

The Political Reality of Israel

By Wolf Ehrlich

We publish below the address delivered by the Guest of Honor, Wolf Ehrlich, at the 11th Annual Jewish Affairs Dinner, June 5, 1983 at the Roosevelt Hotel, N.Y.C.

Wolf Ehrlich, member of the Control Commission of the Communist Party of Israel, is a leading Marxist-Leninist theoretician. He testified for the C.P.I. before the Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry and the United Nations Special Commission Palestine. He is the author of a book of essays entitled, "The Force of the Idea."

I am happy to be here with you. This is my first visit to the United States. I would prefer to sit and listen to you and learn from you. I hope there will be opportunities for it.

If Mr. Weinberger and Mr. Sharon could conclude a memorandum on strategic cooperation between the administration of your country and the government of mine, there is an obvious need for strategic cooperation between the progressive and democratic forces of both our countries. In the same way as the working class has to forge its international links in face of the internationalization of capital, thus we have to build up a special relationship, in order to fight against the unholy alliance of the reactionaries of the two countries, which is directed against other peoples, but against our peoples as well.

The ruling reactionary circles of the two countries all the time export vicious ideological and right-wing political propaganda from US to Israel and back. It is, therefore, imperative for the progressive forces of our two countries to exchange views and experiences, to strengthen our struggles in both countries.

One personal remark: for you, Israel is a political reality, a tangle of problems, an interesting topic, a subject for discussion. For me, Israel is all that, but more — it has become my homeland. Not because of blood and soil, as the Nazi catch word goes, and not because of historical, religious or ideological ties, as Zionist theory implies. As a militant in the ranks of the Marxist-Leninist Party of the working class, the Communist Party of Israel, I have become rooted in the struggle for a better future for the people of Israel, for both peoples living there. It is the struggle for peace, democracy and socialism, together with my comrades and other people of good will that has forged my unbreakable connection with my country.

July/August 1983

Israel has become a developed capitalist country; it has now reached the stage of state monopoly capitalism.

The Israeli bourgeoisie was rather weak until 16 years ago. The Israeli worker was mainly exploited by foreign capital, and that means in the first place US capital. The change came about with the criminal occupation of Arab land in the 1967 war, bringing rich colonial superprofits in the exploitation of cheap labour power, in the robbery of raw materials and in the monopolization of the local market of the occupied territories. Occupation made Israel poor and lowered the living standard of the working people, but the Israeli bourgeoisie made a fortune out of it, becoming rich and strong.

I am not going to speak to you on the present world situation. You are in the midst of the difficult struggle for detente in international relations, for reorganizing the existence and the necessity of a balance of forces between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, for a freeze in nuclear armament, for an agreed solution on outstanding questions with the Soviet Union.

And you will, I trust, agree with me that the Middle East with all its dangers and all its opportunities is an integral part of the world situation. Our experience teaches us that any advance in detente in international relations opens new vistas for solving the Middle East conflict, while any return to cold war policies on the part of your rulers tends temporarily to close option for a just peace in the Middle East.

The USA-USSR understanding of October 1, 1977, on solving the Israeli-Arab conflict by calling for an international conference of all sides concerned was, so far, the latest correct step of the U.S. administration in relation to our region. Its implementation would have inaugurated a genuine process of peace.

What the US and Israeli press call the process of peace, from the Camp David accords until today is in reality a process of war, a process of USA domination in the region, a process of denying the national rights of the Palestinian Arab people, leading to genocide.

Blaming the PLO and Syria for not joining this sham process of "peace," reflects the disappointment of the reactionary forces in both our countries at the fact that not all Middle East forces are being taken in by imperialist maneuvers.

Over the years, the basic overall cooperation between the US administration and the government of Israel has been strengthened. Yet, there are some differences in approach to Middle East development.

