

THE ANTI-ZIONIST SOCIALISTS OF ISRAEL

By J. ARTUSKY

The second conference of the Bund organization in Israel, which took place in Tel-Aviv on October 23 and November 6, 1954, brought forth differences of opinion in our ranks. The differences revolved not around the ideology of the Bund but only around a few questions involving the state of Israel.

As to Zionism in general and its harmful role for the Jewish people all over the world, there have been no disagreements in the past and there are none now. On this question the dividing line has been and remains clear. Complications do appear on the problem of the role of Zionism in Israel and the Bundist struggle in the state of Israel.

No one can deny that the state of Israel owes a great deal to Zionism. The state is the dream-child of Zionism. Though a series of international events and the catastrophic destruction that befell European Jews helped in creating the state, the ground for it was prepared by decades of Zionist political and "pioneering" work. That fact cannot be negated.

It is this fact that gave birth to the popular misconception that Israel and Zionism are identical concepts that cannot be divided.

Zionism a Danger to Jews

When the Bundist organization came into being in Israel over three years ago, it took a position of *differentiating* or separating the two concepts—Israel and Zionism. It took a positive attitude to the state but retained its negative position on Zionism.

The Bund in Israel took the position that: Zionism, despite its achievements for the state, was in its essence—as a movement of Jewish nationalism—inimical to the state of Israel; that the idea of the "Ingathering of the Exiles," of territorial concentration of the Jewish people in Israel, is a dangerous concept not only for the continued existence of the Jews in the world but also for the very existence of Israel itself and of its inhabitants.

Resolutions expressing these ideas were adopted unanimously at the first meetings of the Bund. They established a clear dividing line between the Bund and the Zionists not only in relation to the general Jewish question but also as to the role and requirements of Israel.

The first meeting and conference of the Bund took place at a time when the politics of "Ingathering of the Exiles" was "triumphant." There was still in process a mass immigration which, however, had fatal effects on the economic crisis. There was a shortage of the most elementary products; the Israeli pound was devalued; over 200,000 people were homeless in the Maabrot and other camps for the newcomers; and the majority of the Israeli population lived on charity and food parcels received from abroad.

The harmful effects of the Zionist politics of "Ingathering" was obvious. While the Zionists saw this condition as the "birth pangs" of the Zionist millennium, the Bundists analyzed it as a result of trying to achieve a false utopia. The Bundist organization was the first and, at that time, the only organization that warned against continuing the false policy of "Ingathering of the exiles."

On the question of relations with the Arabs, there also existed a clear dividing line between the Bund and the Zionists.

The Zionist leaders and masses at that time

still were living under the psychology of victory over the Arab countries. Their Jewish nationalism was optimistic; they rattled their small swords, and lived in the belief that "time is on our side." The policy and practice of discrimination against the Arab minority within the country was in full swing. The Bund, which insisted on peace with the Arab world, was clearly aware of the dangers that stemmed from such a nationalism.

The position was also clear on the question of Yiddish. There was open and flagrant discrimination against Yiddish in Israel. It was obvious that in Israel there was no other organization except the Bund that was interested in defending the rights of Yiddish and fighting for its equality.

Insecurity Grows

In the course of the two years since our first meeting, great changes have taken place in conditions in the state of Israel.

The mass immigration has stopped. The illusion of "Ingathering of the Exiles" has begun to evaporate. It has been getting clearer even to Zionists that the state of Israel cannot solve the Jewish question and that the "exiles" will remain in existence, that Israel will remain a small state inhabited by a small portion of the Jewish people.

The international position of Israel also took a turn for the worse. The great powers began to cultivate the friendship of the Arab states and to strengthen them both politically and militarily. In Israel the optimism began to diminish and the feeling of insecurity began to grow. There no longer existed the belief that "time is on our side."

True, the policy of "activism" against the Arabs was the reigning policy and it had its sharpest manifestation in attacks on Kibya, etc. These, however, were acts of despair rather than of optimism. They sprang from the feeling that tomorrow the situation of Israel would be worse and it behooved people to use the immediate opportunity to the utmost.

One result of the changed feeling was that the government began to liberalize its treatment of the Arab minority inside Israel and talked more often of peace with the Arab countries.

There took place important changes in the internal policies of Israel. A radical change occurred in the economic program of the government. The unsuccessful policy of rationing and austerity was abandoned. A free market was established which, while it legalized black-market prices, brought a plentiful supply of products. The bourgeois classes received many privileges and opportunities to make huge profits. At the same time the government froze the wages of workers and set itself the goal of reducing the standard of living of the workers.

Deepen Zionist Crisis

The government did succeed in continuing the development of the country with its new policies. Both industry and agriculture have advanced and the currency has more or less been stabilized. This success was at the expense of greatly deepening the social division in the country, sharpening the class antagonisms. It thereby helped the growth of dissatisfaction and the disillusionment of the people with the Zionist parties.

