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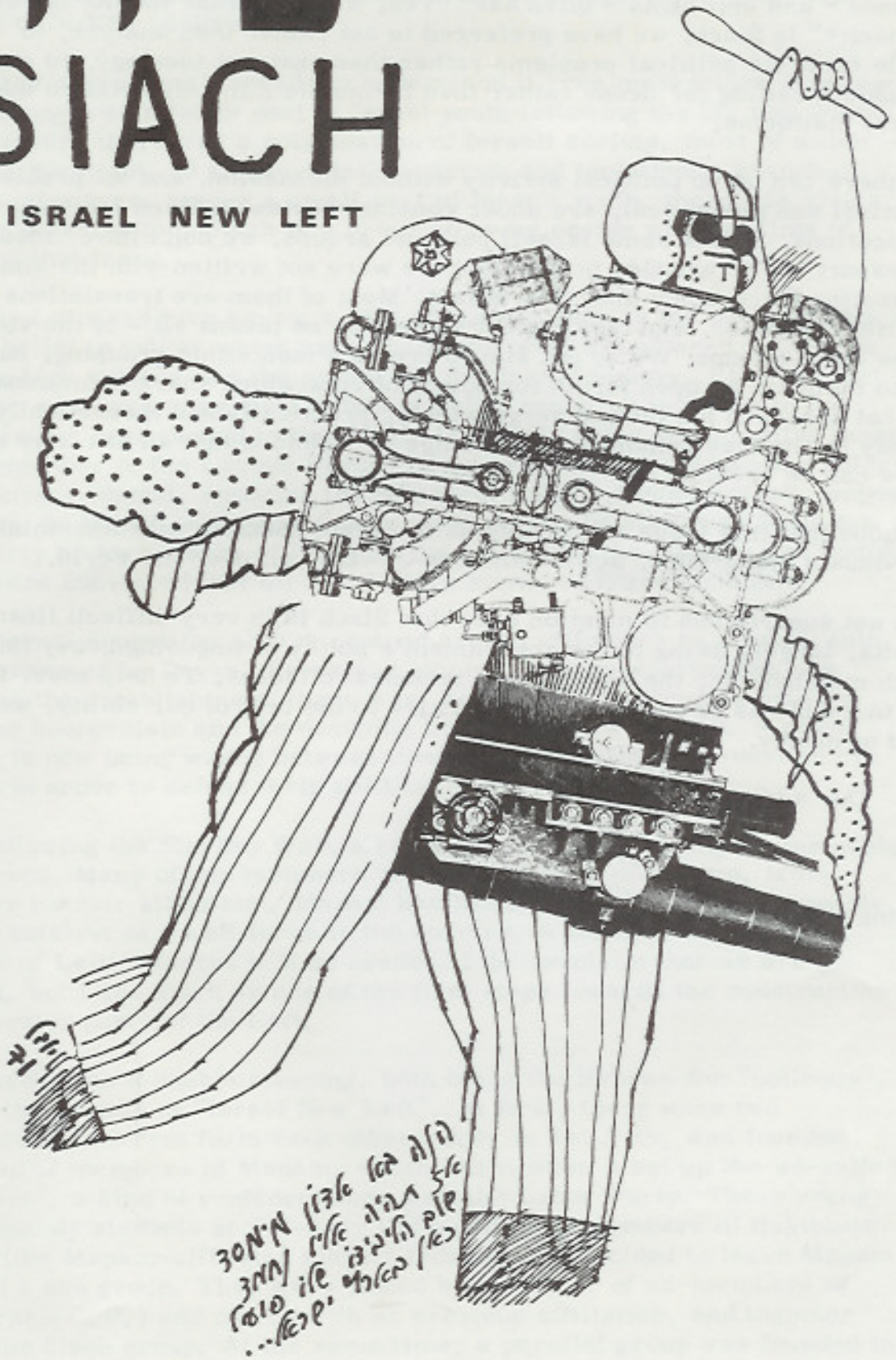
SIACH

ISRAEL NEW LEFT



Presenting Siach.

