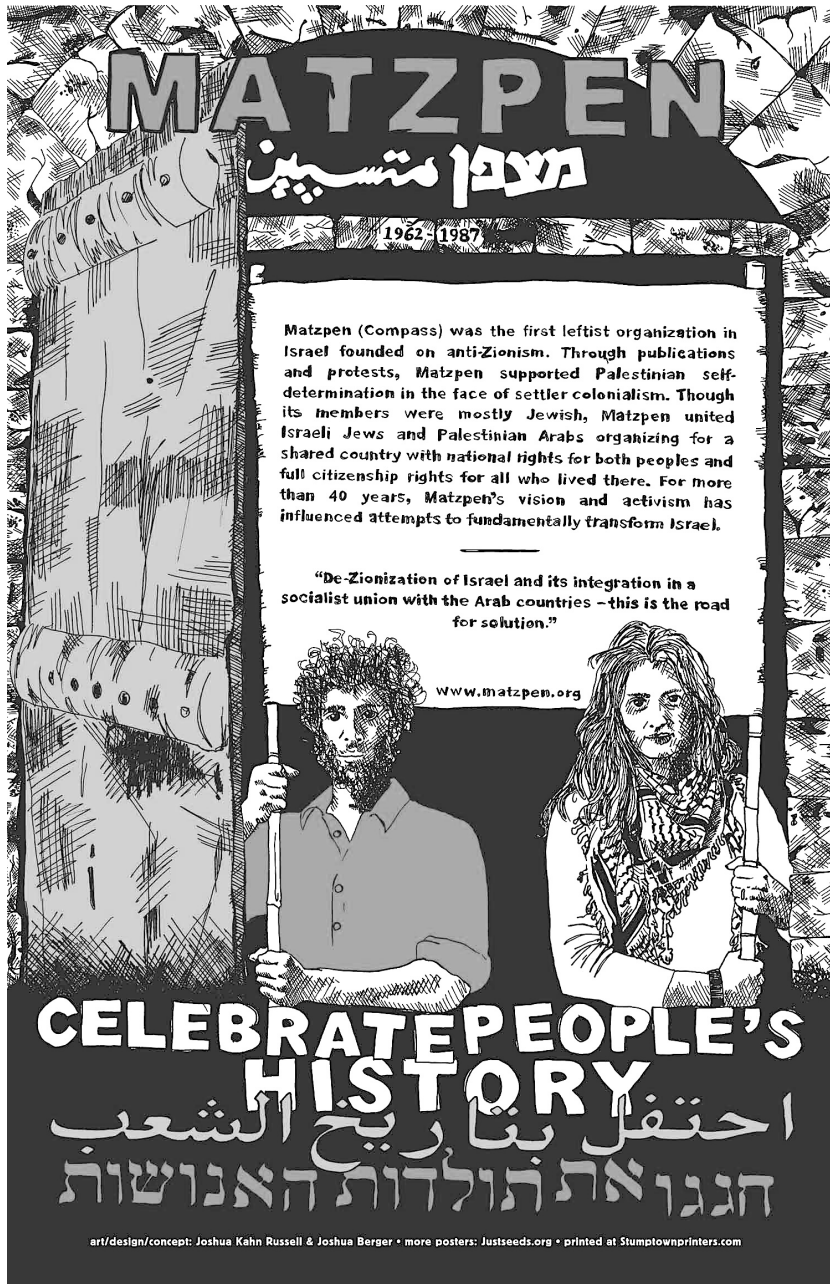


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THE CLASS NATURE OF ISRAELI SOCIETY



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The Class Nature of Israeli Society
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Israeli society, like all other class societies, contains conflicting social interests—class interests which give rise to an internal class struggle. Yet Israeli society as a whole has been engaged, for the last fifty years, in a continuous external conflict: the conflict between Zionism and the Arab world, particularly the Palestinians. Which of these two conflicts is dominant and which is subordinate? What is the nature of this subordination and what is its dynamic? These are questions that everyone involved with Israeli society and politics must answer.

For revolutionaries inside Israel these questions are not academic. The answers given determine the strategy of the revolutionary struggle. Those who consider the internal class conflict to be the dominant one concentrate their efforts on the Israeli working class and attach secondary importance to the struggle against the colonizatory, nationalistic and discriminatory character of the Zionist state. This position sees the external conflict as a derivative of the internal one. Moreover, in this perspective, the internal dynamics of Israeli society will lead to a revolution in Israel, without this necessarily depending on a social revolution in the Arab world.

The experience of classical capitalist countries has often demonstrated that internal class conflicts and interests dominate external conflicts and interests. However this theory fails to hold in certain specific cases. For example, in a colonized country under the direct rule of a foreign power, the dynamics of the colonized society cannot be deduced simply from the internal conflicts of that society, since the conflict with the colonizing power is dominant. Israel is neither a classic capitalist country nor is it a classic colony. Its economic, social and political features are so unique that any attempt to analyse it through the application of theories or analogies evolved for different societies will be a caricature. An analysis must rather be based on the specific characteristics and specific history of Israeli society.

A Society of Immigrants

The first crucial characteristic of Israeli society is that the majority of the population are either immigrants or the children of immigrants. In 1968 the adult (i.e. over 15) Jewish population of Israel numbered 1,689,286 of whom only 24 per cent were Israeli-born and only 4 per cent of Israeli-born parents. (1) Israeli society today is still an immigrant community and has many features typical of such a community. In such a society classes themselves, not to mention class consciousness, are still in a formative stage. Immigration produces an experience, and a mentality, of having ‘turned over a new page in

Let Us Get Out of the Occupied Territories Immediately

From 'Haaretz', September 22, 1967

Our right to defend ourselves from extermination does not give us the right to oppress others

Occupation entails Foreign Rule
Foreign Rule entails Resistance
Resistance entails Repression
Repression entails Terror and Counter-Terror
The victims of terror are mostly innocent people
Holding on to the occupied territories will turn us into a nation of murderers and murder victims
Let us get out of the occupied territories immediately

Signatories: Shimon Tzabar, David Eherenfeld, Dan Omer, Raif Elias, Haim Hanegbi, Uri Lipshitz, Dr. Moshé Machover, Eli Aminov, Rafi Zikhroni, Arie Bober, Shneur Sherman, Yehuda Rosenstrauch



Dwarf, June 12th, 1970.

16. 'Israel: Imperialist Mission in Africa,' Tricontinental 15.

17. Africa and the West, Praeger 1961.

18. Histadrut, International Supplement.

19. *ibid.*

20. Full details of Israel's military aid to Africa in Tricontinental 15.

21. Der Spiegel, November 3rd, 1969.

22. Herzl, Selected Works, Newman Edition, Tel-Aviv, Volume 7, Book I, p. 86.

23. Falk Institute Report, 1961-63. The remainder was owned in approximately equal proportions by the State and by the Histadrut.

24. The Arabs in Palestine (in Hebrew), by Joseph Washitz, p. 151.

25. Union dues are collected by special collection offices which the Histadrut has set up throughout Israel, and local branches receive their funds from the centre, not from their local membership. This severely limits their independence. The Histadrut employs a permanent staff of 30,000 and its bureaucracy has a very tight hold on its members; indeed the Histadrut building in Tel-Aviv is known as 'the Kremlin'.

26. International Supplement on the Jubilee of the Histadrut, 1920-70.

27. Moed, published by the department of culture and education of the Histadrut (in Hebrew), 1960, p. 3.

28. The Arabs in Palestine, p. 173.

29. The secretary-general of Histadrut Enterprises, the industrial wing that controls 25 per cent of the economy, told a group of Zionist businessmen in Los Angeles in early 1969 that Histadrut Enterprises was no different from any other capitalist organization, despite its trade union links; it was expected to make a profit and show a decent return on capital just like any private firm (Sunday Times, July 27th 1969).