Questions that for the Reagan administration are marginal, like delimiting of frontiers, may be of utmost importance for the mythical chauvinism of the Begin

government. The wish of the Reagan administration to draw the reactionary rulers of Arab countries still firmly into its orbit, may sometimes clash with Begin government's policy of expansion. In the main, however, such differences do not affect the essential strategic concord. Both governments find it often useful to dramatize disagreement.

In the eyes of the US administration, Israel as a stable pro-imperialist power, continues to be regarded as America's mainstay in the Middle East, and in the eyes of the Israeli rulers, the United States is its last friend, ally and supporter in the international arena. The two are basically united in the adventurous policy of rearmament and war, in their anti-Sovietism, in their active opposition to all the revolutionary forces of our time and in their lack of any rational approach to the realities of the world around them. Either of them drags the other still deeper into the fog of eventual defeat.

This aggressiveness and their lack of rational approach has again been proved by the war against Lebanon. The war aims of the Israeli rulers, fully supported by the Reagan administration, have miscarried; the national consciousness and militancy of the Palestinian Arab people had not been subdued. The PLO, although not able to hold the onslaught of the huge Israeli war machine, has been strengthened morally and politically. Lebanon has not become an Israeli colony. The Syrian army has remained intact. The hope of the Israeli rulers that the aggression in Lebanon would break resistance in occupied Palestinian territory has proved illusory.

Now, the Israeli army is in the midst of the Lebanese adventure. The Begin government cannot show any real achievements of its aggressive war. While the PLO has been able, in the main, to close its ranks after Beirut — the people of Israel is more divided than ever on the necessity of this war, paying the price in blood and in the sharpening of the economic, political and moral crises.

The so called agreement reached by the government of Israel with Lebanon, while a good part of this country is occupied and with all the pressure exerted by your Secretary of State on the Lebanese government — is an agreement to maintain the division of Lebanon and prevent it from exerting its sovereignty. It stands in cynical contradiction to UN Security Council resolutions 508 and 509 that demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon.

And let me make it clear. The end of adventure and aggression is not yet in sight. Injustice begets injustice. Crime begets crime. War begets war. There are too many signs that war plans against Syria are being hatched in Jerusalem and in Washington.

They may be very bad chess players who consider the next move only, but as such they are most dangerous playing with the fate of the peoples of the Middle East, the Israeli people included.

In the face of the psychological warfare against Soviet assistance to Syria, that is led by the ruling circles of our country, we are telling the people that this Soviet assistance is of defensive nature only and that there are good reasons for Syria to strengthen its defensive positions.

The Middle East conflict endangers world peace. In Lebanon we have a direct confrontation of US military forces and Soviet military advisers. I shall not interfere in the internal affairs of your country, and you will judge whether and how pressure should be increased by your people on the administration to come to an understanding with the Soviet Union on the Middle East issue.

The policy of confrontation has failed. A policy of agreement is needed; it is essential also in the overall interest of saving mankind from nuclear catastrophe.

In regard to the Israeli-Palestinian peace, we are convinced that it is imperative to come to mutual recognition between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Arab people, represented by the PLO, of national rights and interests. The PLO in fact prepared for mutual recognition by accepting the resolution of the Fez Conference and the Soviet proposal.

The government of Israel, with the full support of right-wing Labour leaders, are not yet prepared to do so. The national interest of Israel should no longer be cast aside. It demands the solution that is concretely expressed by the main slogan at our mass demonstrations: "Two States for the Two Peoples."

The best way to a just and durable peace is the convocation of an international conference of the Geneva type, bringing together Israel, the PLO the sole legitimate representative of the People, the neighbouring Arab states, the USA, the Soviet Union and other interested powers. The accord reached, leading to genuine peace, will be strengthened by international guarantees. Concretely speaking, there is outside your and my country an international consensus on the main lines of possible just peace.

First — withdrawal of the Israeli forces from all territories occupied in 1967. Our Party adds: the lines of June 4, 1967 is to become the peace border between Israel and the Palestinian state.

