



---

## Working Paper No. 458

# Dissent and Discipline in Ben Gurion's Labor Party: 1930–32

by

Joel Perlmann

The Levy Economics Institute of Bard College

July 2006

---

The Levy Economics Institute Working Paper Collection presents research in progress by Levy Institute scholars and conference participants. The purpose of the series is to disseminate ideas to and elicit comments from academics and professionals.

The Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, founded in 1986, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, independently funded research organization devoted to public service. Through scholarship and economic research it generates viable, effective public policy responses to important economic problems that profoundly affect the quality of life in the United States and abroad.

The Levy Economics Institute  
P.O. Box 5000  
Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504-5000  
<http://www.levy.org>

Copyright © The Levy Economics Institute 2006 All rights reserved.

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper describes a small opposition group that functioned during 1930–33 on the left fringes of Ben Gurion's Mapai party in Palestine. Mapai dominated Jewish Palestine's politics, and later the politics of the young State of Israel; it lives on today in Israel's Labor Party. The opposition group, probably no more than a dozen active individuals at the outset, was comprised mostly of young adults, recently arrived from the Soviet Union or Poland. They put out a series of pamphlets, *Reshimot Sozialistiyot* (Socialist Notes), apparently held some public meetings and sought some minor party offices as well. These activities, and especially the pamphlets troubled Ben Gurion and the other party leaders. The leadership discussed the opposition group on 10 separate occasions at their private official meetings during 1932. They invited the opposition for an extensive clarification of views, and then insisted that the members cease functioning as an organized group. When that insistence failed to stop the publications, the leadership published a decree (written by party ideologue, B. Katznelson) expelling each of them from Mapai by name. The opposition's critique of Mapai revolved around the balance of internationalism inherent in socialism and nationalism inherent in Zionism. The party reaction showed 1) specific features of ideology that were unacceptable even to this eclectic party; 2) the leadership's concern for control and for disciplined followers; and 3) the nature of leadership discussion and behavior in regard to expulsion.

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I describe a small opposition group that functioned during 1930-33 on the left fringes of the Mapai party in Palestine. Mapai was the dominant labor party, led by Ben Gurion and his colleagues. It would eventually dominate Jewish Palestine's politics, and still later the politics of the State of Israel for decades; it lives on today in Israel's Labor Party.

The opposition group, probably no more than a dozen active individuals at the outset, and not much of an army later either, was comprised mostly of young adults, recently arrived from the Soviet Union or Poland. They put out a series of pamphlets, *Reshimot Sozialistiyot* (Socialist Notes) and apparently held some public meetings and sought some minor party offices as well. Both activities came to the notice of the Mapai leadership. Party leaders discussed the group on ten different occasions at their meetings during 1932, invited group members for an extensive clarification of views, insisted that the members cease functioning as an organized group, and (when that insistence failed to stop the publications) eventually published a decree expelling each of them from Mapai by name. The incident illuminates several aspects of party life: first, specific features of ideology that were unacceptable even to this eclectic party; second, the leadership's concern for control and for disciplined followers; and third, leadership discussion and behavior in regard to expulsion. In addition, the group around *Reshimot* has almost never been mentioned in labor or political histories of the period.<sup>1</sup> It seems worth telling their story for that reason, too; and for that reason, I quote from their own statements in some detail. And of course, it is impossible to read the arguments of that era and not wonder about paths not taken.

My father, Moshe Perlmann, was one of the group's founders; in going through his papers after his death, I found many of the original pamphlets and some related documents as well. In fact, I later realized I had more of these documents than the Hebrew University in Jerusalem or the Lavon Institute Archives in Tel Aviv. Also, my father had called my attention to an autobiography published by perhaps the most active founder, Shlomo Tzirulnikov, which devotes a few pages to the events of that time.

---

<sup>1</sup> Merhav (Hebrew edition), Hattis, and Od refer to it briefly.

Finally, Tzirulnikov's discussion, in turn, alerted me to the fact that the minutes of the Mapai leaders' meetings were now open to the public; and I read them at the Labor Party Archives in Kfar Sava as he had done before me. From these records, then, I've constructed the following narrative.