30. See Elie Lobel, 'L'escalade ` l'intérieur de la société israélienne,' Partisans No. 52, Match/April 1970.

31. The kibbutzim never contained more than 5 per cent of the Jewish population of Palestine or Israel. Hence, whatever their other limitations, they cannot be said to constitute Israeli society or to be evidence for Israel being a socialist country.

32. J. Amitai, editor, in SIAH no. 5, August 1970.

33. Zo Haderekh, September 2nd, 1970.

life'. As a rule the immigrant has changed his occupation, social role and class. In the case of Israel the majority of the immigrants come from the petty bourgeoisie, whether they are from urban areas in Central and Eastern Europe or from towns and cities in the Arab world. The new immigrant looks forward to changing his place in society. Moreover he sees that all the advantageous positions in the new society are filled by earlier immigrants and this enhances his ambition to climb the social scale through long, hard work. The immigrant considers the actual social role he occupies as transitional. This applies to Israeli workers as well. His father was rarely a worker, and he himself lives in the hope that he too will one day become independent, or at least that his son will be able to do so. The class consciousness and pride which exist among the British and French proletariats, do not exist in Israel, and appear odd to many Israeli workers. An English worker, if asked about his origins, will almost automatically reply in class terms ('I'm working class'), and will define his attitudes to other people in terms of similar class concepts; an Israeli worker, however, will use ethnic categories and consider himself and others in terms of being 'Polish', 'oriental' and so on. Most people in Israel still consider their social position in terms of their ethnic and geographic origins, and such a social consciousness is obviously a barrier hindering the working class from playing an independent role, let alone a revolutionary one aiming at a total transformation of society.

No working class can play a revolutionary role in society while the majority of its members desire to improve their situation individually, within the framework of the existing society, by leaving the ranks of their class. This truth is reinforced when the proletariat does not recognize itself as a stable social class with its own group interests and its own value system in conflict with those of the existing social order. The impulse towards a total transformation of society does not arise easily in a community of immigrants who have just changed their social and political status and who are still living in conditions of high social mobility. This does not mean that the Israeli working class cannot become a revolutionary force in the future; it merely implies that today political activity inside this class cannot proceed from the same assumptions and expectations as apply in a classic capitalist country.

A Society of Settlers

If the uniqueness of the Israeli working class consisted only in the fact that it was composed mainly of immigrants, then it could still be assumed that through time and patient socialist propaganda it would start to play an independent, possibly revolutionary, role. In such a situation patient educational work would not differ much from similar work elsewhere. However, Israeli society is not merely a society of immigrants; it is one of settlers. This society, including its working class, was shaped through a process of colonization. This process, which has been going on for 80 years,

was not carried out in a vacuum but in a country populated by another people. The permanent conflict between the settlers' society and the indigenous, displaced Palestinian Arabs has never stopped and it has shaped the very structure of Israeli sociology, politics and economics. The second generation of Israeli leaders is fully aware of this. In a famous speech at the burial of Roy Rutberg, a kibbutz member killed by Palestinian guerrillas in 1956, General Dayan declared: 'We are a settler generation, and without the steel helmet and the cannon we cannot plant a tree or build a house. Let us not flinch from the hatred enflaming hundreds of thousands of Arabs around us. Let us not turn our head away lest our hand tremble. It is our generation's destiny, our life's alternative, to be prepared and armed, strong and harsh, lest the sword drop from our fist and our life cease'.(2) This clear evaluation stands in sharp contrast to official Zionist mythology about 'making the desert bloom', and Dayan brought this out by going on to say that the Palestinians had a very good case since 'their fields are cultivated by us in front of their very eyes'.

When Marx [actually Engels] made the famous statement that 'a people oppressing another cannot itself be free' he did not mean this merely as a moral judgement. He also meant that in a society whose rulers oppress another people the exploited class which does not actively oppose this oppression inevitably becomes an accomplice in it. Even when this class does not directly gain anything from this oppression it becomes susceptible to the illusion that it shares a common interest with its own rulers in perpetuating this oppression. Such a class tends to trail behind its rulers rather than to challenge their rule. This, furthermore, is even truer when the oppression takes place not in a far-away country, but 'at home', and when national oppression and expropriation form the very conditions for the emergence and existence of the oppressing society. Revolutionary organizations have operated within the Jewish community in Palestine since the 1920's and have accumulated considerable experience from such practical activity; this experience provides clear proof of the dictum that 'a people oppressing another cannot itself be free'. In the context of Israeli society it means that as long as Zionism is politically and ideologically dominant within that society, and forms the accepted framework of politics, there is no chance whatsoever of the Israeli working class becoming a revolutionary class. The experience of 50 years does not contain a single example of Israeli workers being mobilized on material or trade-union issues to challenge the Israeli régime itself; it is impossible to mobilize even a minority of the proletariat in this way. On the contrary, Israeli workers nearly always put their national loyalties before their class loyalties. Although this may change in the future, this does not remove the need for us to analyse why it has been so for the last fifty years.

directly suffer from Zionism. This includes all those who, like Israeli youth or the Israeli Arabs, are brought in their daily experience into conflict with the régime itself. It is a strategy which points to the shattering of the Zionist character of the régime.

Notes

1. Statistical Yearbook of the Israeli Government, 1969.
2. Moshe Dayan, in Davar, May 2nd, 1956.
3. The vast majority of those who immigrated before 1948 were of European origin; between 1948 and 1951 the proportions were about equal; and since then the majority of immigrants have come from outside Europe. By 1966 only half of the Israeli population were of European origins.
4. Le Monde, July 2nd, 1969.
5. Journal of Economic Literature, December 1969, p. 1177.
6. This law was passed in 1959.
7. These figures are taken from The Economic Development of Israel, by N. Halevi and R. Klinov-Malul, published by the Bank of Israel and Frederick A. Praeger, 1968. The category 'other sources', included under 'long-term capital transfers', has been omitted from the figures for both long-term and unilateral transfers taken together.
8. Professor D. Patienkin in Ma'ariv, January 30th, 1970.
9. Yediot Aharanot, September 30th, 1970. Out of a total of \$1034 million US military aid to foreign countries excluding Vietnam during 1970, Israel received \$500 million.
10. Early in December 1970 Sapir presented the budget for the period 1970-71; 40 per cent was devoted to military purposes. This included: the purchase of arms, partly covered by the \$500 million promised by Nixon; the development of the arms industry and of military research; and the everyday costs of national security operations.
11. See 'Why this nation does buy British', The Times, March 28th, 1969.
12. The term 'Zionist establishment' is that conventionally used in Israel to denote the ruling group present in the interlocking set of Zionist institutions.
13. In January 1970 there were ten daily Hebrew papers in Israel, of whom seven were subsidized party papers; these included the Labour papers Davar and Lamerhav, and the MAPAM paper al-Hamishmar. The three private papers were Ma'ariv and Yediot Ahanarot, both evening papers with expansionist policies, and Ha'aretz, a more liberal morning paper run by Gershom Shoken. Military censorship operates in Israel.
14. Shoken in Ha'aretz, 'The prostitute of the sea ports and ourselves. Meditations on the eve of newyear', September 30th, 1951.
15. The opposition movement in Israel, particularly among high-school students, was discussed in Akiva Orr's 'Israel: Opposition Grows', Black

and democracy’.