Second — recognition of the right of the Palestinian Arab people to establish their own independent state alongside Israel.

Third — respect for the rights of all states in the region, Israel and the Arab states alike, to sovereign

existence and development in conditions of peace and security. All sides to cancel any claim to a status of belligerency and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the states in the region, their right to live in peace within secure and recognized borders, free from the threat and the use of force.

Fourth — a just solution of the Palestinian refugees problem according to United Nations resolution, recognizing the right of the refugees to choose between return to their homeland and receiving compensation.

The annexation of occupied Eastern Jerusalem should be abolished. It will fall under the sovereignty of the independent Palestinian state. In the framework of a peace settlement, Western Jerusalem should be recognized as the capital of the State of Israel, and Eastern Jerusalem as capital of the Palestinian state, according to the wish of either people in its state. There will be room for mutually agreed arrangements, ensuring cooperation between the two parts of the city, in municipal affairs, free access to holy places, free movement between the two parts.

* * *

Now to the Israeli scene, and I am sorry I have to open here a bitter chapter. Israel is in the throes of an overall crisis, political, economic and moral.

The sharpening of the political crisis may be perceived from the fact that the government is less and less able to solve the problems of the country. I do not even add here: "solve in the interest of the people." I want to say that they are unable to solve it any way, even in the interest of big capital.

The ruling parliamentary coalition is in constant danger of falling apart. Its factions squabble among them, and there are signs of disintegration in most of its constituent parts.

Some of these difficulties may be plastered over, by paying a heavy price to sectional interests; some may be balanced off, for a while.

Foreign policy is led spontaneously from one failure to another. There is no overall long-term programme how to deal with internal policy. Government had to ground El-Al airplanes for months, because of their intrasigence. The physicians' strike goes on for months.

The stand of government is alleviated by the failure of the main opposition — Labour — to put its house in order. It has an even less clear perspective for the future than the right-wing coalition and is rent by inner dissensions ideological, political, personal. In the main, Labour's policy is not far from that of government, as in their opposition to a just solution of the Palestine question; in their opposition to negotiations with PLO; their

anti-Sovietism; their partial acceptance of intensified colonial settlement in the occupied territories.

In some questions, Labour may be somewhat less doctrinaire, being less mythical than their extreme right-wing counterparts. It should be added that among the labour leaders there are some who in concrete questions profess progressive opinions.

The fact that the Labour leaders do not constitute a genuine, principled opposition force, only adds to the crisis factor in Israel's political life.

There is near-unanimity on the critical situation of the Israel economy. Of course, economic conditions would not be good, even without the specific features of the economic and fiscal policy of the government, because of the general situation of capitalist world economy and because of the unhealthy development of capitalist relations of production in our country, where the sector of material production is relatively small and shrinking.

But on top of these comes this policy: the huge degree of militarization of the economy and the state budget; the neglect of civil production in contradistinction to production for war; the neglect of production and development in Israel proper contradistinction to production and development in the occupied territories, especially in the West Bank; the high priority given to expenditure for arms, war, occupation and oppression, coupled with a Friedman concept of reducing civil state expenditures that benefit the working population and even of small and medium capital. All this makes Israel economy extremely lopsided and perverted.

Add to this that Israel seems to be the sole country in the world that keeps the value of its currency artificially high — explained as a measure to fight the three-digit inflation, although inflation does not follow the advice of the Minister of Finance and refuses to go down. As a result of this policy, exports are drastically declining, and import is steadily soaring.

In consequence, Israel's external debt is constantly rising. At the end of 1982, it stood, according to minimal estimates, at \$21 billion. During 1983, Israel will have to refund some \$6 billion, trying to cover this by taking short-term, high-interest new loans.

You may imagine the influence of this policy on the living standard of the working people.

The policy feeds itself: for instance, young couples wanting a flat of their own have to look for it on the West Bank or in Arab Jerusalem; this increases the basic ills that are at the root of the unhealthy situation.

