

# IN THE WORLD

## Israeli workers back Labor

The Labor party stayed in control of the Histadrut, Israel's labor federation, but Likud gained support.

**E**lections to the Histadrut, Israel's general federation of labor, took on unusual importance this year. They followed by one month the May 17 "revolution" in which the official Likud coalition ousted the Labor alignment after two generations of continuous rule, stretching back to the pre-state era.

Labor managed to maintain its hold on the workers' organization, garnering 56 percent of the vote, only a two percent drop from its 58 percent total in 1973. But Likud increased its vote dramatically, from 22 percent in 1973 to 29 percent.

The results are paradoxical. Likud's recent gains reflect a deep dissatisfaction among Israelis with the economic situation and with the Labor establishment's corruption and degeneration after so many years in power. But the support for Labor in the Histadrut reflects some class consciousness among Israeli workers, who understand that the Likud policies of uncontrolled "free" enterprise, unemployment to fight inflation and compulsory arbitration are against their interests.

### Socialist beginnings.

Founded in 1920 by the few thousand Jewish pioneers then trying to settle the country, the Histadrut was never a typical trade union movement. Its main function was to provide otherwise non-existent cultural and social services to its members. Politically, it was the tool of utopian socialists within the Zionist movement who believed that without the creation of a Jewish working class there would be no Jewish national home—at best it would be a colony living on the backs of Arab labor.

They were an idealistic lot, intent on turning a substantial portion of European Jewry—mostly urban in position and outlook—into a new, rural-based proletariat. The movement fought Jewish employers in Palestine who were hiring the cheaper, more plentiful Arab laborers. Thus the seeds of a national conflict were sown. The few attempts to organize Jews and Arabs together failed.

By the 1930s, the Jewish labor parties, based in the Histadrut and led by David Ben-Gurion, held undisputed control of the Zionist movement. The labor movement at least partly controlled many new industrial enterprises, and it organized nationwide health and transportation services. By 1948, the Histadrut had become a shadow government for the solidifying Jewish community of over half a million.

Capital for land purchases, development and industrial investment was only to be found abroad, however. And the donors, especially the large ones, were not socialistically inclined. They maintained some direct control of their money's use in private investment and in institutions such as the Jewish National Fund, but they basically had little to worry about. The Jewish labor movement saw its main task not as a struggle against capital—that could come later, if at all—but as the leading force of the movement to build a Jewish national home in Palestine, by whatever means necessary. As long as the workers' movement proved most effective in pursuing this goal, its class rivals were willing to cooperate.



Prime Minister Menachem Begin (left) presides over his first cabinet meeting in Jerusalem, June 26. Seated around the table from his left are two cabinet secretaries, Defense Minister Ezer Weizmann, Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon, Immigration Minister David Levi, Education Minister Zevulun Hammer and Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan.

### Haves against have-nots.

Only later was the Histadrut's "trade union department" founded. It actually created most local unions, the reverse of the process in normal capitalist development, where local unions band together to form federations. The unions were thus centrally controlled: to this day the Histadrut leadership is elected nationwide, on a party basis, not from shop representatives.

And the Histadrut's role as boss has grown as Israel has developed into an advanced capitalist society. It is the second largest employer (after the government), especially in large-scale industry and services. Thousands of workers not organized in local unions join it solely for its health

insurance. All in all, about 80 percent of the population belongs (Arabs have been accepted as members since the '60s).

Thus, it is not surprising that workers farthest from positions of power, especially the young, the poor and the Oriental Jews, do not see the Histadrut or the labor establishment that founded it as their representative. These sectors voted most heavily for the Likud in both elections. David Shaham, Labor party activist until 1975, wrote in *New Outlook* (June-July, 1977) explaining Labor's defeat in the general elections, that it "ceased maintaining its socialist content, developing instead a mixture of lip service to ideological principles...and a pragmatic approach...total-

ly bound to the goal of developing the economy at any price and of course, the prime goal of staying in power.

"Matters came to such a point that at times, the main struggle of the workers' parties was waged against the workers' desire to improve their condition. Most strikes are wildcat strikes by employees of the state, which was controlled by the labor movement, and against the labor federation, which acts as a tool of state rule."