None of the challenges that the little group raised were new or unfamiliar to the Mapai leaders. But the way the criticisms were inter-linked, along with the group's own insistence that their position on the left was unique, did give them a certain distinctiveness. For analytical purposes, we can distinguish three crucial arguments in their stance. First, the class struggle had to be at the center of a labor party's behavior; and so the efforts of Mapai leaders to build up Jewish Palestine as part of world Zionism amounted to collusion the Jewish bourgeoisie; second, a true class struggle would involve both Jewish and Arab workers, against Arab feudalism, Jewish capitalism, and British imperialism. And only such a policy, by stimulating economic development, reducing Arab hostility, and ending British machinations, would allow continued Jewish immigration to Palestine — albeit moderate immigration to an independent, bi-national state. In the end, what lay behind Mapai's own policy, the group argued, was a “narrow nationalism” that sought an independent state with a Jewish majority. Thus, Mapai sought either to postpone legislative institutions or to create institutions that would be based on national parity for Arabs and Jews — even as Palestinian Arabs outnumbered Jews by almost 5 to 1.<sup>2</sup> And third, both because of the limits to Jewish immigration related to the Arab issue and because there was no evidence that a giant Jewish immigration was likely under any circumstances, the group protested the lack of concern with Jewish workers around the world, and with diaspora Jewry anyway — the “Palestine-centrism” of the leadership.

I “simply” narrate the story in this paper; I don't offer much in the way of explicit analysis, and what I do offer will appear in the midst of the narrative. But of course, no narration is quite so simple. In constructing this one, I found four guiding conceptual approaches helpful. One, stated in various formulations (for example, by Shabtai Teveth in his biography of Ben Gurion), is that the Mapai's leaders had largely lost whatever

---

<sup>2</sup> To be precise, 4.94:1 in 1931. Still, Ben Gurion and other leaders would have taken some solace from the fact that this ratio was down from 5.14:1 in 1927, and would fall to 4.26 by 1933. Calculated from Metzger, 215; for 1931, they rest on the census of that year; other years are his estimates.

Marxist orientation they had had by the early thirties, and especially whatever emphasis they had ever placed on the class struggle; they retained a creative focus on construction of a welfare state for the Jewish population, but their nationalism trumped their socialism. This “reformist” or revisionist tendency in their thinking about socialism was influenced by the experience of labor parties in the democracies, not least because some of these leaders had themselves spent considerable time in such countries. But the fact that they could obtain resources from non-socialist Zionist organizations also mattered to this evolution.

A second generalization is Yonathan Shapiro’s: that party leaders, struggled to concentrate power in their own hands, and that while they held that power through formally democratic procedures, they manipulated those procedures as much as they could. It is this effort to concentrate power, more than twists of ideology, that must be followed to understand the party’s evolution. These two conceptual approaches, I think, have most influenced me; but a third and fourth are relevant as well. A third generalization (again, discussed by numerous authors, such as Anita Shapira) is that younger arrivals from the Soviet Union in the mid-to-late twenties brought a more vibrant Marxism with them, undiluted by long personal experience with revisionist tendencies in socialism. For some, like those in our story, the concern was for a rigorous Marxist analysis of conditions; for others, it also involved learning the lessons of a tightly disciplined party. Many of these new arrivals may, nonetheless, have opposed Lenin’s dictatorship and they certainly opposed the Comintern’s positions on Zionism, but they still brought one or the other of these outlooks to bear. And finally, it is useful to keep in mind a generational lens in considering this story. Most of the opposition group members were in their late twenties. For example, in 1932, the three leaders whom I can identify by age — Tzirulnikov, Perlmann and Tzvi Oguz — were all 27 years of age; Perlmann and Oguz had arrived in Palestine eight years earlier, Tzirulnikov five years earlier. Most party leaders mentioned in this narrative were in their mid to late forties: Ben Gurion was 46, Katznelson, 45; Sprinzak, 47; Beilinson, 43; while the last had been in Palestine only

some eight years, the other three had arrived between 1906 and 1908. Haim Shorer was only 37 years of age, but he had arrived in Palestine in 1913.<sup>3</sup>