Friends - and opponents - often ask: "Yes, we know what you do: but what is Siach?" In Siach, we have preferred to act rather than analyze, to tackle concrete political problems rather than abstract ideology, to phrase pamphlets calling for deeds rather than formulate minutely detailed theoretical platforms.

But there can be no political activity without discussion, and all problems, practical and theoretical, are under constant review in Siach meetings and publications. Unlike some Israeli political groups, we don't have "ideology for export". The articles presented here were not written with the aim of presenting Siach other than it is in fact. Most of them are translations from our Hebrew paper, and they reflect some - by no means all - of the views in the Siach groups. We do not aim to create a monolithic grouping, but try to maintain an open forum for points of view which share a common radical approach but often diverge widely, practically and theoretically. It is only by the free unhampered exchange of opinions that an effective radical force can be created.

We hope that this issue will enable us to create contacts with like-thinking individuals and groups, Jewish and non-Jewish, all over the world.

It is not superfluous to mention here that Siach is in very difficult financial straits, largely owing to the government's policy of imposing heavy fines on Siach members for the most trivial technical offences. To help cover these, and to enable us to continue our activities to the best of our ability, we are in need of money.

Our address: SIACH
P.O. Box 4216
Tel Aviv.

Hoping to hear from you,

SIACH ACTIVIST by Marcel Szatan

This article will try to represent the views of one Siach member on the relation between the non-authoritarian structure of the group and its work in Israeli reality.

Siach represents a trend: to understand it, one must follow developments among a significant part of Israel youth following the Six Day War. After the war, there was a polarisation of Israeli society, most of which veered to the Right, to a chauvinistic, narrow and isolationist branch of Zionism. However, among a small part of Israeli youth, there was also a Leftward polarisation. Siach is a group of young people which claims to represent that trend.

The Leftward turn among a part of Israeli youth is the outcome of a crisis of belief in values which have been inculcated at universities, in the army, in high schools and the press: the dominant ideology. I believe that Siach also represents the first crisis of belief resulting in a turn to the Left; previous ones turned to the Right. In Israel, being conservative means being a member of the Labour Party. Being progressive, demanding reforms, meant being a liberal, opposing the Histadrut (labour confederation), opposing Socialism. In Israel, everyone was convinced that the State was Socialist. After thirty or forty years of living in the belief that the country was Socialist, people were convinced that all its troubles stemmed from Socialism.

Internal opposition always centred around efficiency as a value; this was represented by Dayan, Peres and others. This generation has now fused with the establishment; there was, and still is, a struggle between the rising bourgeoisie and the decaying Labourist bureaucracy. A power struggle is now being waged between them, both wheeling-and-dealing in Zionism in order to defend their political power.

Following the Six-Day War, a restructuring of Left-wing forces could be observed. Many of our members are ex-members of Mapam, from Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim. Mapam has lost its principles, and is unable to act as catalyst of a Left force in the country. A further change in the structure of Leftist forces will be needed. I do not claim that we are the vanguard, but I see Siach as one of the first steps towards the construction of a renovated party of the Left.

"Siach" has a double meaning, both being the Hebrew for "colloquy", and also the initials of "Israel New Left". At first, there were two groups, quite different from each other. One, in Tel Aviv, was founded by a group of members of Mapam, which left it when it set up the so-called "Alignment", a kind of confederation, with the Labor Party. These young people, mainly students at Tel-Aviv University and members of Hakibbutz Ha'artzi (the Mapam-affiliated kibbutz federation), decided to leave Mapam and found a new group. They were joined by a number of ex-members of Maki (Israeli C. P.) and others with no previous affiliation, and together created the Siach group. At the same time, a parallel group was founded in Jerusalem, originating in the Peace and Security movement (a broad, non-

party peace organisation). It was the students' cell of the movement, which tired of being the implement of a number of professors, decided to leave and form a new movement. Strangely enough, they too chose the name Siach, without knowing of the existance of the Tel Aviv group... Discovering the existence of so similar a group on the political map, we decided to cooperate, though without uniting. In the Jerusalem group, there was only a small percentage of ex-Mapam members, a few from Maki, and the majority with no previous affiliations. In both Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, there were ex-members of the executive committees of Mapam and Maki. Siach is a meeting point for people sated with politics, and others lacking any political experience at all. It makes for a strange mixture.