He goes on to describe how managers of state and Histadrut controlled institutions, bent laws to increase drastically their standard of living. "All this was covered by a curtain of hypocrisy. On May 1, the red flag flew over heavy industrial plants, big banks, the large insurance companies and retail chains, over tax offices and health clinics—over all the bodies and institutions which the people on the street did not envisage as belonging to them or to the working class, but on the contrary, as collectively representing the exploiting class. All sorts of 'yes'-men stood at attention at their conventions to the sound of the 'Internationale.' The labor movement's ideology came to be that of the 'haves.' The 'have-nots' found consolation elsewhere."

### Labor wins back voters.

Yet despite the Likud gain, Labor came out of the Histadrut election still in firm control. Some of the reasons are the same as those that always gave Labor bigger victories in the Histadrut than in parliament: some workers support the right's ultra-nationalism, but vote Labor in the Histadrut out of a consciously-perceived class interest. (They fail, of course, to perceive the connection between Israel's defense expenditures—35 percent of its GNP—and the economic burden that workers are forced to bear). Also, the hard core of the right's truly capitalist members and their ideological supporters are not Histadrut members.

In the recent campaign, Labor very effectively used the spectre of unemployment (openly advocated by the new Likud finance minister Simcha Erlich) to win back some voters; others were shocked by the result of their anti-Labor "protest vote" in May. Many, especially Histadrut employees, were wary of the Likud's plan to sell profitable Histadrut enterprises

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## Begin forms cabinet

On June 20, one day before the Histadrut elections, Likud leader Menachem Begin presented his government to the new parliament and won the confidence of 63 out of 120 of its members. The coalition includes Likud's 43 seats (three factions: Begin's ultra-nationalist Herut, Finance Minister Simcha Erlich's strongly pro-capitalist Liberals, and La'am, a conglomeration of small parties led by a former associate of Ben-Gurion's faction); Gen. Arik Sharon's Shlomzion (two seats), which is now totally integrated with Likud; and the National Religious party (12 seats), always a partner of Labor in the past, which has grown closer to the Likud's chauvinism. The NRP received the important Interior Ministry (now including the police), Education (always held by Labor in the past) and Religious Affairs.

The ultra-orthodox Agudat Yisrael party (five seats) refrained from accepting cabinet portfolios, but agreed to support the government in exchange for some key parliament committee positions and a few additional theatrical concessions, such as repeal of the relatively liberal abortion law, stricter Saturday blue laws, and exclusive recognition of orthodox converts to Judaism. Finally, Moshe Dayan abandoned Labor to accept the foreign ministry, a move that aroused protest among bereaved 1973 war families, who consider him responsible for Israeli

losses, and, at first, even among some Likud leaders.

Negotiations were held with the new Democratic Movement for Change (15 seats), which had hoped to be in a pivotal position after the election. But Begin was able, and obviously preferred, to form a government without the DMC. The official unbridgeable difference was Begin's refusal to endorse what the DMC (and Labor) consider the principle of "territorial compromise" in exchange for peace. A Begin acceptance of some similar formula under international pressure could provide a rationale for DMC's joining later.

There are several ways in which Begin might lose his majority. Some of the Liberals in the Likud, who historically opposed religious coercion, may rebel when Begin's promises to the religious parties come to a vote. If Begin stands up to American pressure, and a break in relations or war is the only alternative, some of these same Liberals, or perhaps some of the religious MPs may bolt.

Such an occurrence would lead to new elections, unless Begin—a man intensely devoted to his principles—refuses to step down and resorts to undemocratic rule. Some very reasonable people think that he is quite capable of such a move, if he perceives that enough of the key power-holders and masses support him. —David Mandel



# The Russians

## "You ever see a Commie drink water?"

### Part I

By Louis Menashe

*I'm always thinking of Russia,  
I can't keep her out of my head,  
I don't give a damn for Uncle Sam,  
I am a left-wing radical Red.*

—H.H. Lewis, *Thinking of Russia*, 1932

Back in the '30s, for friends or foes of socialism, Soviet Russia was socialism. Or, at least, trying to build it. If you thought about socialism, you couldn't get her out of your head. In those days, every radical was a sort of doctoral candidate in Soviet studies, primed with data about economic development, ready to footnote a political argument with a reference to Stalin, or Trotsky, or Bukharin, and capable of reciting the major resolutions from Party or Comintern congresses. Foes of socialism (and some of its friends, too) were, of course, fond of citing Soviet contra-indications: murderous political feuds, reports of starvation in the countryside, forced labor camps.