A few words on the moral crisis. Almost everyone in Israel wails that the high values of times past have vanished. I am not going to discuss here, whether these

values, built on so-called Zionist pioneering were genuine positive values, based as they were on discrimination towards, and expropriation of the Arab population, or whether their appreciation had to lead, with its inner dynamics, to the present deep moral crisis.

About chauvinism I shall speak in a few minutes. Here I want to stress another aspect. Many people, especially young people, who do not see any perspective for the future of Israel or for themselves, who are nurtured on war after war after war, who are constantly called for reserve duty, feel insecure, helpless, wasted, frustrated. Thus, drug taking and speculation on the stock exchange becomes part of daily life. The crime rate is growing, many leave the country.

The situation is efficiently exploited by the religious establishment, to lead people back into the bosom of the synagogue and the yeshiva, providing them with some kind of transcendental values, divorced from reality. Zionism is now in need to call on religion for assistance in justifying occupation and annexation of Palestinian territory. Jewish religion of the most orthodox type is increasingly dominant in public education, in the media, in the corridors of power.

The religious establishment has enormous material resources at its disposal. Its influence has led to a growing limitation of personal freedom, not known in other countries, to the darkest legal rules and administration of justice, especially in questions of marriage and divorce. This encroaches sharply on the rights of women; equality between the sexes is even in principle not guaranteed.

You have heard and read about changes occurring in the political consciousness of the people in Israel. These changes are not to be seen in a simplified way and one-dimensionally.

There is a pronounced process of polarization going on in the Jewish masses in Israel.

It is characteristic that physical work is no longer done by Jews.

A not insignificant part of the population — I would say the majority, is more deeply drawn into the cesspool of extreme, narrow chauvinism and militarism. This is to be seen in the poisoned background of all-round Zionist education, activated by efficient manipulation through the schools, the media, the religious establishment, army training and fostered by 16 years of occupation, by the chain of military victories.

Particularly, a good part of young people have embraced the notion of nationalistic superiority, of belonging to an elected race, of not being accountable to any yardstick but natural glory, of disregarding human and humane values.

For only too many of them, government has not to justify its policy of aggression and expansion by referring to defence or security — they are in favour of aggression and expansion as such, without any demagogic cloak.

This is, as I said, to a high degree the fruit of 16 years of occupation. To be part of the army of occupation or of security and intelligence agencies in the West Bank, in the Gaza Strip, in Golan, or being settlers there, with the vast freedom of being the overlord and of terrorizing the Arab population, has released many of them from the shackles of respect for the honour, the life and the property of a human being and led to deep moral degradation.

This dehumanized approach was, with necessity, reimported into Israel. This explains the mass support for Begin and his ilk, and this also provides the mass potential for fascism, ready for the moment, when big capital will decide that it has to do away and is able to do away with bourgeois democracy and the still existing democratic rights of the people.

* * *

I may add here that the Communist Party of Israel is doing its utmost to mobilize the people and especially the working people against the danger of fascism. We try to unite all political forces interested in the defence of bourgeois democracy in a broad anti-fascist movement. To our regret, the right-wing Labour leaders do not see the danger or are still under the sway of anticommunism; they are, so far, not prepared to accept our proposals for a common struggle against the fascist danger.

We are fully aware of the danger, but do not see the development as fatalistic. Fascism can still be stopped in Israel.

I spoke about the process of polarization, and now about the favourable trend.

In former aggressive wars, there was a wide consensus to lead the war to victory, both in the leadership of all parties from the extreme right through the Mapam and in the great majority of the Jewish people of Israel; only toward the end of war, some awakening was felt here or there.

In the war against Lebanon, from the very start, many people and certain leaders, felt unconvinced and uneasy. When our parliamentary faction, the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, proposed a vote of non-confidence in the Knesset immediately at the beginning of the war, only our faction voted for it, but 10 Knesset members did not take part in the vote, thus expressing first doubts regarding the war.

