WHAT PROGRAM FOR U.S. ZIONISM?

Will the new ZOA policy promote peace and the well-being of Israel? An analysis of the real implications of recent Zionist developments

By Louis Harap

IF there is anything certain about the desires of the masses of American Jews in relation to Israel, it is that they hope for peace and independence for the new state. But how can they help Israel to realize these primary goals? Here we should like to discuss the relation of the Zionist movement to these objectives. Is the Zionist leadership directing the movement in such a way as to further the peace and independence of Israel? Undoubtedly many members of the Zionist organizations believe that their leaders are doing this, but are they?

The question is closely related to the present state of the Zionist movement in the United States. It has been obvious for several years that decay has set in.

An anonymous writer from inside the American Zionist Organization (ZOA), most influential Zionist body in this country, wrote in May: "The peak year of 1946-47 saw close to a quarter of a million American Jews on the rolls of the organization. . . . Now we have the State but seem to have lost our goal, our leadership, our program and as a result—have lost our membership. . . . We can expect to close this year with less than 100,000 members in the ZOA" (*Indianapolis Jewish Chronicle,* May 9). Another index of the decline in interest and lack of program of United States Zionism has been the drastic decline in *Halutziut,* training of youth for agricultural work in Israel. Again we may cite a ZOA writer, Jay Fishman (*The American Zionist,* March 1952): "During the past two years the *aliyah* [immigration] of young Americans to Israel has not totaled more than about 400, in groups that have progressively dwindled until there is practically no *aliyah* at all today."

There is little prospect of arresting this trend. For the present Zionist program provides no real foundation for an active mass membership interest in Israel. Jews in the United States are determined that this country is our home and here we intend to stay. The only contingency that would change this would be a catastrophe like an American version of nazism, as Zionist theoreticians now recognize—and almost expect to happen some time or other. But full fascism in the United States would emerge under conditions of world war or imminent world war that would inevitably engulf Israel and cut it off as an "escape." Jews in the United States will continue to express organized interest in Israel in fund raising but we may expect even this to diminish, as it has in the past few years. All this points to a bankruptcy of Zionist theory and its basic tenet that all Jews will emigrate to Israel as the only solution of the Jewish question, as Herzl maintained.

New ZOA Program

Signs are appearing, however, that the Zionist movement is stumbling toward a program. Our evaluation of this program should be guided by whether it helps to achieve peace and independence for Israel. The program was projected after the 55th annual convention of the ZOA in June, whose most lively feature was the fight for the presidency, won by Rabbi Irving Miller, formerly president of the American Jewish Congress. In August, the new administrative council of the ZOA held a two-day meeting to discuss the overhauling of the ZOA. Obeisance to traditional Zionism was made with the reassertion of plans for *Halutziut,* this time with emphasis on supplying technical personnel for Israel, and with the establishment of a department to stimulate the Hebrew language and literature in the United States.

But the important and decisive steps were the setting up of two new bodies, the Department of Economic and Industrial Development and the Commission on Israel and the Middle East. According to *The American Zionist* (September 1952), the aim of the first is "the spurring of capital investments in Israel" and of the second, "the reawakening of the public relations consciousness of the ZOA and the reactivization of our membership in the area of public opinion."

Stripped of "public relations" phraseology, what do these innovations signify? Are they designed to promote peace for Israel? In essence they mark the fact that the ZOA—and this is true of most other Zionist organizations in this country—is now formally and organizationally geared in with Washington's foreign policy. The new economic department has as its purpose the full coordination of the ZOA with the policy of making Israel an economic dependency of United States capitalists, in the manner so incisively and concretely shown in Victor Perlo's current series of articles in this magazine. As Mortimer May, new chairman of the ZOA administrative council, said, there was a "need for the organization to impart to Israel an understanding of the American economic system" (*New York Times,* August 24).

In other words, the aim of the new department is to stim-

ulate private investment and to promote the "free enterprise" system in Israel. Integral to this program is close cooperation with the Palestine Economic Corporation, which Victor Perlo showed (in the October issue) to be one of the agencies through which United States big business interests exploit the people of Israel and keep that country in a continually worsening state of chronic crisis by drawing out huge profits in dollars and lowering living standards. The ZOA has therefore joined the effort of United States big business, through its Jewish business men, to "swallow" Israel economically.