It was decided that the two groups would operate independently. There is no such thing as a "member", or "subscription"; anyone may come and join in our discussions. We try, as far as possible, to avoid the need for voting, but if such a need arises, we request people who are members of bodies imposing united voting on their members, to refrain from voting (referring to members of Mapam, Matzpen or Ha'olam Hazeh). This may seem a minor matter, but, in my opinion, it demonstrates the principle of the ideologically and structurally open group. Such a group is capable of struggling with the stagnation of Israeli society, and pointing out the paralysis brought about in other groups opposed to such a structure.

We have only one institution - the plenum or general meeting, held weekly. Accordingly, we have no formal programme: the plenum may reconsider the programme every week. If one meeting a week is insufficient, we meet two or three times to cover the agenda.

There is a second institution, the national convention, which is a meeting place for joint discussions between the different Siach groups. There is a group in Hedera, consisting of members from the surrounding kibbutzim, and also groups in Haifa and the Negev (there are also autonomous groups of high school pupils - Editor). We set up a coordinating committee for liaison between the different groups, but we were afraid that it would turn into a kind of "central committee" or politburo which would decide what the groups have to do, but as far as possible, we send different people to meetings of the committee to ensure change and prevent the creation of a quasi-leadership.

This or that member may have more influence, more charisma, or a clearer ideology than others, but we try to restrain the tendency to create a leadership, as we believe that in day to day political work, we do not need a leader - each one of us must take on responsibility. No one decides for anyone else: when we plan any action, we insist that those who decide should also be the executors. It sometimes occurs that we cancel a planned activity, if it turns out that the balance of forces is other than foreseen, and we rediscuss our previous decision.

The most important "institution" is the concensus. For some, this is our programme; for others, it is those things which are all more or less agreed upon. This may be briefly summarised. We are all opposed to any form of annexation, including that of Eastern Jerusalem. In relation

to the Jarring talks, we start from the principle of opposing any annexation, whether one-sided or agreed. The Jarring talks should take place on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. We opposed the colonisation of the occupied territories and demand the elimination of existing settlements there. We recognize the right of the Palestinians to struggle for their self-determination, but we do not regard the Palestinian organizations as fully identical with the Palestinian people. We are significantly critical of the political aims of the organizations, mainly of their refusal to recognize Israeli national existence.

Our main aim is, first and foremost, the demystification of Zionist ideology, as it is presented. This does not refer to opposition to Zionism: the group has not defined itself as Zionist or anti-Zionist, or even non-Zionist. We believe that this ideology is a political factor which plays a role in the internal struggle discernable in Israel. Everyone uses it as he wishes, whether it be Matzpen, Rakah, Mapam, Begin or the Labour Party. For us, Zionism is an ideology used by the Israeli establishment for the purpose of unification. Everyone is obliged to think in a like manner; departing from the norm is impossible. But it is system of norms which we question, and we call on people to think. Before people know whether they should be revolutionaries, before they know whether Mao or Trotzki are right, they must first be convinced that the situation in which we are living is such that the social mechanisms are incapable of solving the central problems of Israeli society: peace, poverty, labour relations...

Owing to the politicisation, in the negative sense of the term, of Israeli society, people have ceased to think, they are not truly political. Israeli society is frozen, "Golda thinks for us, she is all-knowing, she holds all the cards" etc. We want people to be responsible, to prevent the "one-dimensional" character of Israeli society, caused by a kind of political socialisation which is only apparently pluralistic.

We number some hundreds. A serious hindrance is that many of our members are restricted in their political work through being members of kibbutzim, while most activities are held in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, on two main fronts: the university campus and the senior classes of high schools. There has been a rash of underground newspapers, most of them sympathetic to Siach.