It was this absence of revolutionary politics that compelled a group of members to leave MAKI in 1962 and to form the Israeli Socialist Organization, better known by the name of its magazine, Matzpen (compass). The Matzpen group accepted the MAKI positions on the right of the Palestinian people as well as the Israeli people to self-determination. It gives primacy to the anti-Zionist struggle and subordinates all other issues, such as the economic struggle of the working class, to this struggle. It considers the overthrow of Zionism as the first task confronting revolutionaries in Israel. At the same time it believes that Israeli society, unlike white society in South Africa, can be revolutionized from within, provided that such a development is subordinated to revolutionary developments in the Arab world. Despite its small size Matzpen has gained influence among the youth in Israel, especially after the 1967 June war, which it opposed. Matzpen has carried out an open dialogue with left tendencies within the Palestinian resistance movement, and throughout the Arab world. It supports anti-imperialist struggles and the Palestinian struggle against Israeli domination. However, it does not support Arab nationalism, or Nasserism. Recently two tendencies split off from Matzpen on these issues. One considers the struggle against Zionism irrelevant, and is calling for ordinary ‘working-class struggle against bourgeois policies’. The other regards Arab nationalism as a revolutionary force. Such a split was expected, but the majority of Matzpen members have chosen to reject these two lines. Matzpen believes that revolutionaries in Israel have a significant role to play in contributing to the overthrow of Zionism within Israeli society; and in this Matzpen differs not only from SLAH and the Communist Party, but also from the groups which have split off.

This analysis has illustrated the specific class structure of Israeli society, and the particular structure of the ruling class. It is a society formed through immigration and the colonization of an already populated land, a society whose internal unity is maintained through conflict with an external enemy. In this society the ruling class is allied to imperialism and depends on it, but does not itself serve imperialism by economic exploitation of the Israeli people. This class rules through a set of bureaucratic institutions that were developed during the colonization process (Histadrut, Jewish Agency), and only a subordinate section of it operates through private ownership of the means of production. These features cannot be explained as products of the internal dynamic of Israeli society; yet they are easily understood as products of the dynamic of the Zionist enterprise as a whole.

Both the experience of political activity in Israel and the theoretical conclusions presented here lead to a conclusion about the strategy of the revolutionary struggle in Israel: in the immediate future political struggle against the Zionist nature of the régime must take precedence over everything else. This struggle must be directed to win the support of all those who

Ethnic Diversity

A third crucial factor is the ethnic character of the Israeli proletariat. The majority of the most exploited strata within the Israeli working class are immigrants from Asia and Africa.⁽³⁾ At first sight it might appear as if the reduplication of class divisions by ethnic divisions might sharpen internal class conflicts within Israeli society. There has been a certain tendency in this direction. Yet the ethnic factor has worked mainly in the opposite direction over the past 20 years. There are a number of reasons for this. First, many of the immigrants from Asia and Africa improved their standard of living by becoming proletarians in a modern capitalist society. Their discontent was not directed against their condition as proletarians but against their condition as ‘orientals’, i.e. against the fact that they were looked down upon, and sometimes even discriminated against, by those of European origin. The Zionist rulers have taken measures to try to fuse the two groups together. But, in spite of these, the differences remained clear: in the mid-sixties, two-thirds of those doing unskilled work were orientals; 38 per cent of orientals lived three or more people to a room, whereas only 7 per cent of those from Europe did so; and in the Knesset only 16 of the 120 members were orientals before 1965 and only 21 after it. However, such social differences are interpreted by the orientals in ethnic terms; they do not say, ‘I am exploited and discriminated against because I am a worker’, but ‘I am exploited and discriminated against because I am an oriental’. Secondly, in the present context of colonial Israeli society the oriental workers are a group whose equivalent would be the ‘poor whites’ of the USA or the Algerian *pièdes noirs*. Such groups resent being identified with Arabs, blacks and natives of any kind, who are considered as ‘inferior’ by these settlers. Their response is to side with the most chauvinist, racist and discriminatory elements in the establishment; most supporters of the semi-fascist Herut party are Jewish immigrants from Asia and Africa, and this must be borne in mind by those whose revolutionary strategy for Israeli society is based upon a future alliance of Arab Palestinians and oriental Jews, whether on the basis of their common exploited condition or on the basis of a putative cultural affinity they might have as a result of the oriental Jews having come from Arab countries. This does not mean that these strata of the Israeli proletariat are reactionary by ‘their very nature’; their present reactionary character is merely a product of rule by political Zionism. These strata could become the agents of socially revolutionary processes in Israeli society if the Zionist establishment itself has been shattered. It is doubtful, however, whether they will spearhead the movement to shatter it.

A Privileged Society: Capital Inflow

Israeli society is not only a settlers' society shaped by a process of colonizing an already populated country, it is also a society which benefits from unique privileges. It enjoys an influx of material resources from the outside of unparalleled quantity and quality; indeed it has been calculated that in 1968 Israel received 10 per cent of all aid given to underdeveloped countries.(4) *Israel is a unique case in the Middle East; it is financed by imperialism without being economically exploited by it.* This has always been the case in the past: imperialism used Israel for its political purposes and paid for this by economic support. Oscar Gass, an American economist who at one time acted as an economic adviser to the Israeli government, recently wrote:(5)

'What is unique in this development process . . . is the factor of capital inflow. . . . During the 17 years 1949–65 Israel received \$6 billion more of imports of goods and services than she exported. For the 21 years 1948–68, the import surplus would be in excess of 7½ billion dollars. This means an excess of some \$2650 per person during the 21 years for every person who lived in Israel (within the pre-June 1967 borders) at the end of 1968. And of this supply from abroad . . . only about 30 per cent came to Israel under conditions which call for a return outflow of dividends, interest or capital. This is a circumstance without parallel elsewhere, and it severely limits the significance of Israel's economic development as an example to other countries.'

Seventy per cent of this \$6 billion deficit was covered by 'net unilateral capital transfers', which were not subject to conditions governing returns on capital or payment of dividends. They consisted of donations raised by the United Jewish Appeal, reparations from the German government and grants by the US government. Thirty per cent came from 'long-term capital transfers'—Israeli government bonds, loans by foreign governments, and capitalist investment. The latter benefits in Israel from tax exemptions and guaranteed profits by virtue of a 'Law for the Encouragement of Capital Investments';(6) nevertheless, this quasi-capitalist source of investment came far behind the unilateral donations and long-term loans. In the entire period from 1949 to 1965, capital transfers (both forms taken together) came from the following sources: 60 per cent from world Jewry, 28 per cent from the German government and 12 per cent from the US government. Of the 'unilateral capital transfers', 51.5 per cent came from world Jewry, 41 per cent from the German government, and 7.4 per cent from the US government. Of the 'long-term capital transfers', 68.7 per cent came from world Jewry, 20.5 per cent from the US government and 11 per cent from other sources. During the 1949–65 period the net saving of the Israeli economy averaged zero, being sometimes +1 per cent and sometimes -1 per cent. Yet the rate of investment over the same period was around 20 per cent of the GNP. This could not have come from within because there was no internal saving within

Zionism. The editor of one of their publications recently stated: 'Our struggle to change the image of Israeli society and to consolidate a peace policy must be based, whatever happens, on principled and consistent affirmation of the state of Israel and of the Zionist principles on which it is founded. Any departure from this will lead SIAH astray from the aims it set itself when it was founded'.(32) At the same time SIAH has been able to attract support from young Israelis hostile to the official line; its second Congress held in Tel Aviv in November 1970 was attended by 350 people—mainly ex-MAPAM and ex-MAKI—and passed resolutions calling for peace without annexations of Arab territory, recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, unconditional talks with the Arabs and Palestinians, and Israeli acceptance of the Jarring mission.

