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# THE LEFT IN ISRAEL

## Zionism vs. Socialism

by ZACHARY LOCKMAN

### INTRODUCTION

One of the major issues that has confronted the left in the past century, in almost every part of the world, has been the national question. This is especially true of the past fifty or sixty years, which have seen the rise of nationalist movements struggling for independence from European and American domination in every one of the countries drawn into the orbit of an expanding world capitalism in the previous centuries.

The left, and most importantly for us its Marxist wing, has been compelled to study the often complex interrelations between the movement for social liberation and the movement for national liberation. Whereas the former is internationalist, directed against classes, the latter is directed against imperialism (modern capitalism in its global aspect) and seeks the emancipation of the whole nation from alien rule. For the revolutionary left since the time of Lenin, this has meant a recognition of the right of nations to self-determination, a struggle against imperialism, and, hopefully, assumption of the leadership of the national struggle by the left in order to achieve not only the national but also the social liberation of the masses of the oppressed nation. It has become quite evident that no real national independence is possible in the era of imperialism and neo-colonialism without a social revolution that can break decisively with the old order and the world capitalist system.

The case of Zionism and of Israel, the state it brought into existence, presents us with a somewhat different problem. Zionism is here defined as that movement (and its ideology and practice) which believes all Jews to be part of a single nation, sees the root of the nation's problems in its lack of a national territory, and seeks to resolve those problems by means of the territorial concentration of the Jewish people in Palestine (which it considered the historic homeland of the Jews, to which despite 2000 years of exile they retained full rights) and their sovereignty there. Zionism was not simply a nationalist movement like those that appeared in Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Those movements sought the expulsion of the foreign colonial power. Zionism, by virtue of its goal, was compelled to be a colonizing movement, seeking to establish a Jewish entity in a land already inhabited by another people, the Palestinian Arabs, who were just beginning to awake to

national consciousness. Such an enterprise, undertaken in the face of mounting indigenous opposition, required the protection and support of one or more imperialist powers. In the end it succeeded in creating a Jewish state in the larger part of Palestine, accompanied by the dispossession, expulsion and oppression of the Palestinian Arab people.

There was no lack of socialist parties among the Jewish people, both in Eastern Europe (where until World War II the majority of Jews lived) and in the growing Jewish community in Palestine (the *Yishuv*, or "settlement"), and later the state of Israel, within as well as outside the Zionist movement. It is the purpose of this study to examine the role of the left in Palestine-Israel, focusing on what should be seen as the heart of the problem: the attitude of the left toward Zionism, and concomitantly toward the rights and struggles of the Palestinian Arab people. Given the fundamentally colonizing nature of the Zionist movement, which meant inevitably the negation of the national rights of the indigenous people, it was this attitude as much as their role in the class struggles of the *Yishuv* itself, which determined the parts played by the various Jewish leftist groups.\*

This gave rise to the basic dilemma of the left in the *Yishuv* and in Israel: those parties which adhered to Zionism (whatever their particular brand of "synthesis" between Zionism and Marxism) were compelled, by the logic of their very presence and goals in Palestine, to compromise their socialist principles one by one when they came into conflict with the demands of Zionist colonization; but those parties which refused any compromise with Zionism found themselves relatively isolated, cut off from the great majority of the Jews of the *Yishuv*, and later the state, and this of course severely limited the possibilities of playing a prominent role in the class struggle. Generally speaking the period between the end of the First World War and the present has been characterized by the triumph of nationalist politics over class politics, a constant rightward shift on the part of the Zionist left, and the failure of the anti-Zionist left to win significant support in the Jewish community.

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\*With a few exceptions, the leadership of the Palestinian Arab national movement during the Mandate was firmly in the hands of the reactionary landowning and big bourgeois classes, and socialism made significant inroads into the Arab community only after 1948.

## HISTORICAL ROOTS

The roots of the Jewish leftist parties in Palestine can be found in the East European Jewish communities of the pre-World War I period. The Jewish masses at the end of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th centuries were caught in a particularly vicious situation. While the feudal order that had survived there was decaying, no vigorous capitalism existed to take its place.

The entire situation of Judaism in Eastern Europe is explained by the combination of the decline of the old feudal forms and of the degeneration of capitalism. The social differentiation which took place in the village as a result of capitalist penetration brought about an influx into the cities of enriched as well as proletarianized peasants; the former wanted to invest their capital, the latter to offer their labor. But the openings for the placement of capital were as slight as those for work. Hardly born, the capitalist system showed all the symptoms of senility. The general decay of capitalism manifested itself in crises and unemployment within the countries of Eastern Europe. . . Placed between two fires, the Jews were exposed to the hostility of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry, who sought to find a place for themselves at the expense of the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

This hostility took the form of pogroms, anti-Semitism, and discrimination, often inspired or tolerated by the reactionary regimes of the area in order to divert the anti-capitalist sentiments of the masses into a safe channel. The Jewish communities underwent a process of impoverishment, and for many emigration (mostly to the United States) was one way out. For those who remained, and sought a new solution to the crisis that threatened their very existence, there were three movements that attracted popular support.

First, there was Zionism, which sought to resolve the Jewish problem by physically removing the Jews from Eastern Europe and transferring them to Palestine. This movement remained weak, in terms of mass support, into the 1930s. Second, there was the Bund, a Jewish workers' party, which saw socialism and a non-territorial "national-cultural autonomy" for the Jews in Eastern Europe as the solution, and rejected both assimilation and Zionism.\* Last there were the non-Jewish socialist parties, in which many Jews played a prominent role, not as Jews but as adherents of the proletarian cause. These parties rejected Jewish nationalism, whether in its Zionist-territorial or Bundist-cultural forms, and felt that only socialist revolution could solve the Jewish problem.

Among the Zionist groups that emerged there were some that, under the influence of the socialist movement, sought to combine their Jewish nationalism with socialism. At the very end of the 1890s a heterogeneous movement, with many local component groups, began to emerge, generally known as *Po'alei-Tzion* (Workers of Zion), which took definite organizational form only later. *Po'alei-Tzion* developed two wings, one social-democratic and one Marxist. The chief theoretician

of the latter, Ber Borochov, became particularly important for his role in formulating a doctrine for the Zionist-socialists in Europe and later in Palestine.<sup>2</sup>

Borochov saw the Jews as an "abnormal" people, for their class structure resembled an "inverted pyramid": rather than workers and peasants constituting the broad base of their society, and lesser numbers of petty bourgeois and capitalists at the top of the social "pyramid," among the Jews the masses were in large part urban petty bourgeois, engaged in increasingly marginal occupations far from the point of production. This was due, Borochov argued, to the fact that the Jews had no territory of their own, and gave rise to hostility on the part of the peoples among whom they lived. Hence the solution was emigration to Palestine, where a "normal" Jewish society, complete with Jewish capitalists and Jewish workers, would come into existence, and in this territory the working class would wage its class struggle. The theory was the ideological basis for a distinct and important socialist-Zionist tendency in Palestine, to which we will now turn.

The Second *Aliya*\*, encompassing the decade before the First World War, saw the emergence of the first leftist tendencies among the newly-arrived settlers (not a few of whom had left Russia after the failure of the 1905 Revolution). Apart from various "independents", two factions co-existed: *Po'alei-Tzion*, which while not uniform in ideology at least defined itself as socialist and called for class struggle; and *Hapo'el Hatza'ir* (the Young Worker), which rejected class struggle as harmful to the national cause. The former group's activities already demonstrated a curious blend of "constructive activity" (i.e., Zionist colonizing activity) and class struggle that was to characterize socialist-Zionism in theory and practice in years to come:

On the initiative of *Po'alei-Tzion* the non-party trade union of guards in the [Jewish] colonies [moshavot], Hashomer, was founded, which took upon itself the protection and defense of the colonies from attack by their Arab neighbors. Attempts were made to organize the [Jewish] agricultural workers (Hahoresht) and to create cooperatives of workers in city and country.†



Self-defense organization (Hashomer) of *Po'alei-Tzion*, 1909.

\**Aliya* literally means "ascent," but is used with the historically specific meaning of "wave of emigration to Palestine." The first *Aliya* took place in the 1880s.

†Borochov, in his essay on the history of *Po'alei-Tzion* entitled *Letoldot Tnu'at Po'alei-Tzion* goes on to record that *Po'alei-Tzion* "favors class solidarity between Jewish and Arab workers and sees in the class struggle to improve working conditions a means to strengthen the position of Hebrew labor in Eretz-Yisra'el." (In Merhav, p.38.) "Hebrew labor" (*avoda Ivrit*) means of course the employment of Jewish rather than Arab labor by Jewish employers, in order to create a Jewish proletariat in Palestine. Thus Jewish-Arab solidarity and common struggle is linked with the strengthening of the Jewish position in the labor market at Arab expense! This apparent contradiction is not merely the result of confused thinking, but of the basic incompatibility of the demands of a colonizing movement, especially one that aims at creating a new working class rather than merely implanting a class of landowners and employers using native labor and socialist principles.

\*The Bund's Fourth Congress (1901) stated that it saw Zionism "as a reaction on the part of the Jewish bourgeois classes to anti-Semitism and the abnormal legal status of the Jewish people. The Congress sees the final goal of political Zionism, the obtaining of a land for the Jewish people—if only a small part of the Jewish people is to be settled in that land—as not of great importance and not a solution to the 'Jewish problem.' And to the degree that Zionism intends to settle in that land the entire Jewish people or a great part of it—the Congress sees it as a vain dream, a utopia. The Congress believes that Zionist propaganda inflames national feeling among the people and is likely to disturb the development of class consciousness. . . ." In Peretz Merhav, *Toldot Tnu'at Hapo'alim be-Eretz Yisra'el* (History of the Workers' Movement in Eretz-Yisra'el) (Merhav, 1967), 18-19. (My translation from all Hebrew sources). After the First World War and the split in the world socialist movement, the majority of the Russian Bundists voted to join the Bolshevik party.

## LEFT ZIONISM, 1919-1948

The Zionist movement gained tremendously in international standing and recognition in the course of the First World War, with the Balfour Declaration (1917) establishing Great Britain as the imperialist protector that Zionist statesmen had sought for two decades. In the Third *Aliya* that followed the war and the establishment of British rule (which took the form of a League of Nations Mandate), the left-Zionist as well as the anti-Zionist parties were formed.

Very soon after the war there was founded what was to become the nucleus of the labor political establishment which has dominated *Yishuv* and then Israeli politics, as well as the world Zionist movement, since the early 1930s. In 1919 the world federation of the *Po'alei-Tzion* parties in Europe and Palestine began to split between right and left over the question of applying for admission to the Communist International and participation in the bourgeois-led Zionist institutions. When the split became final the majority of the Palestinian *Po'alei-Tzion* party supported the right which, together with the independent left Zionists, founded *Ahdut Ha'avoda* (Unity of Labor) in 1919. Among its leaders were David Ben-Gurion (Israel's first Prime Minister) and Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi (its second President), and numerous other major figures in the labor movement, *Yishuv* institutions, and state. *Ahdut Ha'avoda* was not by any means Marxist, but did for some years continue to talk of the class struggle, using leftist rhetoric to hide an increasingly rightward-drifting reality. Affiliated to the reconstituted Second International, it was in fact a reformist, social-democratic labor party, especially after 1930, when it merged with the even more pragmatic *Hapo'el Hatzair* to form *MAPAI*, acronym for the Jewish Workers' Party in Eretz-Yisra'el (i.e., Palestine). The fact that it was Zionist, and thus committed to building an exclusively Jewish entity in an Arab land, made inevitable the surrender of any socialist principles it might once have sincerely held. The socialist-Zionists certainly did not think of themselves as colonialists in a foreign land; they saw themselves as pioneers returning to their homeland to build a new society for their people. But the creation of a Jewish community in Palestine that would be as independent as possible of the existing Arab community (in terms of land, labor and production) required a three-fold struggle: for *kibush hakarka* ("conquest of the land": establishing Jewish ownership and use of as much of the land of Palestine as possible); for *kibush ha'avoda* ("conquest of labor": forcing Jewish employers to hire only Jewish workers, rather than the cheaper Arab labor, and thus creating a Jewish working class); and for *totzeret ha'aretz* ("produce of the land," or boycotting cheaper Arab-made goods in order to stimulate Jewish agriculture and industry).