SIACH AND THE PALESTINIANS

Siach has always declared, in its publications and elsewhere, its recognition of the Palestinian people - but not recognition alone (everyone "recognizes" them: in a campus debate with a Herut member, he declared: "I recognize the Palestinians! They have a state - the East bank of the Jordan!"; Golda Meir claims to be a Palestinian, as she bore a Palestinian passport during the Mandate!) We, on the other hand, demand recognition of the national aspirations of this people. At the moment, the Israeli people is not prepared for this. The civil war in Jordan has caused a number of Left groups to revise their attitudes. Whatever happens, it should not be forgotten that the kernel of the conflict is between Israelis and Palestinians; the national conflict between Israel and the Arab

States, and the regional conflict between world power-blocs, being superimposed upon it.

It is clear that the solution will depend upon relations between Israel and Palestinians, but it is also clear that a peace settlement on the national plane between Israel and the Arabs will open new perspectives for progressive forces in Israel and the Arab countries, above all among the Palestinians. The stages in solving the region's problems will be: a political settlement with an imperialist presence; a solution of the Israel-Palestinian relationship; and an Israel-Palestine anti-imperialist alliance.

Today, we face a Palestinian people living in the occupied territories, a people which is unable to express itself: all kinds of men speak in its name. When this Palestinian mass is able to speak - in other words, when Israel relinquishes these territories, - there is a possibility of a new political direction amongst them, with more correct slogans, with a better political analysis, and a dialogue will be possible. Such at least is my view.

Some members of Siach are in favour of starting an anti-imperialist struggle already, but most of us remain on the plane of a "liberal" campaign: we endeavour to struggle, by radical methods, for "liberal" slogans, such as "returning the occupied territories", which creates resounding echoes on campus.

A question often asked, from many directions and sometimes from within the group itself, is: How can we operate without any ideology? The answer is that our primary aim is to point out the contradictions within Israeli society, which can be done from various directions. We have no cut-and-dried answers to all our problems, and by mutual discussions and confrontation between different approaches, we want to reach a structure which will permit pluralism, which is not only nominal but practical, so that a believer can cooperate with an atheist, and Zionist with non-Zionist. Clearly, we oppose Soviet society as a model, as we do with regard to American society.

And finally: every idea is worthy of attention, regardless of the label attached to it, and no matter how irritating it is.

* * *

(Marcel is a member of Jerusalem Siach. A recent immigrant from France, he represented Siach at the Brussels seminar of the Israel-Palestine committees, and the following is a transcript of the talk he gave there, presenting Siach. From the contents of the article, it will be clear that this is not a programmatic statement of Siach's ideology, as we have abstained so far from drafting a formal ideological programme. However, Marcel's views may be taken as a fair representation of some typical Siach views, to which most or all members would subscribe, more or less).

Siach, No. 7-8, May-June 1971.

"COMPLETE SECURITY" WILL BE WAR

by Ran Cohen

In August, 1970, when the government declared that it accepted the Security Council Resolution, a short article appeared in "Siah" No. 5. It expressed the fear that this step did not indicate a change in government policy and was nothing but a perfectly safe adornment of the policy conducted since the Six-Day War

The fear was justified, being based on governme nt policy that peace without security is not its top priority. There is no doubt today that the government would rather have security founded on clear military advantage even if, in practice, there is no peace.

Several reasons given by the government and some steps taken by it have led me to conclude that government policy is not dictated by its being a government of peace or war, but that its primary (and almost exclusive) considerations are military. In other words, the government does not consider military measures and advantages, together with political means and measures, as instruments for achieving long-term political ends, but its sole function is to ensure military advantage at all costs, even at the cost of giving up security.