The Non-Zionist Left

Outside the Zionist camp there exist two forces: the Israeli Communist Party—RAKAH—and the Matzpen group. The Israeli CP was founded in the late 1920's and was, almost from the beginning, a Stalinist party. It has remained so to this day. In its history the party has undergone many splits, most of them over the question of what policy to adopt towards Arab nationalism; and in general the party has always followed the foreign policy of the USSR. The most recent of the many absurd positions which such a policy leads to is the support of the party for the US Rogers peace plan. The aim of this plan is to stabilize the political setup in the region and to consolidate both the Zionist régime and the reactionary Arab régimes. RAKAH originally defined this plan as an attempt by the us 'to save its tottering influence in the Arab world'(33); it subsequently called for a joint struggle of all peace-loving forces in Israel to implement it. The key to this absurd position is the policy of the USSR, since the Rogers plan is the result of an agreement between the US and the USSR.

In 1965 there was a split in the party, when the Mikunis-Sneh leadership, which had always leaned towards Zionism, demanded a 'more constructive' policy towards Zionism. This group supported the June 1967 war and applied for membership of the Zionist Congress. Although it has usurped the official daily paper of the party and its name MAKI, it hardly has any influence in Israel. The other faction, led by Vilner and Tuby, is the same old Stalinist party; it has an equal number of Jewish and Arab members, and appears under the name of New Communist List, RAKAH. Actually, there is nothing new about it. The CP has always defended the rights of the Palestinian Arabs, and not only their right to self-determination, but many of their daily rights in Israel. It has waged a courageous, trade-union day-to-day struggle to defend the rights of the Palestinians, but it abandoned the theory and practice of revolution a long time ago. It is now dedicated to the slogan of 'the peaceful road to socialism', and considers its main goal to be 'peace

in the period after the June war. When Ben-Gurion was ousted from power in 1965 many of this group joined him to form RAFI (List of Israel's Workers), but when these technocrats realized that Ben-Gurion could no longer return to power they hastened to rejoin the ruling party. The newly reunited party is now called Ha'avoda (The Labour), and it can be expected that when the old guard disappears over the next few years it will be this new group that will be the dominant force in Israeli politics.

The second largest Zionist left party is MAPAM (United Workers' Party), formed in the late 1940's; its main component is Hashomer Hatz'air (The Young Guard). MAPAM originally considered itself to be both Marxist and revolutionary and proposed a binational state in Palestine; however there had to be a Jewish majority guaranteed by the constitution, and until such a majority was achieved—through immigration—Palestine was to remain under 'international trusteeship'. The idea of a binational state was dropped in 1947 when the UN, and the USSR, accepted the partition of Palestine. MAPAM was always a little to the left of MAPAI on many trade-union issues in Israel, and—at least verbally—in matters of foreign policy as well. But it has always remained loyal to Zionism and this has led it into collaboration with imperialism, as over Suez. In Israeli politics MAPAM always trails, under protest, behind MAPAI but it is the main instrument for defending Zionism against criticism by socialists, Marxists and revolutionaries at home and abroad, and it still plays this role, although somewhat less so since 1967. MAPAM always points to its kibbutzim as a new mode of communal life; but it never mentions that many of them are on lands from which the Arab peasants were driven off, that there is not a single Jewish-Arab kibbutz, and that all are subsidized by Zionist funds.(31) MAPAM talks of the 'right of the Jews to self-determination in Palestine', but by this it does not mean the rights of the Jewish population now living in Israel, but the political rights of world Jewry in Palestine. Like all Zionists MAPAM insists on maintaining the Israeli immigration, law which grants automatic immigration rights to Jews while denying them to anyone else. Like all other Zionist parties MAPAM is financed by the Jewish Agency, and this enables it to maintain a party apparatus, daily papers and a publicity network abroad.

The permanent conflict with the Arab world, and with anti-imperialist trends within it, forces Zionism to depend increasingly on imperialism, and this creates a permanent pressure shifting the Zionist left to the right. On its long road from its origins in the Russia of 1905 the Zionist left has one by one shed its slogans of revolution, socialism and anti-imperialism. Each shift to the right leaves behind it a splinter group loyal to the abandoned slogan.

The latest offspring of this kind is SIAH (Israeli New Left). It was formed after the 1967 war by members of MAPAM who were opposed to their party's collaboration with the Dayan-Eshkol-Begin bloc, and their main emphasis is on the lack of a peace initiative in Israeli policy. Yet although they consider themselves Marxists and revolutionaries they pledge allegiance to

the Israeli economy; it came entirely from abroad in the form of unilateral and long-term capital investments. In other words the growth of the Israeli economy was based entirely on the inflow of capital from outside.(7)

Since 1967 this dependence on foreign capital has increased. As a result of the changed Middle Eastern situation, military expenditure has risen. According to the Israeli Minister of the Treasury, in January 1970 military expenditure was estimated as 24 per cent of GNP for 1970, which was twice the US ratio in 1966, three times the British ratio and four times that of France.(8) This has placed an additional strain both on internal sources of investment money and on the balance of payments, and has had to be met by a commensurate rise in capital inflow. In 1967–68 three 'millionaires' conferences' were called in Israel; foreign capitalists were invited to join in increasing the inflow of capital and foreign participation in industrial and agricultural projects. In September 1970, the Israeli Minister of the Treasury, Pinhas Sapir, returned from a three-week money-raising tour in the USA and summed up the situation at that time: 'We set ourselves the aim of raising \$1,000 million from world Jewry in the coming year, by means of the United Jewish Appeal and the Israel Development Bonds campaign sponsored by the Jewish Agency. This sum is \$400 million higher than that raised in the record year of 1967 . . . During the recent visit to Israel of the US financial research team we explained to them that even if we succeed in raising all that we expect from the United Jewish Appeal and the Israel Development Bonds campaign we shall still be millions of dollars short of our requirements. After summing up our requirements in arms we informed the US that we shall need \$400–500 million per year.'(9) It thus appears that the dependence of Israel on the US has changed significantly since the 1967 war. Fund raising among Jews all over the world (by cashing in on their sentiments and fears) no longer suffices to support the enormously increased military budget. The rough average of \$500 million from fund raising has now to be doubled, and on top of this the US government has been asked to provide directly an additional \$500 million. It is obvious that the readiness of the US government to forward these sums depends on what it gets in return. In the particular case of Israel this return is not economic profit.(10)

British capital has also been developing close ties with Israel.(11) Twenty per cent of Israel's imports come from Britain, and trade has nearly doubled since the June war. British Leyland participate with the Histadruth (who have a 34 per cent holding) in bus production, and with private Israeli capital in car and jeep production. Marks and Spencers buy £2–3 million a year of goods from Israel, one-third being textiles and the rest oranges, vegetables and fruit juices. British financial interests, led by Sir Isaac Wolfson and Charles Clore, are also major participants. Wolfson is the chairman of Great Universal Stores in Britain, which has a 30 per cent share of GUS Industries (Israel). Wolfson and Clore co-operate with Israel's largest domestic capitalist group, the Mayer brothers, in real estate in Israel and Africa, and built the only

skyscraper in the country, the Shalom tower in Tel Aviv. Wolfson also controls 30 per cent of the major petroleum chain, Paz, which was sold off by Shell under Arab pressure in 1959. Wolfson is also one of the backers of the Israel Corporation, a \$30 million company with a minimum subscription of \$100,000, which was set up after the June war to finance industrial development in Israel.

The increased participation of foreign capital in Israel has led to certain changes within the economy itself, which have also been carried out under the increased pressures set off directly by the level of military expenditure. The economy has been made more 'efficient' by American capitalist standards: taxes have been reformed, investment conditions 'liberalized', and army generals sent to US business schools and then put in charge of industrial enterprises. In the period 1968–69 there was a compulsory wage freeze, and some public enterprises were even sold off to private capital—for instance, the 26 per cent State share in the Haifa oil refinery.