## **BACKGROUND: ORIGINS AND POLICIES OF MAPAI, THE HISTADRUT, THE ARABS AND THE BRITISH.**

To understand the situation in which the group published its critique, and Mapai's leaders grew exasperated with them, a certain amount of background is necessary.<sup>4</sup> Numerous Zionist-oriented workers' parties, with different positions, developed in Eastern Europe, and were carried into Palestine before the First World War. By the end of the War, there were three main groupings. Poale Tzion (workers of Zion) party, had been founded as a Marxist party and talked about class struggle. Still, even in Poale Tzion, the melding of Marxism and Zionism had required squaring the circle of proletarian internationalism and Jewish nationalism. This feat was typically accomplished (following Nahum Syrkin or Ber Borochov) by claiming that some form of normal class relations had to be attained by Jews before they could be enlisted for the creation of a socialist society. Furthermore, such normal class relations, in turn, could only be established in a Jewish-majority territory — because of the perverse concentration of European Jews in petty trade, and because of European anti-Semitism.

In any case, the leadership of Poale Tzion sought, as much as possible, worker unity; and in 1919, the party merged with a group of unaffiliated workers to create the Achdut Haavoda (the Unity of Labor) party. Chief among the Poale Zion party members had been David Ben Gurion; chief among the independents, Berl Katznelson. At the time of the 1919 merger, Ben Gurion had tried to retain the notion of class struggle as a central tenet for the new Achdut Haavoda party. But Katznelson and others prevailed upon him to give up that insistence in the name of unity, and most of Poale Tzion in Palestine followed the leadership into Achdut Haavoda. Obviously, many members of the new party must have believed in some form of class struggle, even if their new party's platform no longer mentioned it in the name of unity.

---

<sup>3</sup> Teveth; Shapiro; Shapira, "Black Night"; Merhav. Two younger members of the Mapai leadership, however, were Zalaman Aranowitz [Aranne] (33 in 1932) and Pinchas Lubianker [Lavon] 28.

<sup>4</sup> Among the countless narratives, see Teveth; Shapira, *Beryl*; Metzger, Cohen, Shimoni and Shapiro.

Still, the unity of Jewish labor remained far from complete in 1919 because a second major Jewish workers' party had refused to join in: Hapoel Hatzair (Young Worker) was not Marxist at all, and emphasized the virtues of pioneering work in building up the Jewish homeland much more than it supported any notion of socialism. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the twenties, Ben Gurion and his colleagues in Achdut Haavoda managed to reach a different sort of agreement with Hapoel Hatzair, namely to create a labor federation in which both parties could operate jointly for the good of the Jewish worker — the Histadrut (general worker's federation). And this situation persisted for a decade — two main parties for Jewish workers in Palestine, one more explicitly socialist than the other. Neither party officially proclaimed class struggle and both cooperated within the Histadrut.

The importance of the Histadrut cannot be overstated. It is not so much that the federation served as a general union, defending workers' interests in labor disputes, although it did that, too. The Histadrut served as a conduit for charitable contributions flowing into Jewish Palestine through the World Zionist Organization (WZO), which was a national organization with no class identity, in which wealthy individuals and religious leaders, as well as workers' parties, were well represented. The workers' parties, indeed, remained a minority voice until the 1930s. Still, the WZO recognized that it could do much to build up the weak Jewish institutions of Palestine by helping worker organizations directly through the Histadrut. So the Histadrut was able to use not merely, or primarily, the funds of its members, but also outside funds in order to create a host of impressive institutions: health care, a workers' bank, some industrial ventures owned by the federation, and retail stores for its members. It was a major engine for such growth, as there was in industry and construction in the twenties and for social welfare institutions serving Jews. It was a great boon for a worker to be a member, and most Jewish workers joined, regardless of whether they belonged to a political party or not.

Finally, in 1929, after a decade of wary cooperation in the Histadrut, the two parties of the twenties, Achdut Haavoda and Hapoel Hatzair, merged to create Mapai (Mifleget Poale Eretz Yisrael) — the Workers' Party of Eretz Yisrael. Eretz Yisrael meant Palestine, but the party's name referred to *Jewish* workers of Palestine. Mapai now fully dominated the Histadrut.

