

# CONFLICT IN MAPAM

By S. Zachariash

*For several months the sharp differences between the right and left wings of the United Workers Party (Mapam) of Israel have been receiving intense discussion in the press. We print below a consideration of this conflict by S. Zachariash, head of the Central Committee of Polish Jews. The article was translated from the Yiddish.—Eds.*

WE have had occasion many times to comment on the absence of genuine unity in the ranks of Mapam (United Workers Party of Israel). Actually, the "unity" and "monolithic" nature of Mapam is only an empty phrase. How can any movement be monolithic when it is in reality three parties, each of which itself has three factions? How could there be political unity, if none of the three parties [Hashomer Hatzair, Achdut Avodah and Left Poale Zion] underwent basic analysis and modification of its orientation prior to amalgamation? Each group went into the so-called United Workers Party with its own political baggage intact.

A party so constituted cannot be fully equipped politically to do battle. Nor has such a party anything in common with that party of a "new type" described by Lenin and Stalin. For the kind of unity exemplified in Mapam can be more strongly welded only by intensifying national aloofness and separateness, by a policy of subordinating the class issue to the "national" issue. As a result the "national" issue becomes nationalistic and anti-working class.

On this question Stalin wrote: "It may seem to some that the Bolsheviks devoted far too much time to this struggle against the opportunist elements within the Party, that they overrated their importance. But that is altogether wrong. Opportunism in our midst is like an ulcer in a healthy organism, and must not be tolerated. The Party is the leading detachment of the working class, its advanced fortress, its general staff. Sceptics, opportunists, capitulators and traitors cannot be tolerated on the directing staff of the working class. If, while it is carrying on a life and death fight against the bourgeoisie, there are capitulators and traitors on its own staff, within its own fortress, the working class be caught between two fires, from the front and the rear. Clearly, such a struggle can only end in defeat."<sup>1</sup>

If we apply these words of Stalin to the political and organizational structure of Mapam, we find that under no circumstances can Mapam be considered the party of the working class, even though it is active among workers. Instead, Mapam is a party of political eclecticism and hence neither is nor can be a party united in will and deed.

The recent controversy between the left and the right wings of Mapam is perhaps the best proof of this. Just now the discussion is raging between Jacob Riftin on the left and P. L. Goldman and A. Tarshish on the right. A recent article by Riftin has given the Mapam membership an opportunity to become familiar with the true character of their right wing leaders, whose unconcealed anti-communist and anti-Soviet positions were revealed in the Mapam press.

The right wing cries, the communists want to devour us. Riftin does not consider himself a communist but the right wingers have already denounced him as a communist and have even gone so far as practically to label him a traitor to the Jewish people.

It is not our job to defend Riftin or to take up the cudgels in his behalf. Undoubtedly Riftin can take care of himself and will give his own answers to the right wing. But what concerns us is to show the lengths to which the right wing in Mapam has gone in the recent period. The controversy has clearly exposed the anti-communist and anti-Soviet character of this right wing. The right wing is consequently very unhappy over the fact that the left has forced these political differences out into full view of the public.

## ***Right Wing Fears Public Discussion***

"I admit," wrote P. L. Goldman in the August 1950 issue of *Unzer Veg*, Yiddish Mapam organ published in New York by the left Poale Zionists, "that I do this unwillingly. In our movement it has not been the custom to air our inner differences in public. We have a tradition of discussing these matters first among ourselves." Naturally. Why should anyone know that such basic and serious differences exist in Mapam? Why should ordinary workers

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, International Publishers, N. Y., p. 360.

know that there are rabid anti-communists and anti-Sovieters in Mapam? "It is a shame," writes Goldman, "that Riftin broke with this tradition. I say it is a shame because it forces those of us who disagree with him not only to polemize with him but also publicly to differentiate ourselves from him."

It was not Riftin alone who forced the right wing into the open. Left wingers among the workers helped. The issue was forced by the dissatisfaction of thousands of workers and common people arising from the intensification of the class struggle in Israel. And as the Israeli masses begin more consciously to recognize the realities of capitalism, Mapam will be under increased pressure to bring differences over basic questions out in the open. Groups with basic differences will move further apart and this will lead to a crystallization of respective positions within Mapam. It will then be easier to discern who is on the right and who on the left.

The Mapam right wing has chosen this moment, when communist parties all over the capitalist world are being attacked and persecuted, when reaction is riding high, to add their bit to the attack against the Soviet Union and the communist movement. "Yes. Now is the time for Zionist-socialist to come to their reckoning with the Communist Party," writes Goldman. "We left Poale Zionists, for example, never kept quiet about the crimes perpetrated by the communist movement against us and our people. At the time of the Moscow trials (read, Trotskyite espionage trials—S.Z.) we did not remain silent but openly expressed our uneasiness and concern."