This influx of resources from abroad does not include the property which the Zionist establishment in Israel took over from refugee Palestinians as 'abandoned property'. This includes land, both cultivated and uncultivated; only 10 per cent of the land held by Zionist bodies in pre-1967 Israel had been bought before 1948. It also includes many houses, and complete deserted cities like Jaffa, Lydda and Ramleh, where much property was confiscated after the 1948 war.

The Distribution of Foreign Funds

The enormous influx of capital did not come into the hands of the small Israeli bourgeoisie, but into the hands of the State, of the Zionist establishment,(12) and this establishment has been under the control of the bureaucracies of the Labour parties since the 1920's. This has determined the way in which all inflowing capital, as well as conquered property, have been put to use. Funds collected abroad are channelled through the Jewish Agency which, with the Histadrut and the Government, forms part of the triangle of governing institutions. All the Zionist parties, from MAPAM to Herut, are represented in the Jewish Agency. It finances sections of the Israeli economy, in particular the non-profitable parts of agriculture like the kibbutzim, and it also distributes funds to the Zionist parties, enabling them to run their newspapers and economic enterprises. The funds are divided according to the votes cast for the parties at the previous election, and this system of subsidies enables the Zionist parties to survive long after the social forces that created them have disappeared.(13)

Historically the purpose of this system was the strengthening of the colonization process, in accordance with the ideas of the Zionist Labour parties, and the strengthening of the grip which the bureaucracy itself had over Israeli society. This has proved successful, since not only is the Israeli

socialist movements conflicts with Zionist aspirations.

2. Class Struggle: What policy to have towards Jewish employers in Palestine and towards the capitalist sector within Zionism.

3. Socialist Internationalism: Whether to have a joint or separate struggle with the Palestinian peasants and workers against capitalism in Palestine, and whether to support other revolutionary movements.

All those who differed on these issues were still Zionists, i.e. they considered their main goal to be the establishment and maintaining of an exclusively Jewish nation-state and of Jewish immigration from all over the world. Outside the Zionist left there were always a few groups making up the anti-Zionist left; they did not face the political dilemmas outlined here; their differences with each other were on issues of the strategy and tactics of the struggle against Zionism and for socialism in Palestine. They will be examined later. Of the Zionist parties by far the most important is MAPAI (Israeli Labour Party), founded in 1930 through the merger of two smaller parties and the dominant party in all coalition governments in Israel since 1948. Originally the two components of MAPAI agreed that Jewish exclusiveness must take precedence over co-operation with Arab workers and peasants in Palestine. However, they differed on the degree of class collaboration with Zionist employers, and only when agreement was reached did they decide to merge. The policy they agreed on was one of subordinating class interests to Zionist interests within the Jewish community itself, and MAPAI became the main protagonist of the 'Jewish Labour only' policy. This policy meant that Jewish employers were pressured to employ only Jewish workers, and both Arab workers and Jewish employers were terrorized, often by violence, into enforcing this policy.

This was the main internal issue within the Jewish community in the 1930's and it was finally won by MAPAI, thus ensuring its dominant role.

Leaders like Ben-Gurion, Eshkol and Golda Meir have remained dedicated to this policy to this day and are still dominant within Israel. MAPAI has never considered itself Marxist or revolutionary, but socialist and reformist; yet although Mrs Meir spoke in 1950 of 'socialism in our time' the party no longer claims any allegiance to socialism. In all the conflicts between imperialist and anti-imperialist forces in the Middle East this party had consciously collaborated and even plotted secretly (as in the Suez war) with imperialism. It has a clear stake in the continuation of imperialist influence in the area and considers any victory for anti-imperialist forces as a threat to Israel itself.

After 22 years in power certain changes have occurred in the party, the most important of which has been the emergence of a technocracy consisting of army officers who have entered the economy as administrators and specialists; (30) this group is in conflict with the old guard, and represents the growing influence of the army on Israeli politics as a whole, both because of the technical skills it contains and because of the increased weight of the military

The Parties of the Zionist Right

If the Histadrut is controlled by the parties of the Zionist left, the other two main centres of power, Government and Jewish Agency, reflect a wider spectrum of Zionist opinion. The electoral system is a proportional one, with each party presenting a nation-wide list at the elections and the 120 seats in the Knesset being allocated accordingly, to parties obtaining over 1 per cent of the votes.

From the 1930's to the 1960's the Zionist right consisted of two parties, the 'General Zionists' and Herut (Freedom). The General Zionists represented Zionist private capital in Palestine—the citrus grove owners, other landowners, and the industrialists. It was a typical capitalist party with the same slogans as in the west, except that it called for limiting Histadrut powers, rather than for turning the economy into a fully private one. Herut was not based on economic interests in the way the General Zionists were, but rather on militant and extremist Zionism. Its mottoes were (from the 1930's onwards): 'Two banks has the Jordan; one is ours, the other is ours too', and 'In blood and fire Judaea fell, in blood and fire Judaea will rise'. They demanded a policy of military conquest, rather than one of colonizatory settlement, which was the policy of the Zionist left. Herut employed fascist tactics in the 1930's, including brown shirts and armed terror, and it draws most of its adherents from the oriental Jews who are attracted by its crude nationalistic slogans. In the mid-1960's these two parties merged under the leadership of Herut's leader, Begin, and formed the Herut-Liberal Block—'Gahal'. (In Israel 'Liberal' means 'Conservative'.) For the first time in Israeli history Herut was accepted into the cabinet on the eve of the June war to form part of the so-called 'National Unity cabinet'; but they left Mrs Meir's cabinet in August 1970 because of her acceptance of the Rogers plan which called for an Israeli withdrawal from the 1967 cease-fire lines. Like the Zionist left, Gahal receives most of its financial support from the Jewish Agency.

The Dilemmas of the Zionist Left

From the early 1900's to this very day the backbone of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine has been the Zionist left, and in particular those émigrés who came from Eastern Europe in the years between 1904 and 1914. This left has always been reformist and nationalist, but even as such it has split again and again as a result of the inherent conflicts between its Zionism and its socialism. The conflicts it has experienced can be grouped under three headings:

1. Foreign Policy: What position to adopt on imperialism in the Middle East and elsewhere, and on the socialist movement throughout the world, especially when the struggle against imperialism or co-operation with

working class organizationally and economically under the complete control of the Labour bureaucracy but so too is the Israeli bourgeoisie. Historically the bureaucracy has shaped most of the institutions, values and practices of Israeli society without any successful opposition from within, and subject only to the external constraints imposed by imperialism and the resistance of the Arabs. Most of this enormous inflow of resources went into immigration projects and the housing and employment necessary to cope with the inflow that raised the Jewish population from 0.6 million in 1948 to 2.4 million in 1968.

This process was accompanied by relatively little personal corruption, but by a lot of political and social corruption. The influx of resources had a decisive effect on the dynamics of Israeli society, for the Israeli working class shared, directly and indirectly, in this transfusion of capital. Israel is not a country where foreign aid flows entirely into private pockets; it is a country where this aid subsidises the whole of society. The Jewish worker in Israel does not get his share in cash, but he gets it in terms of new and relatively inexpensive housing, which could not have been constructed by raising capital locally; he gets it in industrial employment which could not have been started or kept going without external subsidies; and he gets it in terms of a general standard of living which does not correspond to the output of that society. The same obviously applies to the profits of the Israeli bourgeoisie whose economic activity and profit-making is regulated by the bureaucracy through subsidies, import licences and tax exemptions. In this way the struggle between the Israeli working class and its employers, both bureaucrats and capitalists, is fought not only over the surplus value produced by the worker, but also over the share each group receives from this external source of subsidies.