1. Military advantage - This has innumerable components, of greater or lesser importance. Each of them contributes something to the ability of the army and the country to win in wartime. The government's militaristic line of thought forces it to adopt the view that our military ability must never be even slightly lessened, even if diminishing the risk of having to fight is at issue. In other words, the government is relying more on the army's ability to defeat the Arab armies, if necessary, than on other factors. The question of the occupied territories bears this out. It is certain that not one general in the army would avoid the responsibility of defending Israel, whether from the borders of June, 4, 1967, or from the international (Palestine Mandatory) boundaries as proposed by Dr. Jarring. However, the government does not ask, "how much peace" can be gained in exchange for withdrawing to these, or similar, borders, but argues that there is "no security" on these borders (as if they were totally indefensible). By means of this barely rational policy, the government has managed to torpedo talks whenever they tended towards concessions by both sides.

2. When the government managed to torpedo the process of mutual concessions and Dr. Jarring was sent on vacation to Moscow, the idea of a partial settlement was raised. It was based on the assumption that Israel's present position was not harmful to her (inter alia, without peace). Neither the idea nor the initiative came from Israel's government but from President Sadat of Egypt.

He who takes the initiative does not always have good intentions, but he certainly has some intention in mind. Sadat wished to move his army into the areas vacated by the Israel Defense Force. This

was the basis of his proposals (what else could he subsequently use to press for further withdrawal?). It is arguable whether Israel should risk it or not, and I shall not pass judgement.

Another government argument on the partial settlement is, in my view, a far more serious matter. Nobody in his right mind could imagine the partial settlement leading to an overall settlement unless both Israel and Egypt continue to make concessions towards it. If the government wants an overall solution, why does it oppose the partial settlement becoming part of an overall agreement?

Just as it is clear that Egypt is trying to put one over on Israel by making a partial settlement conditional on forces crossing over to the eastern side of the Canal, Israel is doing the same by demanding a separate partial arrangement and an unlimited cease-fire. Here again the militaristic policy stands out in contrast to a policy that has military cards to play, together with others. A government that sees peace as its main objective would, of necessity, have linked any partial settlement with an overall agreement, which is the only way to peace.

3. Exclusive reliance on military considerations clearly provides proof that a policy directed at achieving peace cannot exist alongside the present policy. In an interview ("Al Hamishmar," Independence Day Issue, 1971), Foreign Minister Abba Eban gave no details of any plan or policy designed to lead to peace, even when specifically questioned about it. Perhaps we should take a far more serious view of the "favor" the government does for the Americans each time it agrees to some aspect of their proposals. It is as if bringing a settlement closer is no concern of the Israel government, but solely of the Americans.

Is making peace an American or an Israeli concern? And if peace is not made the American way, how does the government intend to go about it?

It is strange that the Israeli propaganda organs feared that Rogers' visit would succeed in convincing the Israeli and Arab governments. Their general tone was one of prayer; that he would understand us and not apply too much pressure. Nobody took the trouble to ask what would happen if Rogers failed - "if we have to pay, we'll all have to pay." While Rogers argued that peace is also security, he was shown at first hand the extent to which the occupied regions ensure security, as if peace and territories could go together.

The government is wasting the best possible means of approaching a settlement - the I. D. F. The government holds blindly to its belief in the security value of the occupied regions. The reason, in my view, is that it lacks the courage to depend on the army's ability to defend the country and the people. There is a good chance that it will not have to do so at all. This is a possible explanation for the fact that the majority of the public identifies with the government. The man-in-the-street has learnt to think in narrow military terms. He does not rely on outsiders and certainly not on the Arabs (and not even on the Americans). He adapts his thinking to that of Galili-Dayan-Allon, who think primarily along military lines. They have never given the public a plan showing a way to peace and the public has never considered demanding it from them. The public trusts them because they have shown that their militaristic policy has proved itself and the People of Israel lives - (with a few regretable exceptions...) They have made every citizen a minor military expert in whose judgement only military considerations weigh.