Thus, instead of class struggle leading to socialism, Jewish laborites increasingly envisioned a society constructed de novo on more or less socialist principles. Originally, the character of Jewish immigration tended to support this vision: during the first quarter of the twentieth century, immigration was largely restricted to young “pioneers,” often socialists, who could have gone elsewhere but chose Palestine. By the late twenties, however, other destinations were closed to east-European Jews, and many who chose to come were of the Polish middle class. Moreover, enough of these new arrivals were seeking entrepreneurial opportunities for their capital to transform the economic situation. Thus, it appeared that perhaps an era had ended, and that Histadrut “constructivist” growth might be supplanted by the more-familiar patterns of private capital struggling with labor.

All this was occurring in a society that was predominantly Arab in numeric terms. Most of the Arabs were in agricultural work, of course — but so were some of the most visible Jewish pioneers. The Jewish workers parties generally took the position that the Arab workers, mostly fellaheen in semi-feudal arrangements, were historically too undeveloped to be organized together with the Jewish workers. Nevertheless, some Arabs worked in towns and cities; and even in the countryside, some Arabs were working for Jewish-owned enterprises. The Jewish workers’ parties, and the Histadrut, argued that while in principle they would like to see the Arab workers organized, they could not seriously take on that task in the Histadrut. Quite the contrary: at the end of the twenties, the Histadrut and the Jewish worker parties developed the slogan, “Hebrew Labor” or “100% Hebrew Labor.” The slogan meant that Jewish-owned businesses should not be hiring Arab workers — because the great need of the Jews was for more immigration, and for more “economic absorptive capacity” in Palestine. In the farming sector, much of the Jewish enterprise was centered around cooperative ventures (Kibbutzim, moshavim) that emerged from the socialist or pioneering ideology of the young settlers of the teens and twenties — and from the convenience of funneling WZO funding to their communes on WZO land. But even here, Arab labor would have been cheaper: standards of living among Arab agricultural workers in particular were lower, and it was possible to hire labor at least as talented from that sector at a lower wage. So “Hebrew Labor” was a



campaign to create self-sufficiency, normalization, and even pioneering among the Jews — by keeping out or driving out Arab workers.

The land was then ruled as a British trusteeship. The British Empire had declared itself in favor of a homeland for the Jewish people, and the League of Nations had granted the trusteeship in Palestine, in part, with this goal in mind. Nevertheless, there was also the nagging question of representative government in Palestine, as in other British-dominated lands. Why not a Palestinian parliament for example? Here, the Jewish workers' parties, like all Zionist parties, in essence equivocated and hid behind the platitude that it was too early to consider arrangements of this type — all the while insisting on open Jewish immigration into Palestine. At times, it seemed that Jewish spokesmen could adopt a rhetoric of “bi-nationalism” to deal with these complexities. Yet the workers' party speakers who advocated “bi-nationalism” generally meant a bi-nationalism based on “parity” — that is on the basis of equal representation of the two national groups, Jews and Arabs — in a context of a 5-to-1 population ratio.

Organized Arab reactions to all this were of course many. After the early 1920s, it was clear that the problems of the Palestinian Arabs were distinctive, partly because of their relations to the British, but mostly because the Zionist movement. Major Palestinian anti-Zionist rioting broke out in 1921 and again, with greater ferocity, on the eve of our story in 1929. Also, distinctly Palestinian national organizations, and some Arab working class organizations, were forming in the region during the twenties and early thirties.

### **RESHIMOT SOCIALISTIYOT, 1930-33**

The group began publishing *Reshimot* during 1930, but the core members had been friends for a few years before that, and it is possible that the group had held relatively formal meetings before 1930.<sup>5</sup> In any case, in late 1929 or early 1930, Shlomo Tzirulnikov and Moshe Perlmann asked for a meeting with Ben Gurion to discuss what

---

<sup>5</sup> That Tzirulnikov, Oguz and Perlmann at least knew each other before 1930 is clear from Perlmann's surviving correspondence, as well as from Tzirulnikov's memoir. Merhav (131) says they met formally in 1929, even before Mapai was created. Certainly, it is clear from some of Perlmann's letters from the time that he argued with Achdut Haavoda members, probably in meetings. Also Tzvi Oguz and some other members of the *Reshimot* group had earlier been active in Avukah, a dissenting group in Achdut Haavoda (Od, 174ff).