Militarization of Israel

The second innovation, the Middle East commission, is the political side of the same coin. The new commission is directly and explicitly designed to bring pressure both on the Jewish masses through propaganda and on Washington by lobbying to see to it that Israel is fully brought into the bipartisan global anti-Soviet policies. As Rabbi Miller said in an address before the ZOA administrative council in August, "Continued assistance and friendship for Israel is now a cornerstone of American policy and there is every reason to expect that this policy will be pursued regardless of which party wins in November." One of the main functions of this commission, adds Rabbi Miller, is to press Washington to "grant non-reimbursable assistance to Israel under the Mutual Security act" (*The American Zionist.* September). In exchange for military aid, this act requires the recipient of American dollars and arms to cooperate in the building of bases and an economy-staggering army and subjects the country to Washington's strategic military plans. Thus the new ZOA program means that this branch of the Zionist movement is an arm among the Jewish people for the execution in Israel of State Department policy of war preparations, an impoverishing war economy and drastic lowering of living standards.

How does the ZOA justify this program of agitation among American Jewry and pressure on Congress for full incorporation of Israel into the world military machine being built by Washington? According to William Zukerman (*Jewish Newsletter,* September 1), Rabbi Miller has affirmed that "Israel is in gravest danger of an attack by the Arab states and probably also of a Communist invasion." There is no doubt that the militarization of Israel with the help of American arms through the Mutual Security act is based on this wholly unfounded danger of "Communist aggression." There is absolutely no evidence of any kind whatsoever of such aggressive intentions. What is closer to the facts is that Israel is being prepared by Washington to play an important role in the anti-Soviet war that Washington is planning.

The real meaning of Israel's participation in the global strategy of the Pentagon is quite openly explained by Murray Frank in *The American Zionist* (September). "What Washington and London strategists fear most, in the event of a Russian invasion of the Middle East [read: in the event of an aggressive anti-Soviet war—*L.H.*], is a quick break-through to the Suez Canal and from there a penetration into Africa. . . . Little Israel is beginning to loom large on the Near East defense horizon, so much so that there is talk in Washington of Israel becoming 'the kingpin of Western defenses in the Near East.' " Or, to state this more accurately, Israel is on the way to becoming a pawn in Washington's plans. If the war being prepared by Washington breaks out, Israel is destined for destruction. This is the scheme in whose crystallization the ZOA and other Zionist groups are cooperating. This is the program that the Zionist leaders, despite the peace sentiment of the membership, have made the reason for being of their movement. For its part, the Ben Gurion government has applied for "aid" under the Mutual Security Act. And on August 21, the American Zionist Council, overall executive body of United States Zionist organizations, asked Secretary of State Dean Acheson that Israel be granted $49,000,000 for military purposes out of Mutual Security funds voted for the Middle East.

Internecine Zionist Conflicts

The developments in the ZOA outlined above are typical of the leadership of the various wings of the Zionist movement in the United States. As we shall show, whatever else these leaders may quarrel about among themselves, all agree in pursuing the policies now clearly outlined by the new ZOA administration. This agreement should not be obscured by the vehement internecine conflicts among the Zionist leaders, rivalries within the organizations themselves, jurisdictional fights among United Jewish Appeal, the welfare fund federations and Bonds for Israel and the running battle between Ben Gurion and United States Zionists.

Undoubtedly the most important of these conflicts is that between the Ben Gurion regime and United States Zionist leaders. The reader perhaps remembers the vitriolic attack of Ben Gurion on the Zionist leadership in a speech before the Knesset on December 12, 1951. The attack occurred in the midst of a serious economic crisis during which the Israel government was criticized for the terrible conditions in the immigrant camps. The Zionist leaders of the United States, said Ben Gurion, "went bankrupt since the establishment of the Jewish state. There were not five leaders who got up to go to Israel after the state was established. I don't maintain they would have been followed by masses, but they would have proved that Zionism was not void of meaning at least in the eyes of its leaders." (*New York Times,* December 13, 1951).

Ben Gurion's antagonism has a complex source. He is an ardent advocate of the Zionist doctrine of the "ingathering of the exiles," the theory that all Jews have the obligation to come to Israel. The American Zionist leadership had served unmistakable notice on Israel at the 23rd World Zionist Congress in 1951 that the Jews of the United States regarded their country as their home and had no intention of emigrating to Israel. Ben Gurion and Israeli Zionists

have been angry and rather contemptuous of United States Zionists for this attitude ever since. Another contributory element in Ben Gurion's viewpoint is this fact: the ZOA affirmed its support and "identification" with the General Zionist Party in Israel, the party of "free enterprise" and most numerous opposition to Ben Gurion's governing Mapai ("Labor") Party. Ben Gurion therefore has partisan political reasons for undermining the ZOA, for he hopes thus to weaken his General Zionist political rivals at home.