### **"Sins" of the Communists**

Exactly what are the crimes of communists against the Jewish people? The sacrifice of millions of souls by the Soviet Union in order to save millions of Jews and non-Jews? The fact that only the Soviet Union and the new democracies, where the Communist and Workers' Parties lead, gave full moral and material support to the struggle of the Jews against the armed Anglo-Arab reactionary forces in the fight to create the state of Israel?

Where would the world, and particularly the Jewish masses of Israel, be if not for the help of the communists of the Soviet Union? Where would the world be today if the fifth columnists had not been cleaned out of the Soviet Union, if the trials had not purged Hitlerite agents and therewith made possible the victorious march of the Soviet Army against fascism?

The Mapam right wingers are angry because the left does not speak up against the suppression of Zionists in the peoples' democracies. The left workers in Mapam offer no arguments on this point because they know that the Zionist movement in the new democracies liquidated itself. The workers of the left wing know that only those were prosecuted who acted as spies, like a group in Hungary, that only those were suppressed who worked with foreign agencies. Only those who tried to undo the realities of the peoples' democracies were brought to justice.

No, the Mapam left is not concerned with these matters. But they are concerned with the crimes against the Jewish people perpetrated by capitalism, fascism and the war camp. They are concerned with Ben Gurion's crimes against the Jewish masses and the Arab masses. Zionism is in contradiction and in conflict with the building of socialism in the new democracies. Many Mapam people in Poland understood this. They recognized the fallacy of sitting on two stools in the countries where socialism is being built. Many who did not perceive this while they were in Poland, understand this now that they are in Israel. They are discarding Zionist "socialism" and demanding real struggle against the reactionary elements in their own ranks.

Goldman tries to frighten the Mapam left by shouting, what do you think will happen to you if you enter into a united front with the communists? "What happened to those socialist parties and their leaders with whom the communists had established united fronts?" shouts Goldman. What did happen? The left socialists merged with the communist parties and formed united workers' parties. That's horrible, cry the right socialists, the Bundists and the right wing of Mapam. But the left socialists and their leaders feel somewhat differently about it. The left socialists and their leaders are enthusiastic over the fact that united working class parties now exist in Poland, Rumania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and that they are a part of these parties. The Italian Socialist Party under the leadership of Pietro Nenni, in united front with the Italian Communist Party, strengthens the hand of the working class in the great struggles ahead. The Italian people were not chewed up as a result. Quite the contrary, the left socialists in the capitalist countries are in danger of being ground to dust unless they recognize their responsibilities in these historic times. This is a real and serious danger for those who allow themselves to be chained to the plans of the imperialists. And precisely those who do not want to undergo "national demise" find their way to the camp of peace.

### **Right Wing and the Soviet Union**

Goldman and the Mapam right wing set forth in great detail other sins. "Today," shouts Goldman, "Jewish life in the Soviet Union has become a wilderness. No longer is there a communist alternative to a Jewish national existence." Goldman continues: "This has not been the path of our movement up to now and this must not become our approach in the future."

We have long been accustomed to the ravings of the Dubinskys of the *Forward* and the Ben Gurions of *Davar* [Mapai organ], who see the Soviet Union as a desert. Yet, here we read this same stuff in the Mapam *Unzer Veg* in August 1950! But the fact is that the Soviet Union transforms deserts and barren steppes into orchards and gardens for all its peoples and for the Jewish masses as well. In the eyes of the *Forward*-Mapamite, the Soviet Union and the people's democracies are a desert, while hundreds of

millions of oppressed people under capitalism have great respect for the Soviet Union for its contribution to the struggle for social and national liberation. In the eyes of the Mapam right wingers capitalist America, England, France and Israel are not a desert for national life while the Soviet Union and people's democracies are such a desert!

Goldman rejects the program of the Soviet Union and the communist movement. "It was the historic achievement of Zionist-socialism that it did not allow anyone else to write the program for our people. The Jewish state stands as a monument to this achievement." Not the Marxism of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin but "Zionist-socialism" is the program of the Jewish people. Why? Because, replies the right winger Goldman, "as an exceptional people which does not fit into any universal framework of national problems, we have our unique concept." This Zionist idea of the right wingers, this separation from the communist conception of the national question, is not peculiarly Jewish, but can be found among every people and is the creation of the bourgeoisie and its "socialist" agents. The bourgeois "socialist" conception of the national question has become bankrupt along with the bankruptcy and decline of capitalism, and is a source of racial hatred and adventuristic war.