they saw as the larger implications of the “events” of 1929 — large-scale anti-Jewish demonstrations and violence by Palestinian Arabs. We have only Tzirulnikov’s memoir of this meeting, recalled after half a century.<sup>6</sup>

After the events of 1929, Ben Gurion alone among the leaders of the labor movement was willing to absorb their chief lesson — that we were dealing with an Arab national movement; his sharp sensibilities did not mislead him, and he was greatly troubled [*bemevucha gedola*]... We decided to talk to him before his departure [on a trip to America]. At the appointed hour we arrived, M. Perlmann and I, to his apartment; it was then lunchtime, and the family had just finished eating. Ben Gurion showed an understanding of our position, as he had been ruminating about the same things [*hitlabet beotam devarim*]. But he sought an operational answer to the events, and he tried to convince us that that answer was — the acceleration of the Zionist enterprise. We couldn’t accept this response, seeing it as self-deception .... Not much time passed and we solidified a political line...<sup>7</sup>

The group distributed their first pamphlet in May 1930 and a second in September. The third, printed for the first time rather than stenciled, appeared in August 1931. It was this third pamphlet that first stimulated the Mapai leadership to take notice. During the year and a half after the third pamphlet appeared, while the leadership was debating what to do about the *Reshimot*, a fourth pamphlet appeared in May 1932 and a fifth in October of that year. A sixth appeared just after the group members were expelled, in January 1933.<sup>8</sup> In length, most of the printed pamphlets amounted to about 15-25 double-columned pages. To my mind, while they are steeped in the conceptions of the Marxist left, they are not particularly strident, jargon-ridden, or mechanical. Rather they are intelligent, knowledgeable of local and world affairs (including subtleties of democratic and Zionist politics), and quite readable. If the Mapai leadership thought so too, these qualities, of course, would have made the pamphlets seem all the more troubling.

The group did more than publish pamphlets; how much more I have not yet been able to gauge. But clearly during 1930-32, the group also held some meetings for workers and left-leaning sympathizers, and tried to get some members appointed to various low-level party committees. On this we have only brief and vague mentions in the documents

---

<sup>6</sup> Ben Gurion’s famous diaries do not mention this or the later meeting (discussed below).

<sup>7</sup> Tzirulnikov, 37.

<sup>8</sup> A steady stream of pamphlets would follow over the next decade, but by then the *Reshimot* group were outside any party.

I have read. Still, at least for some leaders, we will see that the group, however miniscule and powerless, meant something more than just the pamphlets. Nevertheless, the pamphlets were the clearest expression of group activity and, without doubt, the contents of those pamphlets (quite apart from anything else) troubled the leadership — or rather, the fact that the contents of the pamphlets were being presented as the work of party members.<sup>9</sup>

In the first two pamphlets, the stenciled affairs, articles were not signed; rather the pamphlets simply declared that the authors were “a group of members of Mapai.” By contrast, articles in the printed pamphlets were signed, at least with initials.<sup>10</sup> The implication in the first two pamphlets was that the group as a whole was presenting its shared views. Perhaps the printed form of the third pamphlet stimulated the group members to consider whether they had now arrived at a more mature stage of publication in which members should sign as individuals. One reason for doing so, probably, was that individuals could now emphasize what they wanted, without worrying if all would go along with every phrase. For example, one author criticizes the cynical politics of the Palestine Communist Party; another writes about how Mapai (unlike many other anti-communist parties throughout the West) cannot get beyond its disagreements with Communism to admit that the Soviet Union is a workers’ state deserving of defense (as well as criticism). The views of these two writers are not strictly in contradiction, but one senses that it might have been difficult to get them each to sign off on the other’s particular formulations.