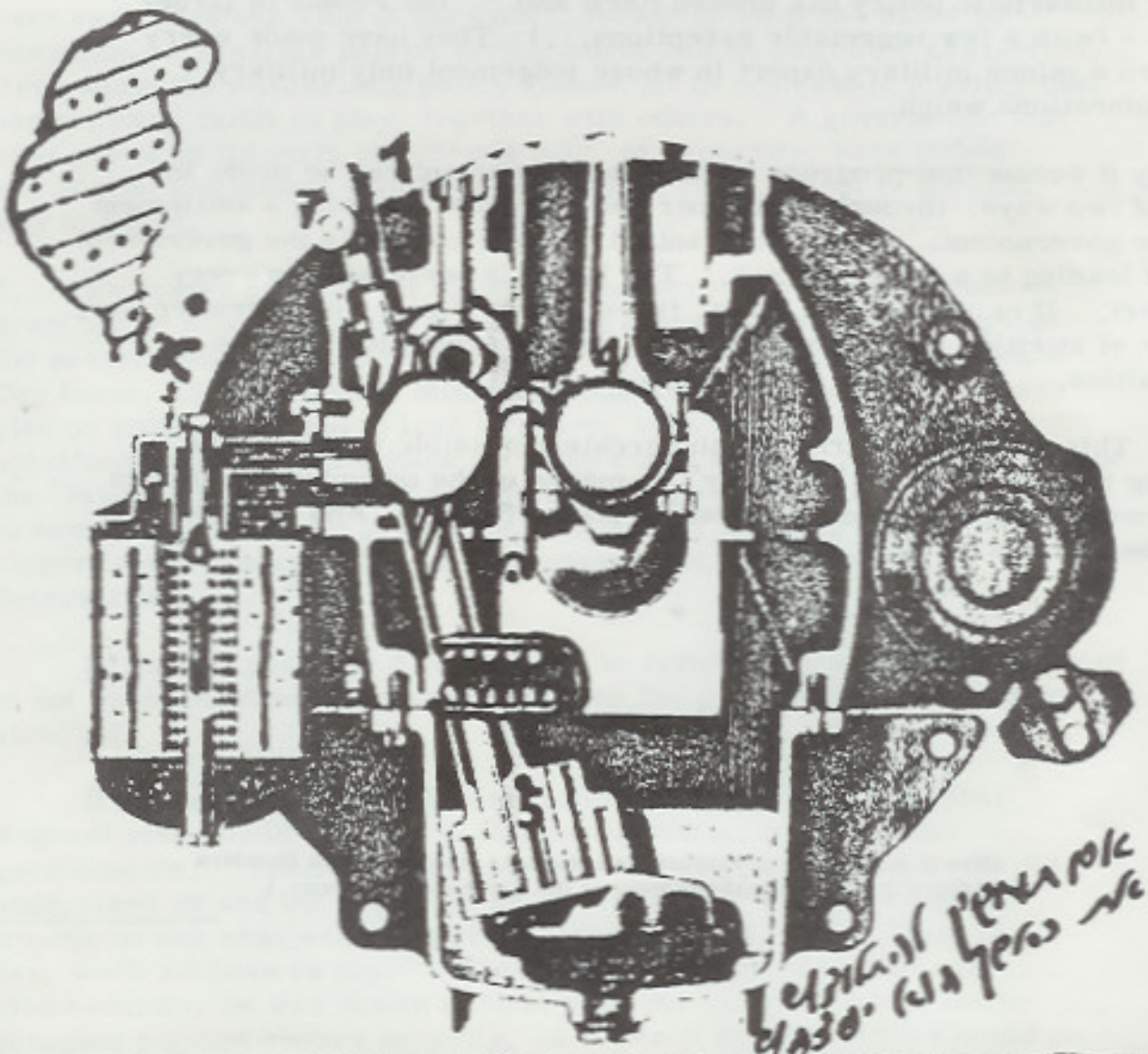
Today it seems that progress towards an agreement can be made in one of two ways: through real American pressure imposing a settlement on the government; or by a substantial internal change in the government itself leading to a policy change. The latter is preferable in every respect. If neither comes about, there will be a wider or narrower war, a war of attrition or a deterrent war. In any event there will be casualties.