These policies were clearly in sharp contradiction to the generally-held socialist principles of class solidarity and opposition to national discrimination, but *MAPAI* and other socialist-Zionists justified them by asserting the uniqueness of the Jewish situation. David Hacoen, a long-time *MAPAI* leader, explained what this "Zionist socialism" meant in practice:

I remember being one of the first of our comrades [of *Ahdut Ha'avoda*] to go to London after the First World War. . . . There I became a socialist. . . . When I joined the socialist students—English, Irish, Jewish, Chinese, Indian, African—we found out that we were all under English domination or rule. And even here, in these intimate surroundings, I had to fight my friends

on the issue of Jewish socialism, to defend the fact that I would not accept Arabs in my trade union, the *Histadrut*; to defend preaching to housewives that they not buy at Arab stores; to defend the fact that we stood guard at orchards to prevent Arab workers from getting jobs there. . . . To pour kerosene on Arab tomatoes; to attack Jewish housewives in the markets and smash the Arab eggs they had bought; to praise to the skies the *Keren Kayemet* [Jewish National Fund] that sent Hankin to Beirut to buy land from the absentee *effendi* [landlords] and to throw the *fellahin* [peasants] off the land—to buy dozens of *dunams* [one *dunam* = .23 acres] from an Arab is permitted, but to sell, God forbid, one Jewish *dunam* to an Arab is prohibited; to take *Rothschild*, the incarnation of capitalism, as a socialist and to name him the "benefactor"—to do all that was not easy. And despite the fact that we did it—maybe we had no choice—I wasn't happy about it.<sup>3</sup>

In 1920 the *Histadrut*, or General Federation of Jewish Workers in Palestine, was founded. It excluded Arab workers, and was in fact as much an institution for colonization as it was a trade union. It encouraged the various campaigns to supplant Arab with Jewish labor (after all, it was argued, the unorganized and poorly-paid Arab workers were a threat to the organized Jewish workers, and a trade union must protect its members), and became itself a large employer, owning a host of industrial enterprises, running a sick fund and a school system, etc. It has throughout its existence been dominated by *MAPAI*. (see box)

While *MAPAI*, social-democratic, reformist and above all Zionist and nationalist, was the largest party in the Zionist labor movement (and in the *Yishuv* as well), there were more radical groups within that movement. While the right wing of *Po'alei-Tzion*, with its main bases of support in the United States, was anti-Bolshevik and anti-revolutionary, the left wing, centered in Eastern Europe and radicalized by the October Revolution, retained its faith in a "proletarian Zionism" and wished to join the Comintern as its Jewish section. This left sought to integrate a Marxian class struggle perspective with a basically Zionist view of Palestine as the site of the concentration of the Jewish people. It believed that the Jewish proletariat of Palestine rather than its bourgeoisie would develop the country, and simultaneously fight for socialism.

The building of a Jewish socialist Palestine can be achieved only by adherence to the main principles of revolutionary class struggle, and its development will continue to be strengthened with the development of the social revolution and its victory. . . . The bourgeois Jewish settlement [*hityashvut*], which has proceeded until today on the basis of private property and exploitation, is completely bankrupt, both socially and nationally. The development and success of the *Yishuv* in Palestine have proven that Palestine can be built only by means of the emigration and settlement of great masses of Jewish workers, relying on their own labor and organizing their activity in accordance with the aims of creative and constructive socialism. . . . Together with the political struggle, already today—in the period of the transition from capitalism to socialism—all material and socioeconomic measures, in Palestine and abroad, should be taken for socialist settlement in Palestine and for the future Jewish dictatorship of the proletariat in Jewish life in Palestine. . . .<sup>4</sup>

Left *Po'alei-Tzion* regarded itself as the standard-bearer of orthodox Borochovism: that is, of the Marxist-Zionist synthesis. Nevertheless, there were several tendencies within it: when negotiations for admission into the Comintern fell through (the communist movement was anti-Zionist, and could not be convinced that Marxism and revolutionary socialism could be reconciled with a colonizing Jewish nationalism in Palestine) some members left to join the Palestine Communist Party. There were frequent splits in the following decades,

and Left *Po'alei-Tzion* never managed to constitute an attractive alternative to the reformist *Ahdut Ha'avoda* - *MAPAI*. It never received more than six or seven percent of the vote in Histadrut elections.<sup>5</sup> It did however possess a significant degree of support among those Jewish workers in Eastern Europe up to the Second World War who considered themselves Zionists but came to Palestine in lesser numbers (before the late 1930s) than members of other classes, either for purely material reasons or because they retained some faith in socialist revolution as a solution to their oppression.

Two other points deserve mention concerning this small party, which lost members on the right to *MAPAI*, on the left to the communists, and to *Hashomer Hatza'ir* as well. First, it opposed the exclusionist policies of the Histadrut and *MAPAI* in regard to Arab labor, advocating instead the joint organization and struggle of Arab and Jewish workers. Secondly, for many years it refused to participate in the institutions of the World Zionist Organization, seeing it as an enterprise dominated by the Jewish bourgeoisie, which "desires to transfer to Palestine the old forms of exploitation of the capitalist society"; "participation in the [Zionist] Congress is only likely to create harmful illusions among part of the working class, and would weaken its activity on the path of independent, proletarian, constructive work in Palestine."<sup>6</sup> But between 1937 and 1939 it returned to the Zionist fold, and began to participate in the Zionist institutions, apparently in order to escape from the dead-end and isolation it had fallen into, and because of the first large-scale influx of East European Jewish workers in the late 1930s.

A second and more influential socialist-Zionist movement was that of *Hashomer Hatza'ir* (The Young Guard). Its founding members came to Palestine with the Third *Aliya* and were not, to begin with, Marxists. Rather they were young and highly idealistic Zionists, educated in the youth movement of the same name in Europe. The kibbutzim established by *Hashomer Hatza'ir*, organized into a federation (*Hakibbutz Ha'artzi*) in 1927, formed the base of this movement. By the late 1920s they had become oriented toward Marxism (in a modified Borochovian form), with a heavy dose of *halutzit* ("pioneering"), a stress on the voluntaristic element involved in building the new Jewish society in Palestine. They characterized this synthesis as the "integration of pioneering Zionism with revolutionary socialism, colonization with class struggle."<sup>7</sup> As a movement it was almost exclusively oriented toward the kibbutz (indeed, it regarded the kibbutz members as the elite of the working class, almost looking down at the urban proletariat), highly sectarian and rather ascetic.

Since its popular base lived in these communal settlements, and was therefore not in direct competition with Arab labor, it could afford to take a stand critical of the anti-Arab policies of the social-democratic *MAPAI*. It called for but rarely practiced joint organization of Arab and Jewish workers in city and countryside, but its attitude toward the "conquest of labor" policy was ambiguous, and even hypocritical: a resolution of the 1934 conference of *Hakibbutz Ha'artzi* stated that the struggle for "Jewish labor" should be conducted "on the basis of the principle of the priority of the Jewish worker for work in the Jewish sector—on condition that this does not damage the rights of permanent Arab workers (maximum Jewish labor as opposed to the *MAPAI* slogan of 'one hundred percent'). . ."<sup>8</sup> Its differences with *MAPAI* on this issue concerned tactics more than principle.

*Hakibbutz Ha'artzi* set up in 1937 an urban counterpart sharing the same ideology called the Socialist League to attract city workers away from *MAPAI* and to constitute a Zionist alternative to the communists. It was clearly the largest and best-organized party on the *Yishuv* left, with strong support on its kibbutzim and in the trade unions: in the elections to the 1942 Histadrut congress the joint *Hashomer Hatza'ir* - Socialist League list elected nearly one-fifth of the delegates.<sup>9</sup> The League merged with its parent party in 1946, to form the *Hashomer Hatza'ir* Workers' Party, the extreme left of the Zionist movement.

It rejected either an exclusively Jewish or an exclusively Arab state in Palestine, and in the late 1930s and 1940s it formulated the idea of a socialist bi-national state in Palestine, in which "the Jewish people returning to their homeland and the Arab people living in it" would have equal rights. Yet at the same time it stressed the necessity of expanding the Zionist enterprise, of allowing unlimited Jewish immigration and settlement. And while it saw the bi-national character of Palestine as unconnected with the future proportions of Jews and Arabs in the population, and criticized the *MAPAI* goal of a Jewish majority, it obviously assumed that the Jews would constitute a majority when it called for the territorial concentration of the majority of the Jewish people in Palestine.

*Hashomer Hatza'ir* (and its post-1948 successor, *MAPAM*) often played the role of the "good cop" of the Zionist movement, recognizing the rights of the Arab inhabitants and showing Zionism's "progressive" face to the international left (with which it has always taken care to develop ties), but one suspects that its moderate stance was due more to its concern for achieving Zionist goals in the least painful manner (painful, that is, to its image as a benign and progressive movement) than to its Marxist principles. It stressed the common interests of the Jewish and Arab working people, asserting that Zionism was in fact a liberating force for the latter:

. . . the Socialist League recognizes the community of economic and social interests of the Jewish and Arab toilers in Palestine. It regards the Jewish immigration to Palestine as a factor stimulating the process of the liberation of the Arab toilers from the rule of feudalism and the men of religion, and regards the Arab toilers (the worker and small farmer) as the natural allies of the Jewish workers in their struggle to develop the country and to establish a bi-national socialist society within it. . .<sup>10</sup>

After the Second World War, the *Hashomer Hatza'ir* Workers Party was one of the least anti-British of the parties of the *Yishuv*, perhaps because it did not believe that Zionism could achieve its goals without the protection of an outside power. It also at that time became enthusiastically pro-Soviet, abandoning the somewhat critical attitude that the movement had maintained in the interwar period. When the United Nations voted in November 1947 to approve the partition of Palestine into an Arab state and a Jewish state, *Hashomer Hatza'ir* dropped its binational platform and supported wholeheartedly the creation of the Jewish state.

On the one hand, the Zionist left parties in the Mandate period confronted a social-democratic and reformist but Zionist party, *MAPAI*; on the other hand, they confronted an anti-Zionist but radical party, the Palestine Communist party. They shared common Zionist premises with the other, non-socialist parties of the *Yishuv*, and in the last analysis it is this that must be seen as most significant. What separated *Hashomer Hatza'ir* from the other Zionist parties as regards the



Histadrut founders at Haifa Convention, 1920.