In the meantime, various members of the Knesset

Jewish Affairs

have criticized themselves, because they did not vote for the non-confidence motion, at the beginning, in June 1982. Some well-known bourgeois and social-democratic journalists have written against the war, as unjust or at least unnecessary from the very start.

Our slogans against the war have been taken up in various degrees by a growing number of people. Anti-war sentiment has become widespread, and the ruling circles are not able to disregard it completely.

Public organizations of diverse ideological and political shades are active against the war. The most consequent is the Committee against the War in Lebanon, that vigorously explains the aggressive and unjust character of the war and mobilizes public opinion for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israel forces from Lebanon.

The militant group of young men, mainly in reserve duty — *There is a limit* — has issued a call not to serve in Lebanon and supports progressive soldiers that refuse to serve in occupied territories. The group has collected close to two thousand signatures of soldiers for its appeal. Those of the group called to reserve duty in Lebanon have refused to do so, and more than 50 of them have gone to jail for it.

Peace Now is the organization able to mobilize the greatest number of people, their activities culminating in the famous demonstration of 400,000 in October last.

This is not a closely knit organization, and it officially accepted a programme with a Zionist plank, intended to exclude communists and Arabs from its ranks. But the inner dynamics of development under present favourable circumstances makes Peace Now an objectively progressive meeting-point, with a great force of attraction. Thus, for instance, the Committee against the War in Lebanon, puts its weight to strengthen Peace Now's activities.

Dovish politicians, rationally arguing journalists and a good part of the people have come to the conclusion that Israel, with all its military might, is unable to attain political objectives by the force of arms. The demand of a political solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict and the Palestine question gains ground.

The Arab population is not only suffering but also fighting back. The new tradition of observing the 30th of March — together with the democratic Jewish forces — as Day of the Land, is a significant and unifying symbol and a notable form of struggle against expropriation.

Although this population is politically, socially, economically — not homogenous, it provides a part of the Israeli working class, much higher than its share in general, and a growing part of the intelligentsia. United
July/August 1983

in the move around correct national demands, with a high social consciousness, amply following the lead of the Communist Party, it is a main prop of the democratic forces inside Israeli society.

The call for Jewish-Arab brotherhood and for Jewish-Arab militant comradeship has been and is of the intrinsic planks of the Communist Party of Israel and is part of its daily practice. From here, it has pervaded many of the democratic organizations of the country and found its way towards other circles and organizations of the Israeli Left. The internationalist common struggle has become one of the most mobilizing factors — forging the strength of progressive forces, felt in the First-of-May demonstration, in the university campuses, in parliamentary, electoral, trade-union struggles — everywhere.

The Jewish people of Israel undergoes a long and tortuous road towards nationhood. This process has been retarded by the policy of its rulers who are interested in keeping the different ethnic components apart and fighting against each other. It is a conscious policy intended not to allow the Israeli working class and its potential allies to see the common enemy — monopoly capital and class rule.

This process towards nationhood has been retarded by the generations — long disregard of the cultural tradition brought with them by the immigrants from Islamic countries and by the discrimination against these Jewish communities in education, housing and economic advance.

This process towards nationhood has also been retarded by the dominant Zionist ideology that only too often regards the Jewish people of Israel as an embattled bridgehead for the pretended world Jewish nation.

The struggle against Zionist ideology and practice is a task of great importance, in order to further the national interests of Israel; to bring the people down to earth to face reality; to liberate it from chauvinism and militarism.

It is generally admitted in Israel that Zionist theory in its classical form has failed. The concentration of Jewish masses in Israel has not solved any national problem. It has neither brought security to the Jews in Israel nor to the Jewish communities throughout the world.

In the slang of the Israeli youth, Zionism has become a word of derision, depicting tedious pep-talk without much content.