### ***Nationalistic "Socialism"***

In Poland this conception was supported by the right wing of the PPS (Polish Socialist Party), in France by the Blum socialists, in America by the right wing Dubinsky "socialists" and in tsarist Russia by the Russian Mensheviks. Nor is it unique among the Jews, either. This notion was originated by the bourgeois Zionists and taken over by the Ben Gurion Zionist-"socialists." This is a Zionist conception irrespective of political hue or party.

The Lenin-Stalin conception, that of the Soviet Union and the people's democracies, has triumphed over a third of the globe. The working class of capitalist countries is fighting for it and the masses of Israel, Jews and Arabs alike, are fighting for it under the leadership of the Communist Party of Israel. The opponents of the Lenin-Stalin doctrine go so far as to pose the "socialists" of present day Israel against the socialism of the Soviet Union, as is also being done by the Tito clique in Yugoslavia.

In the same issue of *Unzer Veg* we read, "We also succeeded in creating in Israel the unique beginnings of a socialist economy, which in many instances is superior to all other examples in the world." But in capitalist Israel the "supreme" achievement of which they can boast is a Ben Gurion clerical-bourgeois Israel. This notion of building a "socialist" economy under the leadership of a bourgeois government, within the framework of capitalism, is not uniquely Jewish or Israeli.

The anti-Stalin theory of "building" socialism in the absence of the leadership of the proletariat (dictatorship of the proletariat) is not new. This is also the conception of Blum, of Bevin. This conception is also represented by



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the Mapai socialists, who may even have created it.

The right wing of Mapam rejects the united front based on the ideological and organic unity of the communist movement and the left wing socialists. It rejects the socialist party of Pietro Nenni in Italy which participates in a united front with the communists. The real socialist party, says the Mapam right wing, is "simply" Mapam under the leadership of right wingers and not, Heaven forbid, under the leadership of Riftin, not to mention the Communist Party. "It would be tragic if the left winger Riftin were to succeed in dissipating everything by attaching himself to a force (read, communists—S.Z.) which would stifle all that is creative in us (that is, Zionism—S.Z.)."

### ***"Marxism" of the Right Wing***

The Goldmans in America are not obliged to quote from Lenin and can write more unrestrainedly than in Israel. But in Israel, where the Jewish worker is face to face with the Zionist bourgeoisie and its "socialist" agents, one cannot write in quite the same anti-Soviet and anti-communist terms as in America. In Israel one must cover up one's anti-communist position with Marxist phrases. And if one's position does not fit into the classical formulas of Lenin and Stalin, one can conceal this by resorting to the ideas of the "uniqueness" of the Jews and of the special nature of their problem.

Despite his attempt to drape himself in Marxism, the right wing Mapamite A. Tarshis of Israel forgets himself from time to time. On one occasion he wrote, "As is well known, there are those who consider themselves the 'possessors of a monopoly' of the concept of Marxism-Leninism, who condemn our activities and our work as 'un-Marxist and un-Leninist,' as being in contradiction to these teachings. Among the Jews of Israel there are orthodox interpreters of this teaching who never troubled to consider how to apply this theory to the problems of Zionist fulfillment. They have taken the easiest and most convenient path despite the fact that the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, according to their poverty-stricken thinking, do not support the fulfilment of Zionism. Consequently they negate

Zionism at its very foundations." Tarshis believes that the general Marxist-Leninist concepts are inapplicable to the Jewish reality. He echoes the same theme as Goldman: "We have more than once seen to what degree general revolutionary slogans create a spiritual rift in our social vanguard."

Since Marxism-Leninism creates a rift in the Poale Zionist movement, it is not acceptable to Zionist-socialists. They must therefore "deepen" Marxism-Leninism by considering themselves Zionists first and socialists after that. Tarshis wants to accommodate Marxism to the Mapam ideology in Israel. Hence Tarshis berates Riftin and exclaims: "He who accepts it (Marxism-Leninism) as basic teaching, as the center of and guide to our activity, must answer clearly and precisely how it should be applied in practice for the upbuilding of Israel and the ingathering of the exiles."

Yes, A. Tarshis, one must really be a Zionist to attempt to adapt the teaching of Marxism-Leninism to the doctrine of the upbuilding of a capitalist Israel through the ingathering of the exiles. For in practice this signifies, among other things, trying to take Jewish workers away from the people's democracies, which are building socialism. It even means, as indeed all Zionists desire, to take Jews from the Soviet Union.