This would, of course, be the greatest possible wrong. The strong desire to ensure "security" by means of the occupied territories will nevertheless lead to war in which boys will fall. And yet this will be called security.

* * *

(Ran is a member of Kibbutz Gan Shmuel; was one of the founders of Siach Tel Aviv while studying at the Tel Aviv University.)

Siach



PROPOSED PRINCIPLES OF THE ISRAELI NEW LEFT - Mordechai Kafri

The idea is not to present an all-embracing doctrinaire ideology, but a number of principles we see as fundamental in setting the pattern of the left today; knowing well that, as times change, our ideas will too become obsolete (as the ideas of the Old Left are now politically exhausted for the developed countries) and they will have to be renewed.

THE LEFT TODAY

The Left is a political trend striving for profound and continued social change: seeing, in change and flux in the social order, the framework of human progress, leading to an improvement in the lot of the people in their struggle against those holding advantages acquired through the domination of man by man, and an assertion of the freedom of man from the conservative forces which alienate him and make him into a tool utilised against his own interests. The New Left is anti-feudal in under-developed society, anti-capitalist in bourgeois society and anti-bureaucratic in the socialist countries, as soon as a conservative establishment is created. In this country, the Left must not only wage a class-struggle against the capitalist sector, but also battle the bureaucratic establishment, which dominates the government, the trade unions, and the union-owned enterprises.

The New Left now arising in a number of developed countries is showing its revolutionary will in the streets of Paris, as well as Warsaw, in Belgrade U. as in Columbia U. It is conducting a new type of Leftist struggle - not so much because of facing the greatest material want, but due to possessing the greatest strivings and ambitions to create a social setup suited to human beings. Such strivings can't be sated by a mess of pottage - "welfare state" in the West, and "liberalisation" in the East. To realise its aims, the New Left must rebel resolutely, against both capitalism and the socialist establishment which has become conservative. Thus, our struggle will differ essentially from the old type, which was Leftist in its attitude to capitalism but almost entirely conservative towards the institutionalised bureaucracies (unions, parties, state enterprises and institutions etc.)which mushroom in modern society.

THE AGENCY OF CHANGE

Which is the agency of historical change today - workers or intelligentsia? It is impossible to change society without involving the working masses: but on the other hand, industrial workers are no longer the vanguard, if only because the Old Left bureaucracy dominates and paralyzes them. The intelligentsia, offspring of the bourgeoisie, is being largely proletarianised.

Parts of the intelligentsia are in a unique situation: the bureaucrats find it extremely difficult to control them (especially when they are students) and this enables them to assume a vanguard role. At the same time, another section of the intelligentsia - managerial bureaucracy - is merging with the capitalist class, becoming its leading force, and, in the long run - our chief adversary. The New Left must now struggle against the Old Left bureaucracy, with the aim of attaining decisive influence in the working class so as to create a new political force that will bring about revolutionary changes in "affluent" society.

The changes in the vanguard, and in the composition of the capitalist power elite, demand a thorough change in the nature of the Left movement, its patterns of action, its intellectual and cultural centre of gravity: above all, stress democratic freedoms, in ways as well as aims. The interests of the bureaucracy stress order, discipline, subordination; while liberty is the main pre-requisite of creative intellectual activity.

SOCIALIST HUMANISM

We should aim at a social order permitting socialist and humanist progress. Socialist humanism is not a graft of liberalism and democracy onto present East European regimes - creating a non-capitalist version of affluent society - but a basic change in relations between man and society. Capitalism subordinates man to profit-making; Soviet Socialism subordinates him even more cruelly to its power institutions, making him into a cog in another type of anti-human machine. Changing from bourgeois relationships in production did not automatically solve all social problems, as the Old Left thought.

Socialist humanism sees man at the centre. It strives to place all society's resources at his disposal. For this, it is not enough to abolish capitalism and ensure democratic liberties - it is necessary to struggle for the elimination of all domination of man by man. We want a society where workers run their plants in a democratic way; where parents and teachers together run the schools etc etc. We want a social set-up the combines individual initiative with public ownership. This has been proven possible in the kibbutz: our problem is to apply the same to urban conditions.