## ISRAELI TRADE UNION FEDERATION – THE HISTADRUT

*General Secretary of the Histadrut, Pinhas Lavon, summed up the historical role of the Federation: "The General Federation of Workers was founded forty years ago by several thousand young people wanting to work in an under-developed country where labor was cheap, a country which rejected its inhabitants and which was inhospitable to newcomers. Under these conditions, the foundation of the Histadrut was a central event in the process of the rebirth of the Hebrew people in its father-land. Our Histadrut is a general organization to its core. It is not a workers' trade union, although it copes perfectly well with the real needs of the worker."*

*Being 'general to its core', the Histadrut has effectively become the central force of the Jewish community in its many aspects. It organized the Zionist armed forces, sometimes in collusion with the British occupation, and sometimes against its wishes; it created a system of social security, the only one in existence in Israel, which has become an important weapon in the domination of the Jewish masses and the organization of the workers under the authority of the Histadrut; it has opened recruitment offices everywhere, thus reinforcing its domination, while at the same time regulating the right to work; it possesses its own school network, its own promotion societies, and its own production and service co-operatives; as an organization it completely dominates all the kibbutzim and collective farms of the whole country.*

*The Secretary-General of Hevrat Ovdim, the Histadrut's holding company, described its philosophy: "We believe in socialist ownership—but a capitalistic way of management; moreover, profit is not a 'dirty word' with us; it is a phrase which guides our general economic thinking. . . . We have nationalistic aims. This is an important element. We will set up an enterprise in an outlying border settlement, although we know it will be a money-loser for many years; but eventually, we know it will make a profit. Making a profit is important; but building the country is more important. Secondly, if one of our well-established industries falls on hard times, we support it financially until it becomes profitable again. In a purely capitalistic set-up, this company would go bankrupt." According to Secretary-Gen-*

*eral Reiner, workers have a special—subordinate—role to play in management: "Frankly, [workers] are laymen; they do not grasp the wider implications of running a business; they can't read a balance sheet; they are weak on long-range planning; these workers have a dozen other weaknesses as members of the Board of Directors [of Histadrut-affiliated firms]. But they contribute mightily in another field: they understand management's viewpoint much better and they pass this message on in one form or another, generally without even thinking about it, to their fellow workers. Secondly, management sees the workers viewpoint much, much better, and like the workers, we absorb this viewpoint without even concentrating on it. The result? Strikes in our enterprises are few and far between. Labor and management exist in much greater harmony."*

*A complement and illustration to these remarks is to be found in the attitude of the Israeli workers towards the Histadrut. Among all the evidence on this point it is most interesting to quote some from the Histadrut itself, published in its 1966 Year Book. 'A very considerable number of workers hardly notice the Histadrut's trade-union activities, and they consider that their situation would not have been modified if there had been no trade union'. According to an enquiry undertaken for the Histadrut, the results of which are in the Year Book, a growing number of workers believe that the local trade-union branches in their places of work (called 'workers' committees' in Israel) should be independent of the Histadrut. 20 percent of all wage-earners indicated that strikes\* have broken out in their enterprises against the advice of the Histadrut; 47 percent thought that in certain cases it was desirable for the workers to embark on a strike without Histadrut authorization.*

\*Certain important strikes have occurred in the short history of the workers' struggle in Israel. The first took place in 1951, relatively soon after the creation of the State of Israel, with the famous seamen's strike; next came a series of wild-cat strikes in 1962, after the devaluation of the Israeli pound; the third wave took place in 1969, with the postal workers' and the Ashdod port workers' strike.

*Sources: The Class Nature of Israeli Society, by H. Hanegbi, M. Machover, A. Orr, New Left Review, 1971; The Journal of Commerce, May 5, 1976.*

key issue, the nature of Zionist colonization and the rights of the Palestinian Arab people, were tactical considerations rather than principles. This is not to say that the leaders of *Hashomer Hatza'ir* —Ya'ari, Hazan and their colleagues—were insincere. It does mean that they failed to see through their own rhetoric about Zionism as a liberating and progressive factor in Palestine to the reality of the negation of another people's national rights. Objectively they constituted the left wing of a colonizing movement, whatever their talk of common struggle, of recognition of Arab rights, of socialism and the brotherhood of peoples. Some of their kibbutzim, too, were on land taken from Arab peasants, and they participated in the various political and military institutions of the *Yishuv*.

Even had *Hashomer Hatza'ir* won over a majority of the *Yishuv* to its program, it is difficult to see what concrete difference it would have made. For even the minimum demands of the bi-nationalists included unlimited Jewish immigration and full freedom of settlement, which were unacceptable to the indigenous people of Palestine, unwilling as it was to be dispossessed by an alien people or to become a minority in its own land.

Nationalism had a corrosive effect on the socialist politics of the radical left-Zionist parties of the *Yishuv*. While *Hashomer Hatza'ir* and *Left Poalei-Tzion* came closer to facing the real issue in Palestine than the other Zionist parties, their adherence to Zionism, given the realities of the Palestinian situation, compelled them to renounce in practice the principles of proletarian internationalism, of anti-imperialism, of class solidarity, of the right to self-determination, that they held to so devoutly in theory.

## LEFT ANTI-ZIONISM, 1919-1948

The picture is very different when we turn to the non-Zionist left in mandatory Palestine. Here we have the Palestine Communist Party, which vehemently opposed Zionism as ideology and as practice, but by so doing isolated itself from the *Yishuv*, while remaining on the fringes of the Arab national movement.

The communist movement in Palestine traces its origins to the Socialist Workers' Party founded in 1920 by a splinter group that quit the *Left Poalei-Tzion* party after its split with the right. Its members of course had been Zionists, and were of East European origin. This early formation was still quasi-Zionist, and lasted barely a year. Its leaders were arrested and deported by the British authorities after a May Day demonstration it had organized in Jaffa clashed with a demonstration organized by the Histadrut, which led in turn to Arab-Jewish clashes that killed and wounded hundreds. The following year a new party, the Palestine Communist Party (PCP), was founded, and (after various splits, mergers and reorganizations) was recognized by the Comintern in 1924.

It was of course an anti-Zionist party (the only one in the *Yishuv*, except for the ultra-religious *Agudat Yisra'el*), Zionism being regarded as an enterprise of the Jewish bourgeoisie designed to secure for themselves a private market, in alliance with imperialism.<sup>11</sup> It argued that the task of the party,

and especially the Jewish comrades, is to denounce the role of the Jewish bourgeoisie and the Jewish national minority under its influence in Palestine as a fundamental instrument of oppression in the hands of British imperialism against the indigenous Arabs.

The party must explain to the masses of the Jewish workers that the Zionist bourgeoisie exploited their

situation as victims of persecution in Eastern Europe and turned them into an instrument to oppress and dominate the masses of Arab workers. It has made them into a reserve army, which British imperialism exploits in its imperialist activities in Palestine and in the neighboring Arab countries.<sup>12</sup>

Relatively few Jews were won over to this argument, for had the bulk of Palestinian Jews not been Zionists they would not have been there,\* and those who did become disillusioned tended to leave the "Zionist hell" (as the Communists called it in the early days) and return to Europe. The fact that the PCP was illegal until 1943 did not make its work any easier. Yet it survived, drawing members from the left Zionist groups, from the *G'dud Ha'avoda* (Labor Battalion, a kind of Zionist labor collective) which it split in 1926, from among anti-fascists who immigrated in the 1930s, and from among disillusioned individuals, especially in periods of economic downturn.

It should be noted that the party underwent frequent splits over the proper attitude toward Arab nationalist and toward the Jewish community, and it suffered from a high rate of turnover among members. Furthermore, while the Comintern directives and party resolutions called for "Arabization", the party remained exclusively Jewish until the early 1930s. This began to change only after the PCP, which considered one of its main priorities to be linking up with the Arab national movement against British rule and Zionism, approved of the 1929 Arab attacks on Jewish settlements and communities, to the horror of the *Yishuv*. It justified these attacks by asserting that

the revolt of the oppressed peoples in the colonies against imperialism has always been accompanied by destructive attacks against the national minorities when they aided the imperialist regime, and that the revolt of the Arab masses in Palestine against the imperialists had been and would in the future be accompanied by a war of annihilation against the Jewish minority, as long as it cooperated with the British imperialists.<sup>13</sup>

In the following few years the PCP worked hard to overcome Arab distrust, acquiring a number of Arab members, as well as developing ties with some factions of the Arab national movement in Palestine; it demanded the expulsion of the British and the establishment of an independent Arab Palestine, with the Jews enjoying the rights of a national minority. In 1936, when the Palestinian revolt erupted, the PCP supported it, giving full and uncritical backing to the leadership of al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni. The Jews were called upon to separate themselves from the Zionist camp, for "only the Arab national liberation movement and its victory is the sure solution to the problem of the Jewish minority. . . we call upon the Jewish public to join the strike and continue the struggle for the following demands: abolition of the mandate and the Balfour Declaration, a popular democratic legislative council, the cessation of immigration, of *kibush ha'avoda* and *kibush hakarka*."<sup>14</sup> It has been alleged that Jewish party members were ordered to plant bombs in public places in order to panic the Jewish population.<sup>15</sup>

In the course of the years before the Second World War, the PCP all but disintegrated. Many Jewish members left, many of the Arab members were killed, wounded or arrested

\*This was less true of the second half of the 1930s and the 1940s than it was in the 1920s. After the rise of Hitler to power, many Jews came to Palestine because there was no alternative: no other country would accept an influx of Jewish refugees.

during the revolt. The Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939 also hit the party hard, and the changes of line between that year and mid-1941 concerning the nature of the world war further discredited it. 1943 witnessed a new major split in the still-battered party, when the Arab members left to form the 'League for National Liberation;\*' and in the following year a number of Jewish members left to form the 'Hebrew Communist Party,' which called for the national independence of the Jews in Palestine.<sup>16</sup>

The PCP Central Committee in 1944 publicly admitted that the party had made 'serious errors' in the 1936-39 period; the party

did not fight against Hajj Amin Husayni and his men who were connected with fascism and became its supporters. . . the view of the Jewish Yishuv by the party leadership in that period as a uniformly reactionary collective opposed to the Arab people as a uniformly progressive collective, without taking into account the social and political differentiation among the Jews and Arabs, resulted in the absence of any program regarding the Jewish Yishuv and its future."<sup>17</sup>

In fact, soon after the end of World War II, the party drew closer to the mainstream of the *Yishuv*, by declaring that the Jewish national minority in Palestine had been transformed into a full-fledged nation, and that the proper solution to the Palestine problem was neither an exclusively Arab nor an exclusively Jewish state, but an "independent, democratic Arab-Jewish state."<sup>18</sup> The isolation of the PCP diminished, and it was buoyed by the great sympathy for the USSR in the *Yishuv* after the defeat of Hitler and its new, more palatable line. When in the summer of 1947 the Soviet Union joined the partisans of partition, abandoning its faith in the workability of a bi-national solution, the PCP swung into line and adopted the new Soviet position, vehemently defending the right of the Palestinian Jews to establish a state in part of Palestine.

The record of the communist movement in Palestine showed that it failed to pose a popular alternative to Zionism. A thoroughly Stalinist party, subservient to the frequently changing Comintern line, it failed either to attract considerable support in the *Yishuv* or to make significant inroads into the Arab community. Its blind support for the reactionary leadership of the 1936-39 struggle, a leadership incapable of bringing the struggle to a successful conclusion and unable (or unwilling) to mobilize the masses on other than a religious or chauvinist anti-Jewish basis, proved disastrous.

However, the PCP was the only Palestinian party with both Jewish and Arab members. It kept alive opposition to Zionism in the *Yishuv*, and it raised the idea of joint struggle of the workers of both peoples against the *Yishuv* and against imperialism, even if often in an incorrect way. It must be admitted that circumstances worked against it: the rising tide of fascism in Europe, and the savage persecution (and eventually extermination) of the Jews that accompanied it, appeared to bear out the warnings and premises of Zionism; and the preservation of Palestine as a haven for those European Jews who could escape from the Nazi-occupied continent seemed a matter of life and death for the Jewish people. Finally, the failure of any progressive Palestinian-Arab force, offering the possibility of co-existence on the basis of equality with the Jews, to emerge as a power in the Arab community made the task of revolutionaries very difficult. Whatever

\*The League achieved some success in its work among the Palestinian Arabs before 1948, and played a role in founding the Arab Workers' Congress, a progressive trade union federation, in 1946.



Labor demonstration in Tel Aviv, May 1947.

the reasons, the PCP remained relatively isolated from the mainstreams of both peoples in Palestine, caught between two hostile camps and found it all but impossible (due to both objective circumstances and its own defects) to develop a theoretical outlook and a practice that would allow it to lay the basis for a class alliance of the workers of the Arab majority and the Jewish minority so as to overcome the tragic and bloody conflict between them.