Israel and Imperialism

What political circumstances enabled Israel to receive external aid in such quantities and under such unparalleled conditions? This question was answered as early as 1951 by the editor of the daily paper, Ha'aretz: 'Israel has been given a role not unlike that of a watchdog. One need not fear that it will exercise an aggressive policy towards the Arab states if this will contradict the interests of the USA and Britain. But should the West prefer for one reason or another to close its eyes one can rely on Israel to punish severely those of the neighbouring states whose lack of manners towards the West has exceeded the proper limits.'⁽¹⁴⁾ This evaluation of Israel's role in the Middle East has been verified many times, and it is clear that Israel's foreign and military policies cannot be deduced from the dynamics of the internal social conflicts alone. The entire Israeli economy is founded on the special political and military role which Zionism, and the settlers' society, fulfil in the Middle East as a whole. If Israel is viewed in isolation from the rest of the Middle East there is no explanation for the fact that 70 per cent of the capital inflow is not

intended for economic gain and is not subject to considerations of profitability. But the problem is immediately solved when Israel is considered as a component of the Middle East. The fact that a considerable part of this money comes from donations raised by Zionists among Jews all over the world does not alter its being a subsidy by imperialism. What matters is rather the fact that the US Treasury is willing to consider these funds, raised in the US for transferring to another country, as 'charity donations' qualifying for income tax exemptions. These donations depend on the goodwill of the US Treasury and it is only reasonable to assume that this goodwill would not continue were Israel to conduct a principled anti-imperialist policy.

This means that although class conflicts do exist in Israeli society they are constrained by the fact that the society as a whole is subsidised from the outside. This privileged status is related to Israel's role in the region, and as long as this role continues there is little prospect of the internal social conflicts acquiring a revolutionary character. On the other hand, a revolutionary breakthrough in the Arab world would change this situation. By releasing the activity of the masses throughout the Arab world it could change the balance of power; this would make Israel's traditional politico-military role obsolete, and would thus reduce its usefulness for imperialism. At first Israel would probably be used in an attempt to crush such a revolutionary breakthrough in the Arab world; yet once this attempt had failed Israel's politico-military role vis-a-vis the Arab world would be finished. Once this role and its associated privileges had been ended, the Zionist régime, depending as it does on these privileges, would be open to mass challenge from within Israel itself.

This does not mean that there is nothing for revolutionaries inside Israel to do, except sit and wait for the emergence of objective external conditions on which they have no influence. It only means that they must base their activity on a strategy that acknowledges the unique features of Israeli society, rather than on one that reproduces the generalizations of analysis of classic capitalism. The main task for revolutionaries who accept this assessment is to direct their work towards those strata of the Israeli population who are immediately affected by the political results of Zionism and who have to pay for it. These strata include Israeli youth, who are called on to wage 'an eternal war imposed by destiny', and the Palestinian Arabs who live under Israeli rule.⁽¹⁵⁾ These strata share an anti-Zionist tendency which makes them potential allies in the revolutionary struggle inside Israel and the revolutionary struggle throughout the Middle East. Anyone who follows closely the revolutionary struggles within the Arab world becomes aware of the dialectical relationship between the struggle against Zionism within Israel and the struggle for social revolution within the Arab world. Such a strategy does not imply that activity within the Israeli working class should be neglected; it only implies that this activity too must be subordinated to the

1962 wave of strikes for the first time gave rise extensively to a kind of organization now known as an 'action committee'. The two fronts were once more clearly defined: the Histadrut on one side of the barricade, the workers on the other. It was during this period that the first steps to group the action committees on a national, or at least a regional basis, were taken—but this attempt was not successful. The 1969 strikes were a warning to the government and to the employers that strikes were possible despite the situation of war and of 'national unity'. The postal workers' strike saw the Israeli government once again issue mobilization orders, with the Histadrut's agreement, against the strikers, to force them back to work, as the existing laws allow. The strikers broke State laws and were brought before the courts, but the trial was never concluded. Another factor characterized the Ashdod port-workers' struggle. The Histadrut threatened to bring the local trade-union militants before an 'internal tribunal', but the local militants, with the support of the workers, held their ground. The trial opened in the presence of television cameras and had a wide coverage in the country. The workers were denounced as El-Fatah agents and as 'saboteurs'. The threats of the Histadrut leadership were: 'If you are found guilty the maximum sanctions will be applied, which means you will be excluded from the Histadrut, thus losing all the advantages of social security for you and your families.' The workers continued their struggle and passed from accused to accusers. The Histadrut leadership received bad publicity, and hastened to end the spectacle without pronouncing a verdict.

Strikes in Israel Year	No. of Strikes	Strikers in 1,000s	Strike days in 1,000s
1949	53	5	57
1950	72	9	55
1951	76	10	114
1952	94	14	58
1953	84	9	35
1954	82	12	72
1955	87	10	54
1956	74	11	114
1957	59	4	116
1958	48	6	83
1959	51	6	31
1960	135	14	49
1961	128	27	141
1962	146	38	243
1963	127	87	129
1964	138	48	102
1965	288	90	208
1966	282	87	156
1967	142	25	58
1968	100	42	72

Sources: Statistical Year Books, 1965, 1967 and 1968.

Annual Report from the Bank of Israel.

Note: Until 1959, only strikes lasting more than one day were included. Since 1960, strikes lasting more than two hours were also included. The figures also include lock-outs, but these are rare and do not affect the yearly comparisons.

advice of the local trade-union branch, 29 per cent were of the opinion that such strikes are justified in certain cases. *In short, the tendency to break with the established order is getting stronger*, in so far as work relations go . . .' (Our italics). The same publication shows that a majority of Histadrut members consider that the trade-union conference has no influence on the functioning of the central body. Among the minority who do believe that ordinary members can exercise some influence, there is still a major number who estimate this influence to be insufficient. In reply to the question 'Why are you a member of the Histadrut?' the official source says that about 70 per cent replied that it was an 'automatic thing', or 'because they made us' or 'because it was the done thing' or 'because of the social security'. A minority (16 per cent) stated that they belonged for ideological reasons, whereas 15 per cent said they were members because the Histadrut defended the interest of the workers.

The Year Book concludes that 'a majority of Histadrut members i.e. 55 per cent, joined of their own free-will, a third (24 per cent) joined automatically on immigrating to Israel, and a fifth (20 per cent) found they had become members automatically because they had been registered as such in their employment.' Histadrut leaders, industrial circles and government members are now openly expressing their concern at what they call the workers' 'crisis of confidence' towards the Histadrut. This crisis is getting worse from year to year. It is, in fact, the reason for the change in the Histadrut top leadership in 1969, when the former Secretary General, Aharon Becker, was replaced by Itzhak Ben-Aharon, known for his vigorous rhetorical style and the working-class phraseology he customarily uses. The former Secretary General, and the new one, are both members of the ruling Labour party.

Wild-Cat Strikes and Action Committees

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.

The seamen's strike was the most violent in the history of strikes in Israel. The battlefield was the port of Haifa, and Israeli ships there, and in foreign ports. It was special, because it was a strike led by young seamen without a trade-union tradition, and because the conflict was about the means of electing trade-union delegates by the mass of seamen. For those who know the nature of the Histadrut it is not surprising that it immediately mobilized all the forces at its disposition against the strikers. The strike leaders were dragged before an 'internal tribunal' of the Histadrut and mobilized into the Army. Vast police forces engaged in violent battles against the strikers. The

general strategy of the struggle against Zionism.

