Peace Now?“

DZ: Two issues, two subjects: a) is why did you both do it, without consulting us?

BT: Okay, that's the kibbutz mentality.

DZ: Yes. And the second point was not exactly from the same people. What's the point? I mean, we should not meet Arafat, at this particular moment, because he had not done that, he had not that, he had not done ...

BT: But you had met only Sartawi, not Arafat!

DZ: Ken, ken (yes). You should not meet the PLO.

BT: That was the Labour-party point of view in that time! And how did you overcome this crisis? I mean I would have probably left then and said, „Go to hell!“

DZ: You see, it is interesting. I will just give it to you briefly, because it's a complicated story.

BT: Because, on the one hand, you say you admired a courageous leader in Austria ...

DZ: Nachon (Hebrew for „right“). So is it. As I see it...

BT: ... and then you come back and you meet all these little people here.

DZ: And it was ..., it was so ..., disappointing and ... frustrating! So the meaning is that two people asked the movement to kick us out. And the movement, most of the people, were angry at us, partly, because we did not consult them, partly, because it

was too early to meet somebody from the PLO. But the form who had to get the decision ...

BT: ... decision? They knew that Kahane wouldn't give money anymore.

DZ: No, no they did not approve the recommendation to kick us out. So when the meeting was over, these two young men, who were against us, stood up and said, „Okay, you did not accept our request, even though you were so critical against them, and so and so. But because you do not accept our request, we leave the movement!“ Okay, and they were two fine, great, friends. One of them is...

BT: Omri Padan, if I remember right?

DZ: Ken (yes). So Yuli and myself looked at each other, and then we stood up and said, „Listen, if Omri and Amos are leaving, we are going to do the same thing, because otherwise the turmoil and the anger in „Peace now“ will destroy the movement.“ So at the end of the meeting Amos and Omri and Yuli and myself - (three of the four people were very central for the movement, Omri, Yuli and myself; Amos much less) - were out. For a short while, but were out. But we survived. It was so disappointing.

BT: I suppose that you told Kahane and Kreisky about it?

DZ: They chickened out! They were amazed. They were, first Kahane was ...

BT: He must have been shocked!

DZ: Ken, ken (yes), because it was so disappointing. Kahane was furious for a very long time after that. He was so furious.

BT: But he continued to give you money?

DZ: I was the contact with Kahane. I was the money-maker in Europe and Israel and nobody else contacted him. I mean, they knew our relations and they knew that he would not give them, they did not even have to ask. They knew enough of this Sartawi affair.

BT: What sort of lesson was that for you? I mean this reaction was almost like one of a political party and not like one of a peace movement?

DZ: Nachon, nachon (Hebrew for right).

BT: A bitter foretaste of what should come afterwards in your life.

DZ: What were my lessons?

BT: Yes?

DZ: The short-term lesson was „behave.“ I mean, „behave yourself, don't run so fast and be patient.“ But in the long run I never have learnt a lesson from this affair, which was very painful. I never have learnt how to behave myself and how to run slowly.“

BT: Did you continue to meet Sartawi or to be in contact with him after that? Or did you think, maybe the time has come even to meet Arafat?

DZ: No. No. I did not meet Sartawi anymore. But the fact is that, after long negotiations and talks and blah-blah, I was the first Israeli who did not belong to Uri Avneri's service, who met Arafat.

BT: When?

DZ: I met Arafat at mid-'86. Secretly.

BT: Where?

DZ: In Tunis. I went to Tunis, for two days.

BT: Who mediated that?

DZ: Amnon Kapeliouk.

BT: So this had nothing to do with Kreisky?

DZ: Nothing.

BT: He also did not know about it?

DZ: No involvement of Kreisky, but I cannot separate between the Sartawi meetings and the fact that I wanted to meet Arafat. And I did it not as an individual, I was sent from ...

BT: From „Peace Now?“

DZ: No. Now by the new „RAZ“-party.

BT: Tell me, when was the last meeting with Kreisky? You said you had three meetings with him?

DZ: Ken (yes).

BT: So the last meeting also must have been in Vienna and in parliament, as you said?

DZ: I think so.

BT: One was in his office, ...

DZ: Yes.

BT: The other one was in his home. The third, it seems, was in parliament.

DZ: Parliament. And I am quite sure it was around this peace prize-ceremony.

BT: Around the time when Lowa and Issam got the prize together?

DZ: Yes.

BT: Again, do you remember this last meeting?

DZ: I remember that. it was long, a long meeting and again warm. And probably what I have said about the first meeting could have applied for the third meeting. Because they are all one thing for me, one memory for me. No, I will have to go back to my papers, because I probably took some notes and then I will have to meet you again.

BT: Unfortunately, Dedi Zucker could not find any recordings about his meetings with Bruno Kreisky in Vienna. Therefore, this recording is finished.