Later, most radicals—especially those born during or after World War II, would have trouble distinguishing Bukharin from Bakunin. The easy and natural identification of socialism with Soviet Russia had crumbled. For a generation growing up in an epoch of global revolution and counter-revolution, with colossal transformations agitating the Third World and the late capitalist societies, socialism connotes new models, new definitions, new personalities. Mao, Marcuse, Che, Berlinguer? Of course. Brezhnev and Kosygin? Maybe; maybe not.

#### Coldwar propaganda.

Yet, deep within American political folklore, the association of Soviet Russia with socialism remains. "Did you ever see a Commie drink a glass of water?" asks Gen. Jack D. Ripper in Stanley Kubrick's film of 1964, *Dr. Strangelove*. "Vodka, that's what they drink, don't they?" he answers himself.

Or the association remains of Soviet Russia with radicalism in general. Looking down from his office at the Justice department during Vietnam Moratorium demonstrations in Washington in November 1969, then Attorney General John Mitchell muttered that "it looked like the Russian revolution going on." At a public protest in New York against the Nixon/Kissinger "incursion" into Cambodia the following spring, a woman shouted at me, "Go to Russia! Go to Russia!" (It so happened I was preparing for a research trip to Moscow that summer, so I shouted back, "I'm going! I'm going!")

Gen. Ripper didn't say that commies drink green tea; Mitchell wasn't reminded of the Long March; and that woman didn't

advise me to go to Havana. No matter that for many leftists the torch of militancy had passed from Moscow to Peking or Havana; or that only with many serious qualifications could the Soviet Union be described as socialist. For ordinary Americans as for the corporate elite and its political/military agents, Soviet Russia equals communism equals socialism.

Heaps of cold war propaganda linking all movements for social change, at least in part, with Moscow were responsible for this attitude. The architects of American globalism aimed "to scare hell out of the American people," as it was put back in the early days of the cold war, during the Truman administration. Stretching the military budget to unheard-of peacetime levels depended on convincing Congress and the public that every peasant insurrection or trade union struggle had its source in Moscow. Former Secretary of State Dean Rusk once described the People's Republic of China as a "Soviet Manchukuo"—an allusion to the puppet status of Manchuria under the Japanese before World War II. In short, socialism as an animating ideal of political movements east and west was translated into the sinister design of an aggressive, expansionist military power, the USSR.

That image remains, although time and events have dulled its cruder edges: Americans now know, for example, that the Chinese don't like the Russians and that American presidents and secretaries of state don't always tell the truth and that socialism is not such a dirty word. Still, a certain obsessiveness about the USSR prevails—not always negative.

#### Wisdom from abroad.

It's not simply that Soviet Russia has an enormous global presence now as the second largest industrial power and the second most potent military force. Other, less tangible ingredients begin to color the picture: the Russians as an exotic people on the border of Europe and Asia; the romance, even for its detractors, of the Bolshevik revolution and the first attempt to mold a socialist society against tremendous odds; and finally, enormous curiosity about a social system not based on private property, possessive individualism, and the entrepreneurial ethos—and not about the halfway houses of Scandinavian socialism either, but about presumably the real thing.

Recent developments have fed into this obsessiveness—detente; the SALT talks since 1972 and their current impasse; Solzhenitsyn and his thunderous moral/historical indictment of the Soviet system; the dissidents and their peculiar, lonely struggle championed by an authentic Russian martyr with technical credentials, the Soviet physicist Andrei Sakharov; the grain deals and other examples of proliferating East/West trade; the Soviets in Africa and the Middle East; and the problems of Jews in the USSR.