The first two pamphlets, then, are perhaps the clearest expression of early, basic group principles. The first pamphlet focuses on the centrality of the class struggle, the second on Mapai’s positions on Palestine’s political arrangements. The class struggle could not be skirted by building institutions through the Histadrut; this was especially

---

<sup>9</sup> Merhav (131) writes that the first opposition to the reformism of Mapai was the *Reshimot*, although he notes that it actually formed in 1929 in Achdut Haavoda, before Mapai was created. It was composed, he says, of several elements: recent arrivals from the Zionist youth movements within the Soviet Union and “graduates of Poale Tzion (Right) in Poland”; to these were added some construction workers and later (after our story) some left socialists arriving from Germany. Tzirulnikov’s autobiography (36) is consistent with this description.

<sup>10</sup> The published pamphlets also listed an editor for each volume: M. Perlmann for the third, S. Tzir (Tzirulnikov) for the fourth and fifth, and T(zvi) Oguz for the sixth. Peretz Merhav lists these and Y. Furmanov as active leaders of the group. Throughout, the references to these pamphlets is indicated by date or number in this narrative (i.e., first through sixth).

true now in 1930, after the new Polish immigration, with its entrepreneurial character, had changed the nature of local investment. But in any case, Histadrut efforts required tight cooperation, and probably subservience, to the WZO — that is, to the Jewish bourgeoisie, not as a brief tactical matter, but as a permanent arrangement. It was illusory to think worker power could be forged out of this arrangement in the long run. And the misperception was a clear expression of how socialism and nationalism were not, as Mapai leaders trumpeted, of equal importance in the party, but rather that nationalism was dominant in the party. The only solution was to evolve towards a true working-class party, and this meant cooperating with, and organizing, the Arab worker. This would eventually raise the standard of living, while also stimulating the end of feudal agricultural relations. A united working class of Jews and Arabs would stand against the array of non-working class forces.

[T]o guarantee, insofar as possible, the socialist gains in the emerging Palestinian propertied enterprise — this the working class can achieve only if it abandons every general [i.e., not working-class] national goal.... The question is ... whether a united working class will overcome the complex of national struggles here or ... whether the whole land will turn into a hell of national conflict.

The first pamphlet also argues briefly that only such a united working-class movement is likely to develop the country economically and politically in a way that will permit some of Zionism's goals.

And from an objective perspective, a consistent and internationalist class politics are today not only a class necessity, but also a national necessity, since only such a politics will permit broadening the restrictions on [Jewish] immigration and settlement by raising the standard of living and by efforts to achieve national peace [i.e., among Jews and Arabs] in the country.

The second pamphlet announces that it will carry the implications of this systematic class position into the political domain.

The path that our workers movement has followed throughout together with all of official Zionism can be summed up in a short formula: immigration, settlement, construction, in an aspiration for a pact with England, as though ignoring the Arab reality... We have acted, and continue to act, as if the land is empty... And what is the party's reaction to everything happening here now [the Arab risings of 1929, etc.]? ... The tried and true [formula:] building and creation, strengthening the endeavor. But it is obvious ... that this building process is one

of many years. During that time there will be no way to avoid the existence and sharpening of the chief political questions... We are witnessing the social-historical awakening of the Arabs, and it is one of the characteristics of the rise of the east in our time.

Nor should there be any ambiguity about the role of the British Empire, with whom the party seeks its future.

As is well known, our leaders excel in being down-to-earth — in their realism, empiricism, etc. ... [But] in this connection [regarding England] we are told of British idealism, the English feeling for justice, etc. Some do acknowledge the imperialistic character of British politics generally, yet political positions here [on the Palestine question] are unaffected.... Others even speak of the Britain's interest in a Jewish homeland. Britain no doubt has its own interests in Palestine, particularly strategic (Suez, Mediterranean, route to India). But why should we think she has a particular interest in transforming Palestine into a Jewish center? .... The absolute orientation to England and the preservation of the political status quo in the country brings us to a real contradiction with the aspirations of national liberation and independence of the Arab nation.... Instead of a sterile negation of the representative institutions, must come a positive, realistic politics oriented (through class-based considerations) to what is being born.

This meant political reforms based eventually on democratic, representative institutions.