## THE LEFT IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL 1948-67

1948, the year which saw the establishment of the State of Israel in the larger part of Palestine, was also a year of re-alignment on the left. A new period began, and the focus of the activity of the left shifted from a struggle over the creation of the Jewish state to the nature of that state, its government and its relations with the Arab minority within it and the Arab world surrounding it. Israel was an established fact, and the entire left accepted it as such; now all parties entered the struggle over its character and future course.\*

### MAPAM

Early in 1948, MAPAM—the United Workers Party—was founded through the union of the left-Zionist camp. Its component parties were the *Kibbutz Artzi-Hashomer Hatza'ir* movement (in the form of its political arm, the *Hashomer Hatza'ir* Workers Party) and *Hatnu'a le-Ahdut Ha'avoda* (Movement for the Unity of Labor), the left wing of MAPAI which split from that party in 1944† and which had merged with left *Po'alei-Tzion* in 1946. For the first time, the Zionist

\*In the 48-67 period, there was one non-leftist non-Zionist countercurrent. The publisher of HA'OLAM HAZEH ('This World'), a weekly that is part scandal, part gossip and part political opposition, Uri Avneri ran successfully in 1965 for the Knesset on his own list. He claimed to be a non-Zionist, arguing that Zionism was no longer a relevant issue. In his book ISRAEL WITHOUT ZIONISM (published after the 1967 war) he wrote that he was a Hebrew (i.e., Israeli) rather than a Jewish nationalist and was thus prepared to deal with Arab nationalists. His program focused on the Middle Eastern question (whose solution he saw in the creation of a 'Semitic federation') and he was anxious to dissociate himself from the left. Once in the Knesset he acted as a gadfly to the government, criticizing its policies and becoming well-known abroad among liberals and leftists. But his constrained opposition still resulted in his support for the 1967 war as a defensive war on Israel's part.

†This group should not be confused with the earlier party, forerunner of MAPAI in the 1920's, of the same name. AHDUT HA'AVODA's base was in the KIBBUTZ HAME'UHAD federation and some city branches of MAPAI, especially Tel Aviv. The split was over the bureaucratic, domineering and compromising (in the trade-union struggle) policies of the MAPAI leadership. The leaders and supporters of AHDUT HA'AVODA were also more sympathetic to the USSR and more 'activist' over questions of the YISHUV's military policy than the MAPAI chiefs. Among its leaders still prominent in Israeli politics are Yisrael Galili and Yigal Allon.



workers' movement to the left of *MAPAI* was united in one party with substantial urban and kibbutz support, and its future looked promising. Its program attempted to combine Zionist and revolutionary socialism:

A. The party is united in seeing Zionism as the solution to the Jewish question by means of the ingathering of the exiles (KIBBUTZ GALUYOT) of the Jewish people and their territorial concentration, national revival, social renewal and political, social and cultural independence in Eretz-Yisra'el. . .

B. The party is united in seeing the historic task of the revolutionary-class struggle and of the establishment of a workers' regime as the elimination of capitalism and of all forms of national and social slavery, the creation of a classless socialist society and a world of brotherhood among peoples.<sup>19</sup>

The newly-unified movement played a major role in the 1948 war, especially through the elite 'striking force' of the *Yishuv*, the *Palmach* (based in large part on the *Kibbutz Hame'uhad* federation) and through its kibbutzim, which contributed to stopping the advance of the Arab armies. In the elections to Israel's first Knesset (parliament), *MAPAM* won 14.7% of the vote (19 seats out of 120), making it the largest party in the country after *MAPAI* (36%, 46 seats). In the Histadrut elections the same year, *MAPAM* won over one-third of the vote.<sup>20</sup> After the first elections in the new state, the leaders of the party proposed to David Ben-Gurion, *MAPAI* leader and Prime Minister, the formation of a coalition *MAPAI*-*MAPAM* government which would be based on the principles of the Zionist left. Ben-Gurion contemptuously refused, preferring to form a coalition with the religious Zionist parties. He was anxious to avoid alienating the US government in that critical period by allowing a pro-Soviet party into the government, and the relatively conservative social outlook of the religious Zionists gave him more room to maneuver than *MAPAM*'s radical program.

*MAPAM* in its early years saw itself as the effective communist party of Israel. It was enthusiastically pro-Soviet, maintained good relations with many left-socialist parties and groups in Europe and the Third World,\* and attacked the *MAPAI*ed government for its close ties with the US, its reformist social policy, and its failure to achieve a peace settlement with the Arab states. In 1951 it had some 47,000 members and 200 branches (many of them in kibbutzim).<sup>21</sup> In the early 1950s there were some instances of cooperation between *MAPAM* and the Israeli communists.<sup>22</sup>

But all was not well within the new party. Three distinct tendencies emerged, based on *MAPAM*'s original components. On the right was the former *Ahdut Ha'avoda*, opposed to the admission of Arabs to membership, increasingly antipathetic to the Soviet Union (especially with the wave of anti-Semitism that marked Stalin's last years, the Prague trials, the 'Doctors' Plot', etc.), fearful of domination by the more ideologically cohesive and more disciplined *Hashomer Hatzair* and, not least importantly, unhappy at the prospect of long years of parliamentary opposition in *MAPAM*. *Ahdut Ha'avoda* also favored a more hard-line, 'activist' policy toward the Arabs. In the center was *Hashomer Hatzair*, anxious to maintain a sympathetic attitude toward the USSR but disillusioned by the anti-Jewish campaign in that country and in Eastern Europe, favoring admission of Arabs to *MAPAM*, wishing to transform the young party from a coalition of autonomous groups into a

\*As noted earlier, *MAPAM* presented Zionism's progressive face to the international left. *MAPAM* leaders were not infrequently sent as diplomatic representatives to East European and other countries where they sought to win sympathy for Zionism, of which their brand was (especially in theory) much more palatable to many foreign socialists than that practiced at home of the Israeli government.



*MAPAM* affiliated border village (moshav), Mishmar Ayalon, settled in 1949.

unified organization which meant subordinating the *Ahdut Ha'avoda* minority to the *Hashomer Hatzair* majority) and opposed to an activist' Israeli military policy (i.e., retaliatory and punitive raids). On the left was a group led by Moshe Sneh, demanding an alliance with the Israel Communist Party, and placing loyalty to the increasingly-hostile USSR ahead of its commitment to Zionism; it attacked *MAPAM*'s participation in the World Zionist Organization and the World Jewish Congress.

The party crisis came to a head in 1953-54. First the anti-Zionist left, led by Sneh, left *MAPAM* and later joined the Communist Party. Then the right split, reconstituting *Ahdut Ha'avoda* as an independent party. After only six years the dream of a unified revolutionary Zionist left had proven a failure. Only *Hashomer Hatzair* was left in *MAPAM*, which received only 7.3% of the votes and 9 seats in the third Knesset elections (1955) to 8.2% and 10 seats for *Ahdut Ha'avoda*, which grew closer to *MAPAI* in the following decade and a half.<sup>23</sup>

The record of *MAPAM* between 1948 and 1967 shows its steady drift to the right. The party opposed the military administration over the Israeli Arabs that was in force from 1948 to 1966 (when it was transformed into a police rather than an army apparatus); it admitted Arabs as members, provided that they accepted the party's Zionist program; it called for a non-aligned Israeli foreign policy, and a conciliatory attitude toward the Arabs; it claimed to oppose *MAPAI*'s reformism and trade-union policies and its failure to live up to its socialist principles. But when crucial decisions had to be made, *MAPAM* placed its loyalty to Zionist nationalism ahead of its commitment to "socialism and the brotherhood of peoples." *MAPAM* kibbutzim did not hesitate to take over and use land expropriated from Palestinian Arabs who fled or were expelled in 1948. While *MAPAM*'s cabinet ministers voted against Ben-Gurion's decision to join the British and French in their aggression against Egypt in October 1956, the party supported the Israeli attack once it had begun and even organized demonstrations against Israeli withdrawal (under US and Soviet pressure) from the Gaza strip in 1957. Though it called for non-alignment, it recognized the crucial importance of US backing—military, financial and diplomatic—for Israel and thus could

not apply the same yardstick to US-Israel relations that it did to the ties between the US and other client states. *MAPAM* supported the war of June 1967 as a legitimate war of national defense on Israel's part. It now opposes withdrawal from the occupied territories except as part of an overall peace settlement guaranteeing 'secure and defensible' borders for Israel; and even then it is unwilling to give up all the territory conquered in 1967. It has not been very favorable to the idea of establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, and rejects the right of all Palestinian Arabs to return to their homeland or choose compensation.

On internal Israeli questions *MAPAM* retained at least some of its militant rhetoric over the years while pursuing an increasingly reformist policy. Indeed, by the mid-1960s it was merely a camp-follower of *MAPAI*, meekly criticizing it from the left but unable and unwilling to oppose it vigorously. *MAPAM* participated in coalition governments from 1955 to 1961, and again from 1965 to the present, its distinct identity as well as its electoral strength eroding away. Its loyal base in Israel's largest kibbutz federation preserved for it some bargaining power in political negotiations, but the concessions made to it by *MAPAI* were generally more verbal than real. These minimal and largely meaningless concessions, the 'unique character of the Jewish problem', and the need to keep the right-wing parties in Israel from winning power were and are used to justify *MAPAM*'s support for the policies of the *MAPAI*-dominated government and to cover the ever-increasing gap between the party's rhetoric and its actual practice.

In sum, it can be said that between 1948 and 1967 *MAPAM* was a classic example of a leftist party drifting rightwards under the pressure of its primary loyalty to nationalism. Though it claimed to be a Marxist and even Leninist party, the fires of its radicalism were put out by the icy waters of an Israeli reality which constantly pushed to the fore the contradiction between Zionist nationalism and revolutionary socialism. *MAPAM* tried to bridge the contradiction, to paper it over; but it ceased to be a real revolutionary alternative to *MAPAI* and became instead merely the left-wing of Israeli social democracy. Ready to abandon its socialist convictions in practice, while retaining its rhetoric in order to retain its cabinet posts, *MAPAM* ended up as a discredited and hypocritical reformist party.

## COMMUNIST PARTIES

For the Israeli communist movement too, 1948 marked the beginning of a new period. By late 1947 all three factions of the communist movement—the official Palestine Communist Party, the Arab League for National Liberation, and the Jewish Hebrew Communist Party—had adopted the Soviet position favoring the establishment of a Jewish state in part of Palestine. The way was now open to unity, which was accomplished by the end of 1948; the three factions merged to form the Israeli Communist Party (*MAKI*).<sup>\*</sup> The party enthusiastically supported the war for the establishment of the state of Israel, and participated in it fully. Indeed, communist parties in several Arab countries agitated in favor of demands calling on the Arab governments to end their intervention in Palestine and to recognize Israel. This intervention was seen as part of an im-

<sup>\*</sup>The former 'Hebrew Communists' didn't last long in *MAKI*. Their leaders were expelled or quit in 1949, accused of forming a bloc with members of 'LEHI' (the 'Stern gang'), a Jewish terrorist group.

perialist plot to crush Israel, which was presumed to become a center of the anti-imperialist struggle in the Middle East. An Israeli communist newspaper in 1948 wrote:

We call for direct negotiations between the government of Israel and the Arab governments. But on what basis? . . . On the basis of ending the ongoing war which imperialism has imposed on the inhabitants of Palestine, and on the basis of withdrawal of the [Arab] armies and their demobilization. . . We call for direct negotiations aimed at saving the Arabs of Palestine from foreign occupation. . . for occupation by the armies of the imperialist-client Arab governments is also occupation.<sup>24</sup>

During the immediate post-WW II period, the Soviet government evidently believed the creation of Israel would be a blow to British influence in the region. From its inception *MAKI* accepted and defended without question the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign Jewish state. This policy was based on the meticulous distinction between Zionism—which it rejected as a reactionary nationalist ideology—and the right of the Jews in Palestine to self-determination in the form of a sovereign state, Israel. Whatever the colonial origins of Israel, the role of the Zionist movement in its creation, and its oppressive and racist policies (e.g., the 'Law of Return'), *MAKI* insisted that it was incorrect to challenge Israel's legitimacy as a state. Of course, it did vigorously oppose the domestic and foreign policies of Israel's governments. But by its acceptance of Israel, it won for itself a place as a more or less legitimate (though rarely respectable) Israeli political tendency, a status it had not enjoyed in the previous *Yishuv*. In the state's first elections, *MAKI* received 3.5% of the vote and 4 Knesset seats.