On the other hand, we are well aware that Zionist ideology and practice is well alive and kicking in the aggressive and expansionist policy of the ruling circles, as well as in the anti-Arab and anti-Soviet brainwashing

accompanying it.

Our struggle against zionist ideology is part and parcel of our general ideological struggle, trying to raise the consciousness of the workers and the working intelligentsia to the scientific approach of Marxism-Leninism. The struggle will be hard and protracted, because of the long manipulation of the people.

A victory in the ideological struggle is not a precondition in our fight for a just Israeli-Palestinian peace. But it will be a precondition in order to advance the revolutionary process and general democratic transformations in Israeli society towards socialist transformation.

The Communist Party of Israel — founded 63 years ago — has remained true to its historic role. It analyses and explains the current political and economic development in the light of Marxism-Leninism. It tries to mobilize the working people in the day-to-day struggle. It provides the programme for overcoming the great difficulties of the country, especially for solving the complex national question in the framework of a genuine peace-settlement. It shows the workers the socialist perspective.

The fact that sons and daughters of the Jewish and of the Arab people are fraternally united in the Party under one common leadership and with one common programme, proves that there is an objective base for peace and friendship between both our peoples.

We are proud that we have been able to withstand all attempts at sidetracking us from our internationalist position towards this or that nationalistic deviation.

We are proud that we have found common ground with the young Communist Party of Palestine and with the communist parties of the neighboring Arab countries; that we have established relations of good-will and agreement with the PLO.

We are proud of being a faithful detachment of the international communist movement, loyal to Marxist-Leninism and to proletarian internationalism, that we have friendly fraternal relations with communist parties in socialist and capitalist countries alike, not least with the Communist Party of the United States.

We are proud that even our ideological and political opponents inside Israel regard us as serious and honest. We are especially proud that many, many people are prepared earnestly to listen to us, even if they do not yet accept our arguments.

We are proud that there is no serious event or question in our country to which we have not tried to give a straightforward answer.

To our regret, we are not yet and shall not be in the near future a mass party among the Jewish people in

Israel. Many obstacles, resulting from long years of social democratic and zionist indoctrination will have to be overcome. To do our job well, we shall have much to learn, and most of all, not to waver and to be persistent day in, day out, until we shall succeed.

The tactics of the Party are based on building the broadest front possible around a minimum program and on building wider alliances on concrete questions, without renouncing the ideological and political independence of the Party.

In the program of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, we have not included the anti-imperialist struggle or our views on scientific socialism and on existing socialism, as built in the Soviet Union and the other countries of the socialist community. We are free within the Democratic Front to propagate Marxism-Leninism and uphold truth in the face of lie and slander. Not only do we explain the peace policy of the Soviet Union in world affairs and in the Middle East. We also try to explain that the peace proposal of the Soviet Union regarding the Middle East coincides with the platform of the Democratic Front and that therefore the Soviet Union constitutes the most important support to the struggle for a just peace in the region.

We cooperate with other organizations and personalities on various fields, as peace, democracy, workers' rights, as national and ethnic equality of rights or that of women, as friendship with the Soviet Union.

We openly declare that we are prepared fully to cooperate on progressive issues, irrespective of ideology, be it religious or zionism or scientific socialism. We do not abandon ideological struggle even with our allies; but we want progressive people of different approach to come together and struggle together, on a common platform, be it for world peace or for a just peace in the region, be it for democracy and against fascism, be it for genuine national independence, be it for the rights of working men and women, for social progress and for socialism.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and comrades, You will have seen again, how complex the situation is, but also how simple the conclusions to be drawn.

I do not belong to those that have one truth for home consumption and another for explanation abroad. There can be one truth only. I am sure that the conception I have tried to present before you, is in the best national interest of my people. This is the only way to advance the cause of Israel, the cause of the two peoples living there.

If you can support us in this struggle, if you can express your solidarity in any way you choose — it will be a most valuable contribution to a just struggle. □