Israel's Role in Africa and Asia

Israel's primary relationship with imperialism is as a watchdog in the Middle East, funded and privileged for serving this purpose. But it has a secondary relationship, that of serving as a channel through which money and ideology can be routed to neo-colonial countries in Asia and Africa. It is obviously in Israel's own interest to build economic and political ties with non-Arab Afro-Asian states and to strengthen pro-Israeli influence there; and at the same time US imperialism often finds it more convenient to funnel its aid through the 'third country' technique, rather than to expose itself by organizing the aid directly. This project is realized in three different ways: '1. highly trained Israeli "experts" are placed at the disposal of African states, often in strategically important positions; 2. various categories of African personnel, including students, civil servants, labour leaders, and military cadres are given specialized training in Israel itself; this training is usually provided quickly and efficiently; and 3. Israeli businessmen and their government have set up joint economic enterprises with African states and private business.'(16)

Since the 1950's Israel's aid programme to Africa has been growing, serving as it grows both Israel's specific interests and the broader interests of world imperialism. Different sections of the Israeli state were mobilized to implement this policy, two of which were the trade union organization, Histadrut, and the army, Tsahal. The specific nature of the Histadrut, being both boss and domestic trade-union at the same time, facilitates Israeli penetration into the third world, where one often finds a governmental one-party, one-union structure. This penetration takes place as a function of Israel's own interests and to further a collusion of interests between Israel and imperialism. 'It is possible that the Israeli model will serve as a "Third economic force"'. Israel is an alternative differing from the Western model, but certainly more adapted to the interests of the free world than is the communist model,' wrote the United States journal Foreign Affairs, in 1959. The author of the article, Mr Arnold Rivkin, was director of the 'Africa Research Project' at the 'Centre for International Studies' organized by the CIA at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Later, in a book published in 1961, Rivkin is more precise about the role Israel plays in Western penetration in Africa: 'Israel's role as a Third force could also be reinforced by imaginative use of the Third Country Technique. A Free World state wishing to enlarge its assistance flow to Africa might channel some part of it through Israel because of Israel's special qualifications and demonstrated acceptability to many African nations.'(17)

Little is known in Israel about this aspect of the Histadrut's activity, and it prefers to make publicity for its Afro-Asian Institute. The Head of the Political Department of the Histadrut (the Histadrut's 'Foreign Minister'

who works in close collaboration with the real Minister) recently summarized the activities of the Afro-Asian Institute: 'The Institute, which was created by the Histadrut in 1960 . . . is an important link in its international activity especially in the under-developed countries of Africa and Asia. But its activity and its world-wide renown contribute to reinforcing the Histadrut's links with other countries and organisations. To date, the Institute has trained 1,848 delegates from trade-unions and co-operatives, from Institutes of Further Education, as well as high officials from 85 African, Asian and Latin American countries . . . The Institute has been called upon to organize seminars in various African and Asian countries . . . It was former students of the Institute, now occupying high positions in their respective countries and organizations, who took the initiative for such seminars. Up to the present the Institute has organized such seminars in the following countries; Nigeria (twice), Dahomey, Togo, The Ivory Coast, Liberia, Singapore, Korea, (twice), Ceylon, India and Nepal. About 500 people participated in these activities. Next month three short seminars will be organized for the militants from Cypriot trade-union organizations, and the 1970 programme includes the following countries. Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia, Singapore, Hong-Kong, Korea . . . others will follow.'(18)

George Meany, President of the AFL-CIO, which finances the Afro-Asian Institute, clearly stated: 'The Histadrut is a national centre which has worked for the cause of democracy and liberty in the free world, particularly in Asia and Africa, through the intermediary of its Afro-Asian Institute.'(19)

Israel's directly military assistance to African states began in 1960 and includes both general assistance to neo-colonial governments and aid to forces on the southern periphery of the Arab world who might further imperialist interests. The latter category has included the provision of military advisers to the Chad government's anti-guerrilla campaign, and aid to the guerrilla movement in the Southern Sudan. Israel has also given military assistance to Ethiopia's campaign against the Eritrean liberation movement. In other countries, including Tanzania and the Congo, Israel has trained airforce, navy and army personnel and has supplied arms and advice for the establishment of paramilitary agricultural settlements modelled on pioneering settlements in Israel itself. Many of these projects have been carried out in co-operation with US foreign aid programmes or with funds funnelled through Israel from the US.(20)

In Asia Israel has been less successful in carrying out such a programme, with the notable exception of Singapore where she is helping to sustain Britain's East of Suez strategy. Since 1966 Israeli experts, originally described as 'Mexican agricultural experts', have been training the Singapore army, and have supplied it with tanks and electronic equipment.(21)

proletarian solidarity compatible with a call for the conquest of labour, and for the creation of the Jewish State?'"(28) No Zionist has ever been able to answer that question; they cannot answer it today, any more than they could yesterday.

A Crisis of Confidence in the Histadrut

With the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the integration of the Histadrut into the ruling Zionist system became more evident. The economic sector of the Histadrut, with its business concerns and its immense wealth, forms part of the public sector, whose development had to accelerate with the arrival of new immigrants, at the same time as capital was flowing into the new State. The Histadrut made it possible to form a nationalized economy. The theory propagated for years by Histadrut leaders, according to which the economic sector of the Histadrut constitutes the basis for the construction of socialism, collapsed with independence. Another often-stated argument, that the economic sector of the Histadrut belongs to the workers, was also invalidated. The Minister of Agriculture, Haim Gvati, who is one of the principal leaders of the Histadrut, had to admit during the Histadrut conference in 1964: 'We have not succeeded in transforming this immense richness into socialist economic cells. We have not succeeded in maintaining the working-class nature of our economic sector. Actually there are no characteristics to differentiate it from the rest of the public sector, and sometimes even from the private sector. The atmosphere, work-relations and human relations of our economic sector are in no way different from any other industrial enterprise.'(29)

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 per cent of all wage-earners indicated that strikes have broken out in their enterprises against the advice of the Histadrut; 47 per cent thought that in certain cases it was desirable for the workers to embark on a strike without Histadrut authorization. The Year Book continues: 'The conclusions of the enquiry into the action committees are even more serious' (These are committees formed against the authorization of the Histadrut and aimed at, or on the occasion of, wild-cat strikes or wild-cat action.) 'Against 8 per cent of wage-earners who stated that strikes which had broken out were contrary to the

where labour was cheap, a country which rejected its inhabitants and which was inhospitable to newcomers. Under these conditions, the foundation of the Histadrot was a central event in the process of the rebirth of the Hebrew people in its father-land. Our Histadrot 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.'⁽²⁷⁾ Being 'general to its core', the Histadrot 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 secretly 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 Histadrot; it has opened recruitment offices everywhere, thus reinforcing its domination, whilst 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 cooperatives; as an organization it completely dominates all the kibbutzim and collective farms of the whole country. It is not for nothing that the Histadrot was considered as the central pillar of the Zionist enterprise from its beginning, or as the Zionists say 'the State in embryo'.

The Histadrot leadership decided the political line of the Jewish community, both in matters of 'Jewish interest' and in its relations with the British occupiers and the Arab masses. The political leaders of the State of Israel—David Ben-Gurion, Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir—have all come from the ranks of the Histadrot.

It was only at the end of the period of the British mandate, in 1943, that the Histadrot created a special department for Arab labourers; its aim was to organize them within a paternalistic and puppet framework, so as to divert them from the political struggle—i.e. from the anti-Imperialist and anti-Zionist struggle. The experiment was summed up at the time by a Zionist historian—a specialist in Arab questions and a Histadrot member: 'As a national feeling develops among the workers (Arabs) their opposition to those who want to organize them from the outside is becoming stronger. The most intelligent and dynamic among them never have an opportunity to show their talent and initiative. A pamphlet in Arabic (published by the Histadrot) explains that one should only be concerned with the economic interests of the Arab workers, and that one should exclude all political activity. This condition is difficult for people who are aware and close to public life to accept. The conception of work and the conquest of work held by the majority of the Histadrot is equally an obstacle, since it is difficult to explain things convincingly to an Arab worker. The discrimination in salaries between Jewish workers and Arab workers exasperates the Arabs, particularly since work conditions and price-levels tend to be equal. In these circumstances it was easy for Arab organizations to send us their members to ask 'naive questions' at the time of the May Day demonstration—"Is

Which is the Ruling Class?