As *MAKI* tried to play an active role in the social struggles of the early years, it was able to tap two new bases of support apart from the veteran communist hard-core: new immigrants and the Arab minority. Many hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants entered Israel in the first few years of its existence, and there was widespread discontent at the inadequate housing, unemployment, poor working conditions, etc., that they encountered.

But the Arab minority in Israel was a much richer field of activity. The remnant of the Palestinian Arab community found itself cut off from the neighboring countries, in many cases dispossessed, under military administration and second-class citizens in the new Jewish state. *MAKI*, though unequivocally defending the right of Israel to exist, was the only non-Zionist party in the country and had some able Arab organizers. Furthermore, the Israeli authorities prevented the emergence of any Arab nationalist party. Thus *MAKI* had a virtual monopoly in the conscious Arab sector, and support for it became more an expression of Arab discontent at national oppression and discrimination than of belief in socialism. Indeed, not a few merchants and professionals in Arab towns and villages supported the party for this reason. As early as the 1949 elections, *MAKI* received about half of Arab Nazareth's votes, and thereafter Arabs provided a much greater than proportional part of the party's membership and electoral support.<sup>25</sup> *MAKI* fought against discrimination and for the abolition of the military administration. Its Arab members were often harassed and persecuted by the authorities for their activities.

In the 1950s *MAKI* attacked the Israeli government's policies in nearly all fields. It argued that Israel was becoming a puppet of American imperialism, and demanded that it follow a neutralist (or pro-Soviet) foreign policy. The party accused Ben-Gurion of following an aggressive and provocative policy

toward the Arab states and condemned the Israeli-British-French attack on Egypt in 1956. As the Soviet Union's attitude toward Arab nationalism warmed in the mid-1950s, *MAKI* grew increasingly supportive of Nasser and other leaders of 'progressive Arab nationalism'. In short, it unquestioningly supported Soviet policy toward and analysis of the Arab nationalist movement in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Domestically, *MAKI* regarded Israel as just another capitalist state. It had little support among organized Jewish workers, generally receiving fewer votes in (exclusively Jewish) Histadrut elections than in national elections.<sup>26</sup> As it remained non-Zionist, and seemed to support the country's alleged enemies, it remained isolated from the majority of Israeli Jews.

In the early 1960s, as the process of 'destalinization' and the search for new, national roads to socialism engaged the world communist movement, a new tendency began to emerge in *MAKI*. Led by Moshe Sneh, Shmu'el Mikunis and Esther Vilenska, this tendency sought to move closer to the mainstream of Israeli political life by adopting a more critical attitude toward the Arab regimes and their 'progressive' characters, while softening opposition to the government of Levi Eshkol, which it regarded as an improvement over the Ben-Gurion regime. It felt that *MAKI* should make clearer its support for Israel's existence and should criticize those Arab leaders who spoke of eliminating the Jewish state. Israel, it argued, must be the first to recognize the right of the Palestinian Arabs to return to their homeland or receive compensation, as *MAKI* had always believed, but while the party

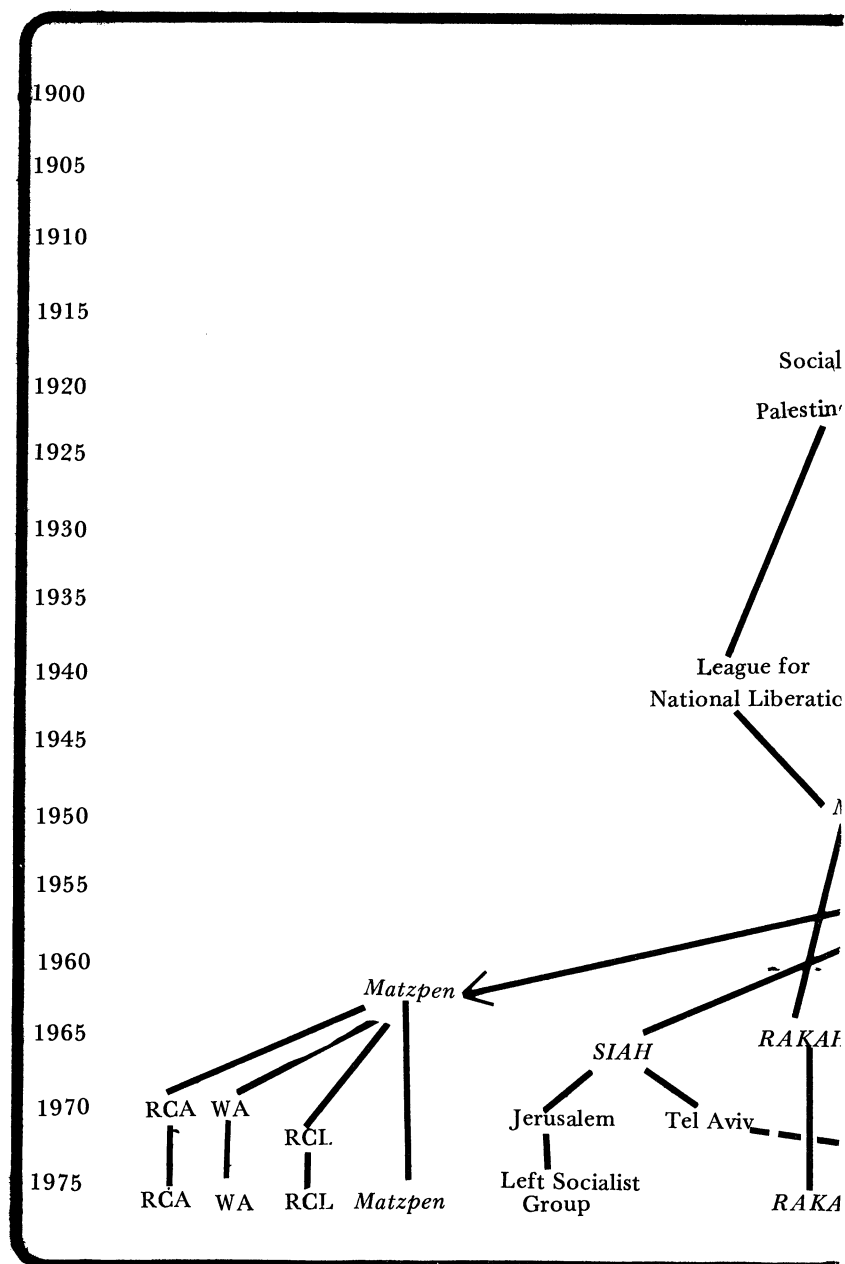
directs the brunt of our struggle against the denial by the rulers of Israel of the rights of the Palestinian Arab people, with this we must forcefully come out against every manifestation of negation of the rights of Israel on the part of anyone. . . .

Our appearance against Arab chauvinist manifestations does not weaken our primary struggle against anti-Arab chauvinism and the dominant policies in Israel; the complete opposite is true.<sup>27</sup>

Opposing this new tendency was a faction led by Meir Vilner, Tawfiq Tubi and Emil Habibi; they regarded the Sneh-Mikunis-Vilenska formulation as a capitulation to Israeli chauvinism, arguing that the basic problem was not the lack of mutual Israeli-Arab recognition of each other's legitimate rights, but rather the Israeli government's failure to recognize the rights of the Arabs; this should remain the main focus of *MAKI*'s struggle: ". . . the position of the Arab countries against the right of the State of Israel to exist results from the continuation of the harmful policy of placing Israel in the service of imperialism. . ."<sup>28</sup> Vilner, Tubi and Habibi also felt the differences between the policies of Ben-Gurion and those of his successor Eshkol were minimal.

The struggle between the two factions intensified in 1964 and resulted in a split in the party just before its 15th Congress in August 1965. Nearly all of *MAKI*'s Jewish members, and none of its Arab members, supported the 'softened' position of Sneh, Mikunis and Vilenska; all the Arab members and a handful of Jews backed the traditional policies endorsed by Vilner, Tubi and Habibi. Each faction held its own party congress and claimed to be the 'real' *MAKI*; and indeed the party split more or less down the middle. After lengthy legal battles the Jewish section won the right to the name *MAKI*, while the predominantly Arab party had to adopt a new name, *RAKAH* (the 'New Communist List') though it continued to insist that the other faction had left the real party.

Henceforth there were to be two communist parties in Israel. Both sought to win Moscow's approval and *MAKI*



insisted that it remained a loyal communist party while trying to convince the USSR to adopt a more 'balanced' approach to the Middle Eastern problem—that is, a more pro-Israeli stance. *RAKAH* claimed that it had remained faithful to the Soviet line, asked "if the policy of the Mikunis-Sneh faction, which left *MAKI*, is not able to convince one Arab communist, how will it be able to serve as a basis of peace between Israel and the Arab states? This is a group which, to our sorrow, has tumbled into Jewish chauvinism," and asserted that "in Israeli conditions a communist party without Arabs is like a rabbi wearing a cross on his chest."<sup>29</sup> In the elections held later that same year, *MAKI* won only one seat to *RAKAH*'s three; before the split the unified party had held 5 seats.<sup>30</sup>

Two conclusions can be made about the Israeli communist movement before 1967. First, its strong base of support in the Arab community (almost exclusively in the case of *RAKAH* after 1965) as a nationalist, or at least anti-government, party

## ISRAELI NEW LEFT, 1967 - 1973

The six years between the third and fourth Israeli-Arab wars saw both the absorption of the traditional left, *MAKI* and *MAPAM* but not *RAKAH*, into the consensual mainstream of Israeli politics and the emergence of a new left searching for a new road.

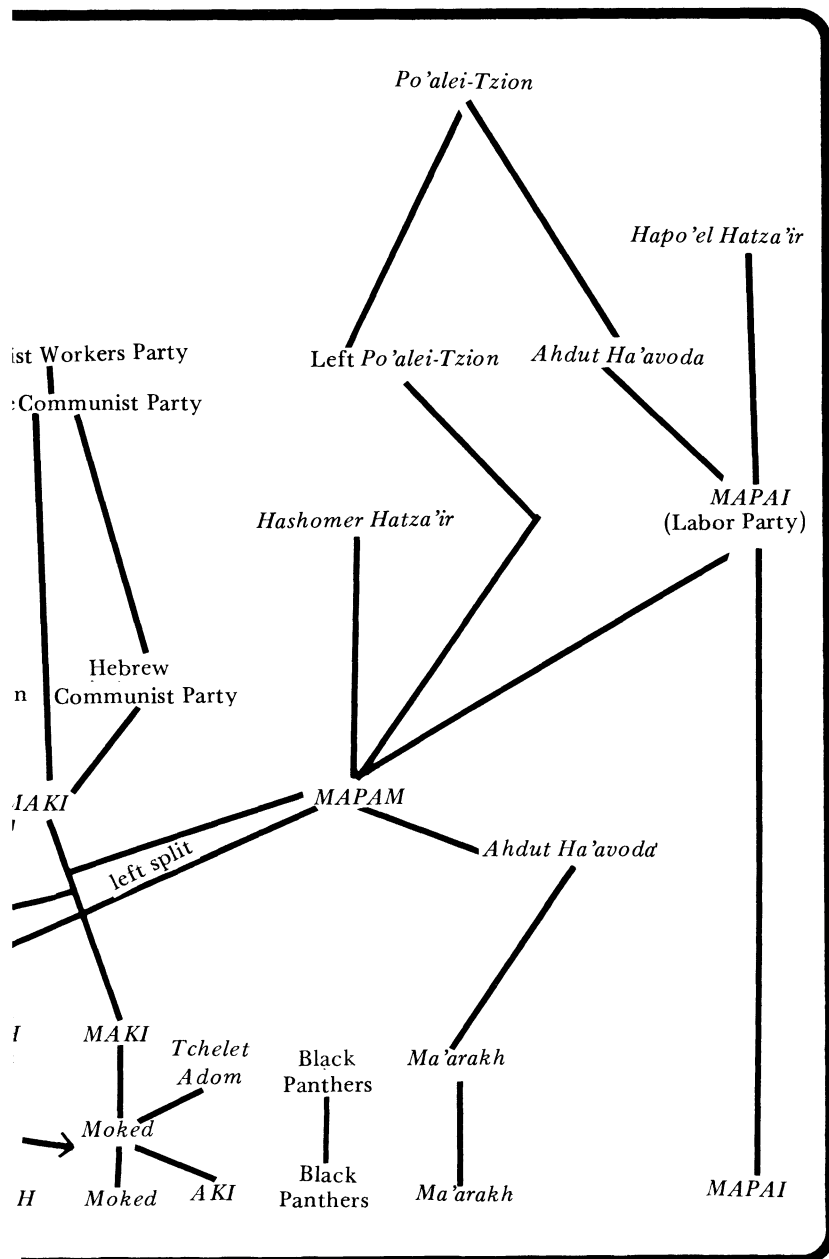
*MAKI*, increasingly under the domination of Moshe Sneh, endorsed the 1967 war and echoed the line of the Israeli government concerning its origins. In the years that followed, despite some internal opposition, it moved steadily toward a renunciation of its entire communist past and a reconciliation with Zionism. While it remained critical of the government's economic policies, on the question of peace and policy toward the Arabs *MAKI* was no more advanced than *MAPAM*, or even some Labor Party leaders; it opposed any return to the pre-1967 borders, demanding instead new "secure" borders for Israel. By the early 1970s *MAKI* (or what remained of it) was openly Zionist. In 1973 it joined with a small group under the leadership of Meir Pa'il (*Tchelet-Adom*, or Blue-Red) to form *Moked* ("Focus"). *Moked* opposed a return to the 1967 borders, though Pa'il, (elected to the Knesset in 1973) later came around to favoring a complete withdrawal. Before *MAKI* abandoned the last vestiges of its communist past, a small group led by Shmuel Mikunis and Esther Vilenska (who with Sneh had organized the 1965 split) quit the party and set up another small group known as *AKI*, the "Israeli Communist Opposition."