Ben Gurion Alliance with AJC

But these elements are secondary and, curiously enough, founded upon the most basic consideration of all, which is superficially a paradox. We refer to the alliance of Ben Gurion with those non-Zionist Jews of the United States whose main organizational expression is the American Jewish Committee. This tight organization of the wealthiest American Jews found it absolutely necessary to throw its hand into the Zionist question because of its desire to control Israel policy in the service of the State Department and to channelize in this direction the deep concern of the American Jewish masses for Israel. The AJ Committee has combated Zionist influence for many years for middle class assimilationist reasons. This fight has been especially important for the AJC in the past few years as part of the AJC aim of obtaining control of the Jewish community. The AJC has a very strong lever—it commands the biggest money both for Jewish philanthropy and private investment in Israel. Ben Gurion calculated that the American Zionists would support fund drives and promote private investment willy-nilly. But the AJC was in a strong position to bargain with Ben Gurion because it was not Zionist, held the strings to the biggest purses and had the inside track to the State Department.

Through its president, Jacob Blaustein, the AJC made its bargain with Ben Gurion at a momentous meeting in Jerusalem in August 1950. There the long range "four point" program for "aid" to Israel—the billion dollar Israel Bond issue, private investments, loans from Washington and the United Jewish Appeal—was projected. After Ben Gurion worked out this basic policy with Blaustein, with commitments on both sides, Ben Gurion held a second conference with about 50 United States Zionist leaders and Jewish big business men at which this "four point" program was confirmed. In exchange for Blaustein's asquiescence with these plans Ben Gurion pledged that: the Israel government would unequivocally orient its foreign policy on Washington, a position that the Israel government had already been pursuing in fact, if not in form; Ben Gurion was to abandon the attempt to include American Jewry in his agitation for "ingathering of the exiles," and Ben Gurion would not permit the Zionist leadership to gain sole control of world Jewish relations with Israel.

Ben Gurion has made good on these commitments. Alliance of the Israel government with Washington's policies is too obvious to require comment—and Ben Gurion needed no persuading on this point since this intense anti-Soviet direction coincided with the policy of his own party. Ben Gurion has also given up pressure on American Jewry to emigrate to Israel. One should not suppose that Ben Gurion's blast at the "bankruptcy" of American Zionist leadership on the ground that they did not themselves emigrate to Israel is an infringement of this commitment to Blaustein. For this blow to the prestige of American Zionist leadership was not unwelcome to the AJ Committee group.

Another sign of Ben Gurion's fidelity to his pledges to Blaustein—as well as the persistence of his partisan politics—is the matter of granting formal, legal status to the Jewish Agency inside Israel. The Jewish Agency is an executive committee of the World Zionist Organization, which is dominated by its American section, the ZOA. It has the function of managing immigration to and land development in Israel. The World Zionist Organization has been trying to obtain legal status as exclusive "representative" of all world Jewry in its relations with Israel. This would give the WZO (that is, in effect, the ZOA) control over non-Zionist relations with Israel. But if Ben Gurion permitted this, he would violate the agreement with Blaustein and give added power to his General Zionist political rivals.

In May, the Ben Gurion government introduced into the Knesset a bill granting the Jewish Agency status as an "authorized" body. On August 11, a Knesset session attended by only half the Knesset members, changed the bill on its second reading by a 31-27 vote to give the Jewish Agency the status of "representative" of world Jewry. The next day Ben Gurion withdrew the bill, thus saving the non-Zionists from subordination to the ZOA. Ben Gurion was faithful to his commitment to Blaustein. Ben Gurion has since re-introduced the bill giving the Jewish Agency "authorized" status.

It has been necessary to go into some of the intramural conflicts of the Zionist movement and their relationship to the powerful non-Zionist AJ Committee in order to demonstrate that such noisy differences do not touch basic policy. They are partisan bickering and juggling for influence. For it is apparent that not one of these antagonisms suggests any disagreement on issues of vital importance to the people of Israel—economic development and relation to the preservation of world peace, on which the very existence of Israel depends.

The membership of the Zionist organizations, who are concerned for peace and the preservation of Israel, should combat such anti-Israel policies. In this they would act in harmony with the expressed desires of the Israeli masses for peace, as the over 400,000 signatures in Israel this year to the petition against German rearmament and for a five power peace pact showed. They would be fighting against the effects of the policy that is steadily lowering living conditions in Israel. The way to a solution for Israel lies in a government of the workers' parties that would renounce a program of economic domination and war preparations. These are the policies which the American Zionist membership should support, if they would advance the peace, independence and economic welfare of Israel.