It is the custom among some Mapamites to wrap their nationalism in phrases buttressed by quotations from Lenin. It is true that Lenin and Stalin warned against the mechanical application of Marxism-Leninism from one country to another. Lenin warned against any attempt to apply the experiences of the Russian revolutionary movement mechanically to the conditions and realities of another country. But when A. Tarshis quotes Lenin, he tries to pull the little trick of dropping out the heart of Lenin's teachings—the evaluation of the *international* significance of the Russian revolution.

### ***International Ties of Right Wing***

A. Tarshis asks in *Al Hamishmar* (Feb. 6, 1950): "If today we conceive our party as not being a communist party, do we not then place ourselves in the camp of social democracy?" Then he answers: "Our party has no ties, no ideological, spiritual or organizational connections with the present-day socialist parties in the western countries." So Tarshis wishes his party to be neither a communist party nor an ally of the social democrats of the west. Then whom does he favor? He wants Mapam to be transformed into an independent, revolutionary center "that marks out a path for itself and for others." This is an attempt by the Mapam right wing to revive the old bankrupt theory of a fourth center of the working class movement. Tarshis has no apprehensions about the present situation in which the crystallization of the working class movement makes possible only two wings. "We are not so isolated," he says. "There are many other socialist parties and groupings which have not finally decided where they

belong." The right wing of Mapam wishes to mobilize and organize all socialist groups which, with phrases about their "independent" role or their special characteristics, desire not only to separate themselves eternally from the communist movement but actually to conduct a struggle against it. How else can one interpret the statement that we "have the power to go our own way, to express our own aspirations and to create an Israeli socialist revolutionary center which will assume a worthy position in the lives of the Israeli people and even possibly in international socialism." This means creation of a third or fourth force which must necessarily hinder the cementing of a real revolutionary workers' movement. In practice this means in Israel moving closer to Mapai and on an international scale to right wing social democracy.

History has shown what happened to those who went their own "independent" way, who had their own notions about exceptionalism and uniqueness, who were not satisfied with the communist movement but verbally expressed their discontent with social democracy.

Everything both ideological and organizational in the articles of Tarshis and Goldman is nothing but the purest social democracy. The Mapam refusal to vote with the communists on the American loan, sabotage of the united front, refusal to vote with the communists on the budget, voting against the acceptance of Arab workers in the trade unions on an equal basis with Jewish workers, refusal to establish united lists for the municipal elections—are not these policies of Mapam stations on the classical path of social democracy? But is this not social opportunism? This path is familiar. So is its ending.

In the main the articles of Goldman and Tarshis cast aside socialism and subordinate the principle of internationalism to nationalism. Tarshis does not feel that his concern for the "national" aspect of the problem conflicts with internationalism. "Our party," he writes, "needs theoretical, political and organizational independence, even though this means that we are placed in the camp of 'the reformists.' Call us reformists, if you will. That doesn't trouble us. We will not retreat from our nationalism."

### ***Leave Social Democracy Behind!***

Perhaps we have quoted too much from the writings of these two gentlemen. We did so to indicate that the right wing of the Mapam never expressed its anti-communism as openly and frankly as it does now. Right wingers had always paraded under the flag of internationalism. But their current writings put an end to the legend of their internationalism and reveal them as spokesmen of social democracy. For example, Tarshis has written in *Al Hamishmar*: "As long as we are faced with these responsibilities (Jewish colonization, ingathering of the exiles—S.Z.), our party must not become a territorial party, a Jewish-Arab party, whose responsibilities are limited only to problems on an Israel territorial basis."

In another article A. Tarshis wrote: "Is it our responsibility at this moment to make a final decision or definitively to stabilize the character of our party as an international party?" Of course this is a completely anti-Marxist, anti-proletarian policy. Nationalists of all peoples speak in the same terms. This was the attitude of the PPS in Poland toward Jewish workers. This was the attitude of the Bund toward Polish workers. This was the position of the French Bundists toward French workers. This is the language of the Arab reactionaries with regard to the Jews. And this is the attitude of the right wing of Mapam. In fact, this is the view of Kautsky, Bauer, Vandervelde and all other

social opportunists. This is not a Marxist-Leninist position, which recognizes that all questions are subordinated to the class problem, that the social and national liberation of both the Jewish and the Arab peoples in Palestine demands a monolithic proletarian party in which Jewish and Arab workers are joined.

Riftin was quite right when he declared in his polemic with the Mapam right wing that refusal to come closer to and work more intimately with the communist movement necessarily means a closer approach to Mapai and reaction generally. Genuine left wing socialists must work against such a right wing policy.

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