*RAKAH* opposed the 1967 war vehemently, considering it part of an imperialist attempt to bring down the "progressive" regimes in Egypt and Syria. It retained its pro-Soviet orthodoxy and its solid base among the Israeli Arab population, while finding itself more isolated and abused than ever in the Jewish sector amidst the wave of hysteria that preceded the war and the wave of chauvinism and euphoria that followed the stunning Israeli victory. It still sees UN Resolution 242 of November 1967 as the basis of a final settlement in the Middle East.

*MAPAM* regarded the 1967 war as one of national defense. Increasingly a reformist party, it joined in 1968 the *Ma'arakh* ("alignment") with the new Israel Labor Party formed the same year by the merger of *Ahdut Ha'avoda*, *MAPAI* and *RAFI*, Ben-Gurion's right-leaning *MAPAI* splinter. The Zionist left finally found itself united within a single political framework, but it was a thoroughly pragmatic and social-democratic bloc. *MAPAM* was reduced to echoing, and occasionally criticizing, the Labor Party from the left, no longer even running its own separate list in Knesset elections. It has, however, insisted on maintaining its traditionally distinct identity, rejecting full integration into the Labor Party.

Within both *MAKI* and *MAPAM* there were many who were unhappy with this drift to the right and surrender of long-cherished principles. As early as 1962 a group had split from *MAKI* to the left over that orthodox communist party's bureaucratism, its failure to carry through de-Stalinization or to reassess its doctrine in light of the Cuban revolutionary experience. Though this group, known as *Matzpen* ("Compass") from the name of its magazine, thus appeared before the 1967 war, its greatest growth came only afterward.

**MATZPEN.** *Matzpen* (its proper name is the Israeli Socialist Organization) is explicitly non-Zionist, regarding Israel as a



proved, despite government harassment, to be a fertile field of activity but showed the relative isolation of the party from the masses of the Jewish majority in Israel and its marginality in political life. Secondly, it was overwhelmingly difficult to resist the ideological pressure exerted by that majority and the parties that led it: nearly all the Jewish communists, to the praise of the Zionist left, succumbed to those pressures and the fact of their isolation from the Israeli mainstream, and embraced a new course that, once begun, proved impossible to limit. While from 1965 to 1967 Sneh and his colleagues insisted that *MAKI* was like any other loyal communist party, it was soon to become clear that it had broken with its non-Zionist past more sharply than was at first apparent and that once this break was made the road to a 'communist Zionism', a "communism" within the bounds of the official Israel consensus, was open. Of course, this synthesis was not to prove any more successful than it did in the case of *MAPAM*.

settler-colonial state. It rejects the distinction made by *RAK-AH* and other left groups between Zionism, the movement and its ideology, and Israel, its creation, and denies the legitimacy of the state inasmuch as it is a colonial and racist phenomenon. *Matzpen* recognizes the right of the Israeli-Jewish people to self-determination but argues that it cannot take the form of a Zionist state established at the expense of the indigenous population. Thus the “de-Zionization” of Israel, and socialist revolution throughout the region, are seen as the only solution to the Middle Eastern problem.

The fundamental field of activity of *Matzpen* is the struggle against the present regime in Israel. Our socialist principles place us in uncompromising opposition to Zionism. We see Zionism as a colonizing enterprise carried out at the expense of the Arab masses (and foremost the Palestinian people) under the protection of imperialism and in cooperation with it. Zionism also stands in contradiction to the interests of the masses of exploited workers in Israel, by placing them in historic opposition to the masses of the entire Arab East. The State of Israel in its present, Zionist form is not only the result of the Zionist enterprise but also an instrument for its perpetuation and expansion.

*Matzpen* is in solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian Arab people against its oppression and the negation of its rights by Zionism.

A solution to the national and social problems of the area (and among them the Palestinian problem of the Israeli-Arab conflict) can be achieved only by a socialist revolution in the area, which will overthrow all the existing regimes in it and will establish in their place the political unity of the region, under workers' leadership. In this united and liberated Arab East the right of self-determination (including the right to establish a separate state) will be given to every one of the non-Arab peoples living in it, including the Israeli-Jewish nation.

As part of the struggle for this revolution, *Matzpen* wages a struggle for the overthrow of the Zionist regime and the abolition of all the institutions, laws, regulations and procedures it is based upon. *Matzpen* strives for the integration of Israel in the socialist regional union on the basis of free choice.<sup>31</sup>

*Matzpen* is not a Leninist organization, in the sense of regarding itself as the vanguard of the Israeli proletariat. It combines a basically Trotskyist perspective of the Soviet Union with a stress on the self-activity and spontaneity of the working class, which some critics have seen as bordering on anarchism. *Matzpen* is opposed to *RAKAH's* policy of working within the Histadrut, seeing it as a Zionist institution. It calls for independent workers' struggle and organization instead.

*Matzpen* attracted many new members and sympathizers\* after 1967, as its theoretic approach allowed it to explain the June War as an inevitable consequence of Zionism as an inherently expansionist movement. It was one of the first Israeli left groups to become aware of the centrality of the Palestinian aspect of the Israeli-Arab conflict and after 1967 to establish contacts abroad with individuals active in the Palestinian liberation struggle. *Matzpen* also recruited Palestinian Arab members.†

The post-war situation, within Israel and outside it, played a large role in fostering the growth of the new Israeli left. *MAKI* and *MAPAM* had been discredited, *RAKAH* was too rigid and subservient to Moscow to attract Israeli youth. Many Israelis were worried about the fact that their army was

\*“Many” in the context of Israeli radicalism means not thousands or hundreds but perhaps dozens.

† It should be noted that *Matzpen* suffered from the same problem that affected the anti-Zionist Palestine Communist Party in the mandatory period. Once someone became convinced that Israel was indeed a colonial phenomenon, and given the immense efforts required to make any headway at all in the struggle, she or he was as likely to leave the country as to remain and continue the fight. Some Israeli revolutionaries remained active abroad, in the framework of *ISRACA*, the Israeli Revolutionary Action Committee Abroad.



Defendants in the Red Front trial, 1972.

now an army of occupation in conquered Arab territories, and began to wonder if the Israeli government was really willing to return the conquered territories in exchange for a peace settlement. The rise of a new student left in Europe and the United States was also not without an impact on young Israelis. Last but not least the rise of a militant and independent Palestinian Arab resistance movement resurrected the question of Zionism and the rights of the Palestinian people, leading many to question their once strongly-held beliefs in the benevolence of Zionism and the validity of Israel's claim to legitimacy.

*Matzpen* and the other new left formations benefited from this new atmosphere. *Matzpen*, despite harrassment (the term became synonymous with traitor in the Israeli press and leading circles), carried on its work of propaganda and agitation, focusing on repression in the occupied territories, violations of the rights of the Palestinian people, and the unwillingness of the Israeli government to give up the conquered territories.

Unfortunately, the good contacts it developed with the left in the Western countries as the only militant anti-Zionist and socialist group in Israel led to its fragmentation. *Matzpen's* members developed ties to Trotskyist and other international left tendencies, which first crystallized within *Matzpen* into distinct groups and then split off as independent sectarian formations. The first big split came in the fall of 1970, when the Revolutionary Communist Alliance (known by the name of its publication, *Ma'avak* (“Struggle”), left *Matzpen*. The *Ma'avak* group is “Third Worldist” and quasi-Maoist in orientation (not unlike the Progressive Labor Party in the United States at one point) and emphasizes the colonial nature of Israel. It sees the Arab revolution developing in stages, with a stage of petty bourgeois-led struggle against Zionism and imperialism leading to the stage of socialist revolution. At the present time, it feels that the petty bourgeois Arab regimes (Egypt, Syria, Iraq) still have a historic role to play in the Arab revolution and must be supported in their struggles against Zionism and imperialism.

At the same time a second faction split off. This was the Workers' Alliance, known as “Avant-gard” from the name of

its journal. It identifies with the Lambertist section of the splintered Trotskyist movement. Highly sectarian and active in labor work, it emphasizes the capitalist character of Israel, tending to downplay the colonial-Zionist aspect. Today it is perhaps the largest of the *Matzpen* splinters.

The following year a third group, the Revolutionary Communist League, left *Matzpen*. Also Trotskyist, but identified with the Fourth International led by Ernest Mandel, it is often known as "Matzpen Marksisti." It is at present very weak, many of its members having left in 1975 for the Workers' Alliance group.

Thus of the original *Matzpen* there are today four remnants: the core of the original group, still known as *Matzpen* (the ISO); the Revolutionary Communist Alliance (*Ma'avak*); the Workers' Alliance (Avant-gard); and the Revolutionary Communist League. *Matzpen*, the RCA and the RCL cooperate on some issues, while the WA remains aloof. There has been some friction between it and the rest of the anti-Zionist left.<sup>32</sup> The total membership of all these four groups does not exceed two hundred, though each has a periphery of sympathizers.\*

**SIAH.** Considerably larger in size and broader in appeal was *SIAH*, which stands for "New Israeli Left" and also means 'dialogue' in Hebrew. *SIAH* began to take form in 1968-69, and its membership was in large part drawn from two groups: first, young members of *Hashomer Hatzair* kibbutzim who were unhappy with *MAPAM*'s decision to enter the 'alignment' with the Labor Party and sought a new, more dynamic and radical framework in which to express their socialist-Zionist politics,<sup>†</sup> and second, immigrants from abroad, often radicalized by the student movements in their home countries, who came to Israeli universities after 1967 and sought to help build an Israeli new left. The former element was predominantly studying at Tel Aviv University, and thus the Tel Aviv 'branch' (*SIAH* had no formal membership, fixed organizational structure or commonly-accepted ideology) tended to seek a more radical version of *MAPAM*; while in Jerusalem, where more foreign students were active in *SIAH*, many members of the branch thought of themselves as non-Zionist or even anti-Zionist. The Tel Aviv branch rejected cooperation with *Matzpen*, while the Jerusalem branch was willing to work together with it on specific projects. There were differences over tactics as well, with the Jerusalem branch more willing to confront the police in the streets.