All these things contributed to deepen the crisis in the Zionist ranks. The tendency to flee from the country grew. It did not, however, bring about a strengthening of the Bundist organization in Israel. Rather it was apathy to the political struggle that grew amid the people generally; among the youth there sprouted "Canaanism" and estrangement from the Jews; as regards left elements, the "Communist" tendency grew in strength. The Zionist parties, basing themselves on the state apparatus and economic institutions, succeeded in retaining their hold on the majority of the population in an organizational sense—though losing on the ideological field.

The difficulties which the Bundists met in spreading its ideas and political influence gave rise to a tendency

With the following article, translated by Al Findley from the February issue of Unser Tsait, we are glad to acquaint our readers with the comparatively recent establishment in Israel of a militant anti-Zionist socialist movement, the Israeli section of the Jewish Labor Bund (which publishes Unser Tsait in this country).

Judging by the content of the accompanying article, which reports on the Second National Conference of the Israeli Bund, the political and ideological stand of the Israeli Bundists on the issues of Zionism, Israel and the Jewish question is very close, if not indeed identical, with our own, up to and including even our proposal for federal unity with the Arab people. We greet this correspondence in socialist thinking with great pleasure, and hope to follow more closely the activities and ideas of the Israeli Bund as spokesman for a genuine socialist approach in Israel.—Ed.

among a group of comrades to think along the lines of de-emphasizing our principled struggle against Zionism, which is slowly dissolving of its own accord, and to concentrate only on such slogans and demands as are more adapted to the feelings of the masses and do not antagonize their Zionist beliefs. These comrades also believed that we should not accuse the Israeli government of not wanting peace with the Arabs. At any rate, these comrades argued, we cannot change the Zionist character of the state—it may take generations—it is therefore correct to concentrate on slogans and demands that are concrete and on problems or sore points of the workers in general and the Yiddish-speaking masses in particular.

No Programmatic Retreat

The recently concluded Second National Conference of the Israeli Bund rejected these proposals. It took the position:

(1) By putting aside our principled opposition to Zionism we erase the separation between us and the Zionist parties now in opposition to the government, and that will weaken our organization; and

(2) Without the political-ideological struggle against Zionism, our organization would lose its right to exist as a separate tendency.

In opposition to the proposed program, the conference decided that our main function is to maintain the ideological independence and propagate our truths despite the fact that they are not popular at the moment.

The course of Israeli's development in the past few years has strengthened our position *ideologically*. The failure of mass immigration, symptoms of the bankruptcy of the Zionist ideas about the "millennium," the crisis in the Zionist ranks, the rise of dissatisfaction with the Zionist parties—all these factors demand not a weakening but an intensification of our struggle against Zionism. The conference pointed out that the distorted forms taken by the disillusionment with Zionism—growth of apathy, Canaanism, and the Communist tendencies—are only the beginnings of the awakening process in the Jewish population.

It is therefore the duty of Bundists to unite with these masses to direct them toward democratic and non-Zionist socialism, i.e., in the direction of the Bund. This obligation will not be fulfilled by hiding, but rather by expressing openly and clearly, the Bundist opposition to Zionist ideology and politics.

The conference underlined the necessity of demands and slogans that defend the political and social rights of the masses and strengthen the struggle for the equality of Yiddish. It emphasized that the reactionary and anti-democratic politics of the government is the inevitable consequence of the Zionist character of the governmental policy.

Toward Unity with Arabs

So too, in relation to the question of peace with the Arab states, the conference deemed it correct to state its position clearly and unambiguously: "while the respective nationalisms of both the Arabs and Jews are responsible for the current situation and are an obstacle to a stable peace," that "on the Jewish side, the main obstacle to such a peace is the Zionist ideology of the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' which bears a tendency to territorial expansion."

The conference condemned the so-called "activist" policy in relation to the Arabs as exemplified in Kibya, etc., and emphasized that the only road to peace lies through mutual compromises from both sides.

The conference thereby formulated the unique position of the Bund on the basic problems of the state of Israel. Its positive attitude toward Israel is not bound up with the Zionist ideas of redemption but with uniting the state of Israel with the general national groups of the Jewish people, as a national community that is at peace with all the nations among which it dwells. The task of Bundists in Israel—no matter how difficult that task may be—to find a way to the masses through a fight for a socialist Israel, freed from Zionist politics, that, on the one hand, will be capable of making peace with the Arabs and even unite with them in a federated community, and, on the other hand, maintain its cultural unity with the widespread Jewish people.

The debate that took place at our conference helped to crystallize the ideological face of the Bundist organization in Israel; and the freedom for differing opinions is not in contradiction but is in line with the basic traditions of the Bundist fraternity. This spirit manifested itself in the celebration of the 70th birthday of the Bundist veteran in Israel, Bentzaz Tsalewicz, that took place at the same time as the conference. At the celebration all political differences disappeared. As a united family the Bundist organization celebrated this well-earned anniversary of its presiding officer.

This Second Conference, which carried on the banner of fidelity of the Bundist ideas, is an important step in the coming difficult but responsible road of the Bundist organization in Israel.