Communist-dominated Democratic Front for Peace and Equality increased its strength to 3 percent, as opposed to the 2.5 percent won by the CP in 1973, but after a 50 percent gain in the parliamentary elections a month earlier. Many of its Arab voters, too, switched back to the Alignment to prevent the latter from losing too much.

#### Disunity on the left.

Many voices in Labor are calling for renewed workers' militancy as the key to reviving the party. This may be easier now that the labor movement no longer has the job of steering the capitalist state. But serious conflicts still exist between chiefs of Histadrut-owned industry, which is run along hierarchical and profit-motivated lines like any other, and the masses of lower-level workers. The kibbutzim and other privileged cooperatives under Hista-



A director of a farmer's market in the Soviet Union. This is one of a series of photos by Meg Gerken taken during a visit to the Soviet Union last year.

Witness the spate of magazine articles and best-selling books about the Soviet Union. *Fortune*, *Time*, and *Forbes* are filled with cover stories with cutesy titles like "Capitalists of the World, Unite!" (a recent *Forbes* cover article about trading with the "communists"). To widespread acclaim and sales, the former Moscow correspondents of the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, Robert Kaiser and Hedrick Smith, have produced major studies of the USSR based on their experiences there: *Russia: The People and the Power* and *The Russians*.

#### Obsessiveness remains.

What has the left contributed to thinking about Russia? Has the left been able to answer with clarity the renewed curiosity about the USSR and about Soviet socialism? It's important to understand that these days socialism is not simply a subject of sectarian definition but a topic of practical concern among growing numbers of Americans in all walks of life who have come to the grim conclusion that capitalism in the U.S. no longer functions effectively or humanely. Is socialism a work-

able alternative, they ask, and does the USSR suggest an acceptable model? (This is the sort of question I hear regularly from my students.)

Unfortunately, no coherent answer has come from the left. Too often the left has only riddled the question with transparent apologetics or doctrinaire mystifications. Above all, what the left has failed to do is think for itself. Somehow, analytical wisdom has always seemed to come from abroad: in the old days, from Moscow; more recently, from Peking. What has been lacking is an open, historical sensibility that appreciates that socialism is not some uniform, universal thing and panacea; that its particular Soviet application is a unique correlation of ideology, cultural background, and material-economic conditions. And that other societies will generate other correlations.

Next week: a survey of theories and perceptions of Soviet society.

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## Histadrut

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and close others, nationalizing those which were too vital to close.

And finally, the significant Likud gain was hidden by voters who abandoned other parties to prevent an Alignment loss: the new Democratic Movement for Change, close to the Alignment on foreign policy but closer to the Likud on economics, dropped from 12 percent in the May elections to 7 percent in the Histadrut elections; the Independent Liberals and the Citizens' Rights party won 1.2 percent each in May, 1 percent total now; the Religious Workers dropped from over 4 percent in 1973 to under 2 percent; the parties comprising the left-Zionist Sheli won 2.7 percent in 1973, 1 percent now; the

drut auspices were outstandingly active in mobilizing for Labor's campaign; they too are culturally and socially alienated from urban workers.

Perhaps groups to the left of Labor should be able to make inroads among these urban workers, especially when the Likud proves unable to pull off an economic miracle. But there is little unity in the theoretical perspective or in practice—the Communist party is strictly orthodox and pro-Soviet Union (generally considered national enemy number one), the left-Zionists see their task as one of reconstructing the discredited Labor movement, and two Trotskyist factions do not get along with each other or with anyone else.

Even for those who avoid these pitfalls, the whole left suffers for being "outside the national consensus" on the Palestinian question and foreign policy. Thus, most efforts are concentrated on the

"peace" issue; a settlement that would greatly lessen the danger of war would better enable the left to get its message across on other matters.

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#### Correction:

There were several editorial errors in "Korean probe may sink U.S. envoy" (ITT, June 8). The headline was inaccurate, since the author did not suggest that Philip Babib, Carter's envoy to South Korea, would be sunk. Secondly, the editors added that "investigations have so far failed to get off the ground," not specifying "administration investigations." And the omission of a paragraph implied that Donald Ranard, former chief of State department's Korean Desk, had blamed his former boss, Philip Habib, for a cover-up of the Korean scandal.