*SIAH* initiated serious political activity in 1970, with actions protesting the establishment of Israeli settlements in

\*Government persecution of the anti-Zionist left deserves to be noted in any account of *Matzpen*. In 1972 a number of Arab and Jewish members of the 'Red Front,' a splinter of the Revolutionary Communist Alliance, were arrested, tried and imprisoned as Syrian agents. (See the depositions of Ehud Adiv and Daud Turki in the JOURNAL OF PALESTINE STUDIES, Vol. II, No. 4 [Summer 1973]). At the end of the same year two members of the Revolutionary Communist Alliance (*Ma'avak*) itself, Rami Livneh (son of RAKAH Knesset member Avraham Levenbraun) and Mali Lerner were arrested and charged with having had contact with a foreign agent, failing to report such contact, and possessing material published by an illegal organization. Livneh had, in 1970, had a political discussion in Nazareth with an Arab whose identity was unknown to him, in the course of which he refused on political grounds to have anything to do with terrorist activities inside Israel. The government claimed that the Arab was an 'enemy agent' sent to recruit others inside Israel. The 'illegal' material Livneh possessed consisted of Arabic newspapers and journals available in Israeli university libraries. He was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, later reduced to four; Lerner received a shorter sentence.

†Another small group which left *MAPAM* because of its rightward drift was Brit Hasmol ("Left Alliance"), led by *MAPAM* veteran Ya'akov Riftin. One of its main priorities is the restoration of good relations between the USSR and Israel, which to the members of *SIAH* was hardly a priority issue.

the occupied territories, the government's failure to pursue peace initiatives, and the manifestations of corruption and profiteering that appeared in the economic boom that followed the 1967 war; several violent clashes with the police ensued. Very cautiously *SIAH* began to approach the formulation of a coherent program, a process which is not complete today. In its internal debates the question of the attitude toward Zionism played a prominent role, with nearly everyone anxious to preserve *SIAH*'s unity, even at the cost of ideological amorphousness and extreme decentralization.

In the spring and summer of 1973, with elections scheduled for the fall, the left groups realigned themselves. We have already noted the formation of *Moked*, an explicitly left-Zionist party by *MAKI* and *Tchelet-Adom*. One part of *SIAH*, mainly in Tel Aviv, joined the new formation, seeing in it a return to the authentic socialist-Zionist synthesis *MAPAM* had abandoned. The non-Zionist and more radical members (mainly in Jerusalem) backed *Meri* ('Insurgency' or 'Rebellion'), a list headed by Uri Avneri, which called for Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 frontiers.

פועלי כל הארצות התאחדו!

## להפגנה מאוחדת יהודית-ערבית ב-1 במאי 1976

נוכח סכנת המלחמה —  
נוכח התלכדות והסתערות „גוש אמונים” והימין הקיצוני —  
נוכח הפגיעות הנמשכות באוכלוסייה הערבית —  
נוכח ההתנכלות לשכר ולזכויות העובדים —

אנו החתומים מטה, בעלי השקפות שונות והמשתייכים לזרמים ציבוריים שונים, קוראים לציבור העובדים, לאנשי ההתיישבות העובדת, לסטודנטים ולנוער —  
להפגין במלוכד ב-1 במאי 1976 —

- \* למען שלום צודק ללא סיפוחים, כתנאי הכרחי להבטחת שלומה ובטחונה של מדינת ישראל!
- \* להכרה בזכות העם הפלשטינאי לכינון מדינתו בצד מדינת ישראל!
- \* להגנת הדמוקרטיה ולכלימת הימין הקיצוני!
- \* לשוויון זכויות לערביי ישראל!
- \* לחיסול הפער הערתי!
- \* נגד היוקרה, נגד פיטורי עובדים ופגיעות כשטר!

ההפגנה תיערך בשבת, 1.5.76, בתל-אביב, מתאספים בשעה 11.30 בשדר' בן-גוריון פינת רח' דיזנגוף.

"For a United Jewish-Arab Demonstration on the first of May 1976"  
Slogans include: for a just peace without annexation; for recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people to establish its state by the side of the State of Israel; for equal rights for the Arabs of Israel; for the elimination of the gap between ethnic communities; for the defense of democracy and stopping the extreme right.

Another important movement that appeared in Israel during the six years between the 1967 and 1973 wars was the 'Black Panthers'. (See interview with a representative in this issue of *MERIP Reports*). After the 1970 cease-fire on the Suez front, this movement emerged from the slums of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and the smaller towns, demanding an end to social and economic discrimination against the 'Oriental' Jews of Israel, those whose origins are in the Arab countries. The gap between Israeli Jews of Western origin and those of Eastern origin had

been growing, with the latter receiving the worst jobs, living in slums, getting poor-quality education, while new immigrants from the USSR and the West received new apartments, social benefits, and high-prestige jobs. Demonstrations, sit-ins and clashes with the police followed. Despite harassment, attacks in the press and from government officials, and splits, the movement survived and spread. From the start the Israeli left supported the struggle of the Black Panthers, who have in recent years moved toward socialism, broadening their political perspective and coming to see the connection between their own oppression, that of the Palestinian Arabs, and the social structure of Israel. This is quite a break with the past, for many Oriental Jews have in the past supported the chauvinist right on nationalist grounds rather than the socialist left on class grounds. This movement could have tremendous potential for the future, as the Oriental Jews and Arabs together constitute a majority of the Israeli working class. Any revolutionary alliance in Israel must ultimately focus on that link.

## SINCE THE OCTOBER WAR

Before the 1973 elections could be held, the October war erupted, and again the Israeli political scene shifted. Though Israel managed in the end to secure a military victory, the war proved a political defeat and, even more importantly, severely shook Israel's morale and economy. The old political leadership was discredited, new groups sprang up to challenge the establishment from various directions, and the focus of the political struggle shifted.

The left saw as vindicated its assertion that continued occupation of Arab territories would prevent any peace settlement and ensure new wars, though many other Israelis became more convinced of the need to keep the territories as buffer zones. Nonetheless the recognition that time is working against Israel, and that it is impossible to continue to ignore the Palestinian factor, has penetrated the thinking of many Israelis, even in government circles; US pressure undoubtedly helped push this along.

The left in Israel today is both diversified and dynamic. On the non-Zionist side are *Matzpen* proper and the three groups which split from it. All have small memberships, but Israel is a small country and even small groups have an impact larger than their members might warrant. *RAKAH* remains an orthodox communist party, and retains great support among Israeli Arabs, as demonstrated by the victory of a 'Democratic Front' led by *RAKAH* leader Tawfiq Ziyad in Nazareth's municipal elections in December 1975. At present *RAKAH* is leading the struggle against expropriation of Arab lands for Jewish settlements in the Galilee and organized the March 30th 1976 'Land Day' protest strike in which six Arabs were killed by Israeli police and soldiers. It continues to faithfully follow the Soviet line, attacking Zionism and Israeli government policy but unequivocally defending the right of the State of Israel to exist within its 1967 borders. *SIAH*-Jerusalem, which remained independent when most of the Tel Aviv branch joined *Moked*, is gradually formulating an ideology, which will probably resemble that of *RAKAH* as regards Israel: a rejection of Zionism combined with an affirmation of the legitimacy of Israel, along with a Palestinian Arab state in the West Bank and Gaza. It seeks to build a new Israeli left, democratic, radical and flexible.\* Late in 1975, a group close

\**SIAH*-Jerusalem publishes 'Israleft', a bi-weekly English-language news service. Subscriptions are available from: Israleft, POB 9013, Jerusalem, Israel.

to it in outlook emerged in Tel Aviv, calling itself the "Left Socialist Group," publishing *Pulmus* ("Polemic"). In May the two groups merged and they have an active core group of several dozen people.

*Moked* continues to be active in opposing government policy from a left-Zionist perspective. *Pa'il*, representing the party in the Knesset, now endorses a return to the 1967 borders and advocates recognition of Palestinian national rights in a West Bank state. The Black Panthers now define themselves as socialist and have joined the left in supporting Palestinian self-determination and demanding real peace initiatives on the part of Israel.

The *Matzpen* splinters, *RAKAH*, *SIAH*-Jerusalem and the Black Panthers have cooperated at times, notably at this year's May Day demonstration in Tel Aviv when several thousand Jews and Arabs marched together (see handbills). *Moked* held its own demonstration, refusing to be identified with the anti-Zionist *RAKAH* and *Matzpen* groups. The left groups and the Arab students' organization also cooperated in setting up a common list in student elections at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; the coalition received more votes than any other list. At the end of 1975, *Moked* and Black Panther activists in Jerusalem broke into a warehouse of hoarded oil and distributed it in poor neighborhoods.

A 'Committee for Israel-Palestine Peace' has come into existence, led by Uri Avneri, Arye Eliav\* and Matityahu Peled† among others. The Committee calls for Israeli recognition of Palestinian rights and envisions the creation of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza.

The major focus of the efforts of the left has been, understandably, the problem of relations with the Arabs, both within Israel and without. All the parties and groups demand an end to Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and evacuation of most if not all of the West Bank, Gaza, the Sinai and the Golan; they have in recent months organized and participated in several demonstrations against expropriation of Arab lands and official repression against Arabs both within Israel and in the occupied territories. The creation of a West Bank Palestinian state is generally supported, though it is understood that such a state is likely to be a 'Bantustan' dominated by Israel and Jordan unless won by popular struggle against Israel's will. The 1974-5 'interim accords' with Egypt and Syria were seen as an attempt by all parties concerned in the conflict to avoid a comprehensive settlement; *Pa'il* (for *Moked*) and Eliav and Friedman (together with Shulamit Aloni and Bo'az Mo'av in the now-defunct *Ya'ad*) reluctantly voted to approve the accords in the Knesset rather than join the right wing parties which opposed the interim agreement as a capitulation to US pressure.

Attempts have been made by the radical left groups to play a part in labor struggles and develop ties with the working class, but so far they are still predominantly composed of students, intellectuals and professionals.

The dilemma that debilitated the left in the pre-1948 *Yishuv* played a similar role in the 1948-1973 period. The great hope of the left, *MAPAM*, drifted steadily to the right, unable to resolve the contradiction between the practical implications of Zionism on the one hand and the principles of socialism on the other. It left in its passing *SIAH*, a large part

\*Eliav is a former Labor Party leader who split to the left, joined for a time with Shulamit Aloni's 'Citizen Rights Movement' in *Ya'ad* and now with Marsha Friedman constitutes the 'Social Democratic' party in the Knesset. The need for peace initiatives stands at the center of his program.

†A former Israeli army general, active in left and peace causes.

of which today seeks, in the framework of *Moked*, to find and maintain that same synthesis without losing its radicalism. *MAKI*, the focus of Israeli non-Zionism, could not withstand the pressure exerted by the society around it; its Jewish membership gave up the struggle and in just a few years ended up wholly within the Zionist camp, even if on its left-fringe. *RAKAH*, the other part of the original *MAKI*, lost its ties with the Israeli Jewish community and became almost wholly an Arab party. *Matzpen* and the sects to which it gave birth have preserved their non-Zionism and commitment to revolutionary socialism at the price of isolation from the Israeli Jewish masses. *SLAH*-Jerusalem and the similar group in Tel Aviv seek to tread what they perceive to be the fine line between a rejection of the tenets of Zionism and support for Israel's existence as a Jewish state. Thus, as before 1948, the Zionist left came to abandon in practice its radicalism, while the anti-Zionist left was unable to reach the Israeli Jewish working class with its message.