In Israel, we cannot limit ourselves to a struggle against the status quo. The country is still in a state of flux, socialist innovation is still possible. We should continue where the Old Left stopped and stagnated. Urban kibbutzim, collective economic projects, Arab-Jewish projects, anti-poverty schemes - are examples of issues we must treat creatively.

Means must fit ends. Dictatorial regimes can only be overthrown by force, but a revolutionary regime resorting to repression only prepares the way for a new elite. Nationalisation is incomplete and insufficient: the old view of communism emphasised economic affluence, rather than power relations. The answer to contemporary problems is in humanism.

THE THIRD WORLD AND THE NEW LEFT

The concept of "world village versus world city" is unscientific and anti-human. Viewing the developed countries as incapable of change denies all we know of history. A Left which strives, not for social change, but for total destruction, will bring devastation on itself. With a Left like that, you don't need a Right.

NEO NATIONALISM AND THE EQUALITY OF NATIONS

The struggle against feudalism created the slogan of "equality of man ". Now, when the super powers are turning most small nations into satellites, the slogan of "equality of peoples" is our key to the basic political problems of our time. Peoples considered as assimilated within larger nations, have thrown up national movements. Scots, Welsh, Bretons, Basques French Canadians and American Blacks, like the Jewish national movement, Zionism, all fit the pattern of minorities fighting for equality. Zionism was the first of these movements, and was considered unique: today,this is a general trend. Zionism struggles for the right of the Jewish people to its own national life and culture. This principle holds true for the rights of the Palestinian Arabs, against the annexionist plans of Israeli chauvinists. The tragic national dispite in this country can only be solved by compromise between the two conflicting rights of Jews and Palestinians.

(The above is a shortened version of Mordechai's article. The second part, dealing more fully with Zionism, will be published in the coming issue of SIAH, which will mainly be devoted to articles by members of SIAH, putting forward different points of view about the Jewish people, Zionism, and the Palestinian national movement).

* * *

Mordechai Kafri was born in Poland and educated in the USA. He is a member of the Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz Gal-On, and has been active in SIAH Tel-Aviv since it was founded. The following article was written prior to the founding of SIAH; at this time, the left wing in Mapam was fighting against the plans of the party leadership to form the so-called "Alignment" with the Labour Party. Following this struggle, the more consistent elements of the Left resigned from Mapam. One result was that the group which had left Mapam joined up with other Leftists to create SIAH.

The article was written late in 1968 for an anti-Alignment caucus meeting, which Mordechai could not attend because he was doing his reserve service. The article tried to set out the general principles on which a new Left grouping should work, as it became clear that a break with Mapam was imminent.

This is an abridged version (reprinted by CONAME) of what Siach hopes will be a regular series of Siach publications in English. In the series, Siach will try to present the view of the radical left in Israel, and try to establish contact with interested groups and individuals outside Israel.

Owing to government pressure, Siach is in difficult financial straits. The only way Siach can continue to publish the journal and send it abroad is by it becoming self-supporting. You can help make the next issue possible by sending Siach the price plus postage (IL 20 or 50¢). Better still, a bulk order for your organization or others likely to be interested.

SIACH P O B 4216 TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

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COMMITTEE ON NEW ALTERNATIVES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

WE are committed to seek out reconciliation, peace and justice in the Middle East.
WE firmly believe that we cannot wait for peace; that we must work now, unceasingly, to make possible a peace that will resolve the conflicting national aspirations of all parties concerned. Full and open dialogue is essential to this effort.
WE encourage creative approaches to conciliation in the Middle East through speakers and literature seeking that end.
WE do not undertake to make dogmatic judgments nor present one-sided answers to the complicated and often contradictory questions posed in the Middle East. We invite individuals and groups to work with us, even though they may emphasize different approaches, if they share in our patient search for a workable peace.

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