The subordination of the entire economy to political considerations has characterized Zionist colonization from the very beginning, and is the key to decoding the unique nature of the Israeli ruling class. Zionist colonization did not proceed as an ordinary, capitalist, colonizatory process motivated by considerations of profitability. The bourgeois elements in this colonization always preferred to employ Arab labour, but the Zionist Labour bureaucracy struggled against this and demanded a policy of 'Jewish labour only'. It was a bitter struggle that was waged throughout the 1920's and 1930's and formed the main conflict within the Zionist community in Palestine. It was finally won by the Labour bureaucracy, to a considerable extent due to the support it received from the world Zionist movement. That support was based on political considerations, for the aim of political Zionism was, from the very beginning, to establish a purely Jewish nation-state in Palestine and to displace the indigenous population. As early as June 1895 Theodor Herzl wrote in his diary: 'The private lands in the territories granted us we must gradually take out of the hands of the owners. The poorer amongst the population we try to transfer quietly outside our borders by providing them with work in the transit countries, but in our country we deny them all work. Those with property will join us. The transfer of land and the displacement of the poor must be done gently and carefully. Let the landowners believe they are exploiting us by getting overvalued prices. But no lands shall be sold back to their owners.'⁽²²⁾

It was this consideration embodied by the world Zionist movement that tipped the scales in favour of the Zionist Labour bureaucracy in Palestine and its policy of 'Jewish labour only'. The defeat of the bourgeois elements established a pattern of joint rule in which the Labour bureaucracy played the senior role and the bourgeoisie the junior one, combining to form a new embryonic ruling class. This specific combination within the ruling establishment has remain unchanged from the 1940's to this day and constitutes a unique feature of Israeli society. If the dominant ideology in any given society is the ideology of the dominant class, then if the identity of the dominant class is rather blurred one can try to analyse the dominant ideology itself and deduce from it the identity of the ruling class. In Israel the dominant ideology was never a capitalist one; it was a blend of bourgeois elements combined with dominant themes and ideas typical of the Zionist Labour movement, ideas derived from the socialist movement in Eastern Europe but transformed to express the aims of political Zionism.

This balance between the different sections of the ruling class is not static, and recently the balance has been shifting in favour of the bourgeois partner. One of the symptoms of this is the division between Mrs Meir and Ben-Gurion on the one hand and their disciple Dayan on the other. The issue was the old one of whether to employ Palestinians from the occupied territories

for work within the Israeli economy. Mrs Meir was strongly opposed to this policy, whereas Dayan supported it and the bourgeois paper Ha'aretz supported Dayan. But whatever the different tendencies at any one moment the Labour bureaucracy still dominates through its three centres: Government, Jewish Agency and Histadrut. Wielding the tremendous apparatus of the state and the unions it dominates Israeli society and most of the economy. In 1960 the privately owned sector produced only 58.5 per cent of the total net product of the Israeli economy,(23) and it is doubtful if this proportion has changed much in the subsequent decade.

But the economic power of the Zionist Labour bureaucracy is far greater than this figure suggests. Apart from its direct control of the state and the Histadrut it has indirect bureaucratic control over the private sector. This control goes far beyond the ordinary intervention of the state in the economy of the kind that occurs in most capitalist countries. The entire Israeli economy, including the private sector, depends on subsidies from abroad which flow mostly through state-controlled channels. By controlling the flow of subsidies through the policies of the Treasury and the Jewish Agency, the Labour bureaucracy directs and regulates this flow. This also gives it a useful grip on its capitalist partner. Israel is a unique form of capitalism, ruled by a unique class partnership. The control of the bureaucracy over the flow of funds from abroad enables it to exercise a far-reaching control over the broad masses of the population, not only in political and economic matters, but even in aspects of everyday life. The majority of the Israeli population depend directly, and daily, on the goodwill of this bureaucracy for their jobs, housing and health insurance. Some of the workers who have rebelled against the bureaucracy, like the seamen, in the great strike of December 1951, were denied employment, and some who refused to surrender were forced in the end to emigrate. At the same time there is no national health service in Israel, only that of the Histadrut, so those who refuse to join or who fight it are deprived of health insurance. Indeed the key to the hold of the bureaucracy over the proletariat is the trade union federation, the Histadrut.

The Histadrut: National Interest Before Class Interest

Israeli workers might seem to be in an enviable situation, since the Trade Union Federation, known simply as the 'Federation' (Histadrut) gives the impression of being an advanced and powerful workers' union. From a certain viewpoint the Histadrut and its facilities are indeed quite exceptional: it has 1.1 million members out of a total population of nearly 3 millions; a quarter of Israeli wage-earners work in concerns belonging to the Histadrut; and the Histadrut has for years accounted for around 22–25 per cent of the Israeli Net National Product.

The Histadrut was founded in 1920 during a General Congress of Jewish workers and until 1966 it was known as the 'General Confederation of

Hebrew workers in the land of Israel'. The number of Jewish workers in Palestine in 1920 was some 5,000, while there were around 50,000 Arab workers, according to the estimate of a Zionist historian.(24)

The founders of this 'General' Federation, who were all inspired by Zionist ideology, and most of whom were members of Jewish petty-bourgeois parties, limited membership of the Histadrut exclusively to Jews, and to Jews 'living on the fruits of their labour'—workers, artisans, tradesmen, and self-employed workers. When the basic principles of the Histadrut were being laid down, the founders made it clear that 'national interest' took priority over 'economic interest' and 'cultural interests'. The internationalist approach to the class nature of society was never brought up at the Histadrut's founding congress, not even by a minority group. A year after its foundation, the Histadrut created its first enterprises. These were a large company dealing with Public Works—'Solel Boneh'—and the 'Workers' Bank', the latter in association with the World Zionist Organization. 'Solel Boneh' has been engaged on a variety of construction work over the past few years, in several parts of the world; for example, it has built luxury hotels in certain African countries, and has constructed roads and various military installations in several Asian countries, including US air bases in Turkey). The fact that from the start, the Histadrut made Zionist interests its primary concern, at the expense of its trade-union role, has led to an extremely hierarchized organizational structure. A bureaucratic machinery was set up such that the entire organization of the trade-union was subordinated to the management and to the political 'bosses'—who were always from Zionist parties. There has never been the least trade-union independence in the Histadrut.(25)

The Histadrut was not merely concerned with its role of maintaining Jews in national isolation while they were living in an essentially Arab milieu. Since its creation it has been at the spearhead of Zionist colonisation in Palestine. Its choice position amongst the country's Zionist colonizers, and its extremely strong organization, made it a pioneer in the process of agricultural colonization and in winning places of work for Jewish workers, by evicting Arab peasants and workers. The Zionist slogans of the 20's and 30's—'the conquest of work' and 'the conquest of the soil'—found their principal realizers in the Histadrut. Its leader, Berl Katznelson explained: 'Our Histadrut is unique among trade-unions, for it is a union which both plans and executes. This is not due to our wisdom or perspicacity. This was always our vision, in all our actions. From the moment that the young immigrant reaches the shores of Palestine and looks for work in the plantations, he finds himself up against hard reality, and, at the same time, in our world of vision.'(26) More recently, the then 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