But it has been characteristic of Israel's left that external circumstances have played a major role in determining its success or failure. It was during a period of Palestinian resurgence and world-wide student activism that the Israeli new left emerged, for example. The success of the left in the future may well depend on prevailing conditions in the world and region, as well as within Israel. There were objective circumstances that underlay the dilemma of the Israeli left up to 1973 which may cease to play a major role in the future. First, before 1973 Zionism seemed to almost everyone a successful enterprise: it had defeated both the Palestinian and other Arabs, secured the greater part of Palestine and created an apparently viable society. This ensured it a powerful hold on the consciousness of Jews in Israel and elsewhere. But since the 1973 war Israeli society has been in a state of shock: demoralization is widespread; few retain the optimism they once had concerning the future; the economic situation is poor and will probably get worse; social tensions are rising; emigrations exceeds immigration; old myths of Israeli superiority have been punctured; diplomatic isolation is nearly complete; and even the long-cherished Israeli faith in the 'loyalty' of its Arab citizens has proven to be a vain delusion. After the war, and the emergence of world support for the restoration of Palestinian Arab rights, as well as the uprisings in the occupied West Bank, the Israeli political establishment is shaken, unable to pursue the old, familiar course but equally unable to find a new way out of its crisis.

Likewise, the emergence of forces in the Arab world, and even in the Palestinian national movement, which distinguish between Zionism on the one hand and the rights of the Israeli-Jewish people on the other makes the premises of official Israeli ideology increasingly untenable. The Israeli government has in the past been able to win mass support by asserting that the country and its people faced the threat of destruction, and it found sufficient evidence on the Arab side to make this look plausible. But Sadat publicly and even some PLO leaders\* now have all but recognized Israel's right to exist and staked their political careers on a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Individuals and groups on the revolutionary left in the Arab world have come to see the liberation of Palestine as requiring the overthrow of the existing Arab regimes and their replacement by socialist governments, which would recognize Jewish rights in Palestine while opposing Zionism as a colonialist ideology and movement. The left wing of the Palestinian movement has sought to formulate a Marxist analysis of the class as well as

#### RAKAH ON U.N. PALESTINIAN RESOLUTIONS

*... just and lasting peace will be established on the basis of the realization of the rights of the Arab Palestinian people and respect for the independence and sovereignty of all the states in the area, including the state of Israel. We are convinced that the main blame for the absence of a clear reference in the resolution to the state of Israel's right to exist ... lies with the policy of the Israeli government.*

Source: *Israleft*, no.52, Dec. 15, 1974 (translated from *Rakah ad in Ha'aretz*, Nov. 30, 1974).

national dimensions of the Palestine problem in order to give a concrete content to the concept of the 'democratic, secular state' in Palestine, with a more realistic understanding of Israel. At the same time, the emergence of an anti-Zionist revolutionary left within Israel which supports the struggle of the Palestinian people while affirming Israeli-Jewish rights, has opened the way to a dialogue between revolutionaries on both sides of the frontier and to the prospect of the common struggle of both peoples against Zionism and reaction. While there remain serious points of disagreement between Israeli revolutionaries and the radical wing of the Palestinian resistance movement, partly due to the fact that each has emerged from a very different background and must work under very different circumstances, the very fact that they can communicate is a hopeful sign for the future. Any development of this process will help erode the Israeli government position, based on the apparent absence of an alternative to the constant warfare between Arabs and Jews.

Another key element in the formula which has secured popular support for Israeli government policies has been its ability to keep social discontents under the surface, out of sight, by citing the external danger. Whenever the threat of war has receded, as in 1970-73, social and labor protest have intensified sharply. It is uncertain how long the Israeli working class, predominantly Oriental and Arab, will accept the old arguments and refrain from letting explode their rage at deteriorating living and working conditions, growing unemployment, discrimination and oppression. In recent months there have been several riots in Oriental Jewish slums, protesting the high rate of inflation and the failure of the government to carry out real reforms. If a link can be forged between the simmering social rage and the demand for a just solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict—perhaps through the Black Panthers—it will be a major step forward for the left.

Thus it is not inconceivable that in the next few years unique opportunities may arise for the Israeli left, today quite weak, to reach the Jewish working class with its program of class struggle and a peace settlement securing the rights of the Palestinian Arab people. The objective factors that made Zionism the dominant ideology may weaken in their effect and the way lie open to struggle on a new basis. An Israeli victory in a future war may delay the unfolding of the crisis for a few years, but it is likely to reassert itself in the end. The establishment of a West Bank Palestinian state may defuse the Israeli-Arab conflict, provided that the Palestinians accept it. But in that case, the war danger removed or lessened, social tensions are likely to re-emerge and the Israeli left, in cooperation with the Palestinian left, may be able to wage a struggle for common goals, transcending both nationalisms, with some measure of success.

\*e.g. Said Hammami and Ibrahim Souss.



There are of course other possible courses of future development, some of which are perhaps more likely than any of the above. One is the threat of a rightist 'backlash' and dictatorship in Israel, as a frightened and confused people seek security and salvation in authoritarian government. Respected Israeli commentators have in recent months warned of such a tendency among some Israelis who are disgusted by the present vacillating leadership and yearn for a 'strong leader.' Israel has no lack of former generals and demagogic politicians who might like to play the part. Such a regime would be likely to try to defy international pressure and rely on Israel's military might alone to impose a settlement, or at least a maintenance of the status quo, on the Arab world. Such a course would be disastrous for the people of Israel, and might lead to the second holocaust the existence of Israel was supposed to prevent.

Whatever the future brings, the historical record of the Jewish left in Palestine shows us the corrosive effects of a colonizing nationalism on socialism, the immense pressures a nationalist ideology like Zionism exerts even on those who set out with the intention of breaking its hold over the masses, and the great difficulties involved in seeking to transform a struggle between two peoples into a joint struggle of both against their common enemies. One can only hope that the Israeli left, and its counterparts in the Palestinian movement and in the Arab world, will succeed in this task and bring a better day for the Jewish and Arab peoples. The price of failure is likely to be very high.

#### EDITOR'S NOTE

*Zachary Lockman presents us with a clear and coherent political history of the development of the Israeli left and its struggle to deal with the contradiction between Zionism and socialism. As he concludes, it is most encouraging that an anti-Zionist Marxist wing has come steadily forward in the current period, producing formations which can engage in fraternal dialogue with the Marxist wing of the simultaneously evolving Palestinian movement.*

*While the points of convergence between Palestinian and Israeli revolutionary socialists are indicated, their differences are not as clearly set forth. First, none of the Israeli organizations has endorsed the Palestinian demand for a democratic, secular state; and the Matzpen stress on the existence of an Israeli-Jewish nation with full rights of self-determination has not been endorsed by any Palestinian organization.*

*A second difference is implied in the Matzpen view that the liberation of Palestine/Israel can occur only in the context of a socialist revolution throughout the Arab East. This tends to downgrade the national contradiction—the Zionist denial of the Palestinian right to national self-determination—which the Palestinian movement sees as primary and central. Palestinian Marxists stress the role of the national liberation struggle in building the struggle for socialism, pointing to the examples of Indochina and Mozambique.*

*These and lesser points of contention will be the subject of considerable debate and struggle in the future as both Palestinians and Israelis, separately if not together, attempt to clarify the national contradiction in Palestine/Israel. In this process fraternal criticisms can be the basis for self-criticism within both movements and for joint struggle against their common enemies.*

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Abram Leon, THE JEWISH QUESTION: A MARXIST INTERPRETATION (New York, 1970), p.227.
- 2 His major works are THE NATIONAL QUESTION AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE (In which he sets forth his general theory of nationalism, based on the materialist conception of history); THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE; and OUR PLATFORM.
- 3 HA'ARETZ, November 15, 1969, quoted in Arië Bober, ed., THE OTHER ISRAEL: THE RADICAL CASE AGAINST ZIONISM (Garden City, N.Y., 1972), p.12.
- 4 From the resolution of the Left Bloc of Po'alei-Tzion at its Fifth World Congress, 1920, in Peretz Merhav, TOLDOT TNU'AT HAPU'ALIM BE-ERETZ YISRA'EL (History of the Workers' Movement in Eretz-Yisra'el) (Merhavia, 1967), p. 74.
- 5 Merhav, Appendix III, p. 353-356.
- 6 From the Resolution of the World Congress of Left Po'alei Tzion 1920, in Merhav, p. 79.
- 7 Merhav, p. 103.
- 8 Resolutions of the 11th regular conference of Hakibbutz Ha'artzi, 1934, in Merhav, p. 121-2.
- 9 Merhav, Appendix III, p. 354.
- 10 "Ideological Principles of the Socialist League in Eretz-Yisra'el", 1936, in Merhav, p. 128.
- 11 Merhav, p. 89.
- 12 From a resolution of the PCP 7th Congress, 1932, in G. Z. Yisraeli, MPS-PCP-MAKI: KOROT HAMIFLAGA HAKOMUNISTIT BE-YISRAEL (MPS-PCP-MAKI: History of the Communist Party in Israel) (Tel Aviv, 1953), p. 218.
- 13 IBID.
- 14 May Day leaflet of the PCP, 1936, in Merhav, p. 90.
- 15 Walter Laqueur, COMMUNISM AND NATIONALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST (New York, 1956), p. 97-8.
- 16 IBID., p. 301-2.
- 17 Merhav, p. 90.
- 18 Yisraeli, p. 195.
- 19 "Unity Program", in MAPAM, VE'IDAT HA'ICHUD SHEI MIF-LEGET PO'ALIM HASHOMER HATZA'IR BE-ERETZ YISRA'EL VE-HAMIFLAGA LE-AHDUT HA'AVODA—PO'ALEI-TZION (Unity Congress of the Hashomer Hatzair Workers Party in Eretz-Yisra'el and the Party for the Unity of Labor Po'alei-Tzion) (Tel Aviv, 1948), p. 83.
- 20 See Information Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, FACTS ABOUT ISRAEL 1970, p. 80; Merhav, Appendix III, p. 355.
- 21 Merhav, p. 153.
- 22 A. B. Magill, ISRAEL IN CRISIS (New York, 1950), p. 131. This book, published by International Publishers, illustrates well the communist attitude toward Israel and Zionism in the year or two immediately following the creation of Israel.
- 23 FACTS ABOUT ISRAEL, p. 80.
- 24 From AL-ITTIHAD, organ of the League for National Liberation (and later of MAKI), November 22, 1948, in al-Hakam Darwaza, AL-SHUYU'YA AL-MAHALLIYYA WA-MA'RAKAT AL-'ARAB AL-QAWMIYYA (Local Communism and the National Struggle of the Arabs) (Beirut, 1963), p. 318.
- 25 Laqueur, p. 115-118. He estimates 4000-5000 members in 1955, about two-thirds Jewish and one-third Arab. Merhav, p. 88, also gives this proportional make-up for 1965.
- 26 In 1956, MAKI won 4.5% of the popular vote but only 4% of the Histadrut vote; in the 1959 and 1961 general elections 2.8% and 4.1% respectively, but only 2.7% of the Histadrut vote in 1960. This of course was just the opposite of the situation that prevailed among the labor Zionist parties (MAPAI, MAPAM, Ahdut Ha'avoda) and reflected the importance of the Arab vote to MAKI. See FACTS ABOUT ISRAEL, p. 80, and Merhav, Appendix III, p. 355.
- 27 From the draft program of the Mikunis-Sneh-Vilenska group to the 1965 MAKI Congress, in Merhav, p. 92.
- 28 From a speech by Emil Habibi at the 1965 RAKAH Congress, in Merhav, p. 100.
- 29 Meir Vilner at the RAKAH Congress, 1965, in Merhav, p. 100.
- 30 FACTS ABOUT ISRAEL, p. 80.
- 31 From the "15 Basic Principles" of the ISC (MATZPEN), September 1972.
- 32 The affair of Yossi Ben-Akiva illustrates the sectarian attitude of the Workers Alliance—"Avant-gard". Ben-Akiva worked as an agent of the Israel security service in a number of left groups, including SIAH, Matzpen Marxist, and finally Avant-gard. In the fall of 1975 he admitted that he was an agent, announced his authentic conversion to revolutionary socialism, and asked for admission to Avant-gard. Needless to say this came as a surprise to the other Matzpen splinters, who requested that they be allowed to talk to him and find out what information he may have passed on to the security service. Avant-gard (as of early 1976) refused and was keeping Ben-Akiva in hiding. This uncooperative attitude has led to a marked deterioration of relations between Workers Alliance and the remainder of the left in recent months.