A politics of peace means taking political initiatives to create and solidify a united class front in economics and politics on the basis of radical reforms and movement to the equality of nations in a material and political sense in the common country, in a bi-national state... In our situation there is no way to establishing national peace except through class cooperation of a supra-national kind, and from “national units” nothing will come.

This last — the reference to “national units” — is as close as either of the first two pamphlets come to clarifying the implications for the Zionist endeavor in a context of self-government when a great majority of the electorate is Arab. Its implications are spelled out in the first signed article that *Reshimot* would publish (in the third pamphlet).

The second pamphlet underscores these themes in discussions of related matters. For example, the Socialist International wants nothing to do with the new party because of its nationalistic focus. And locally, British administrative policy involves increasing attacks on civil and human rights, yet the Histadrut and party newspapers comment only mildly, and favorably because the victims are Jewish communists. A footnote adds that were they not Jewish, there would be no comment at all in those papers.

Thus, generally, the first two pamphlets insist on criticism of the Mapai positions from the perspective of class struggle and the cooperation of Jewish and Arab workers in economic and political arenas. Relatively little is said about just what sort of future the opposition's own policies would bring. Also, relatively little is said explicitly about world Jewry and the Jewish worker in other countries. Still, the first pamphlet makes one brief mention of "bi-nationalism,"<sup>11</sup> and a single passage in the second pamphlet seeks to reassure readers that the labor Zionist enterprise is not being discarded.

Of course we should cultivate and develop immigration and settlement, of course we should mobilize the influence of the Jewish worker and Jewish democracy, but alongside all these it must be said clearly that the solution is possible in principle only ...if we overcome national struggles and institute peace among the nations here.

Exactly what the future would hold was not specified with much clarity in these two pamphlets; group members would no doubt have responded that the future was uncertain, but that the only hope for healthy development lay in the two principles of working-class Jewish independence from world Zionist organizations involving all classes, and from cooperation in Palestine with the Arab workers. Whatever the future would look like, if it weren't based on these two principles, it would be a disaster.

Possibly there was less discussion of possible concrete outcomes because individuals had come together mainly out of a loyalty to systematic working class action within the Jewish world and realized in discussions that they were less clear and less united about the probable outcomes of a healthy direction for the party. Nevertheless, beginning with the third pamphlet, with its signed articles, the question of possible futures comes up more explicitly, most clearly in a succession of articles, one each in the third, fourth, and fifth pamphlets, by Shlomo Tzirulnikov.<sup>12</sup>

Since the preceding issue had been devoted to political questions, and had stressed that only a supra-national working class politics would succeed, it is revealing

---

<sup>11</sup> After arguing for Jewish and Arab cooperation: "Of course there is no such bi-nationalism in any working-class politics that is not based on serious and honest internationalism...."

<sup>12</sup> "The Working Class and Questions of State Governance in the Country" (August 1931); "The Working Class and the Problematics of the Jewish Enterprise in Palestine" (May 1932); and "The Question of the Worker in the Yishuv [Jewish society in Palestine] and in Zionism" (October 1932).

that the third pamphlet's lead article, the one by Tzirulnikov, takes the same focus. The key novel feature in this piece is to make explicit the meaning of a bi-national state.

What are the political aspirations of Jewish nationalism here? ... We all remember the episode of Weizman's declaration about a bi-national state. The position of our faction in the Zionist Executive's meeting and at the [Zionist] Congress was: not to put this question at all, not to touch it and not to answer it. We find the extension of this line in the programs of Ben Gurion and also of B. Katznelson.... What hides behind this "silence" — is well-known... That is, our aspiration is actually — a Jewish state, but by contrast to the Revisionists [i.e., the Zionist Revisionist Party led by V. Jabotinsky]... we don't declare it and think that it will be free of any domination of one side by the other (by the way: the Revisionists also promise this). The Jewish workers movement in this country, together with the entire Zionist movement, was educated on the idea of a Jewish majority in a Jewish state. ... But alas history "decreed" that this aspiration would be directed not to a land without inhabitants, but rather to one that is actually largely populated and settled — albeit not densely settled — and whose population is in the process of a rapid national solidification and a national-political establishment [*tekuma*]... It has to be understood that no national peace can be envisioned in this land so long as we aspire — openly or secretly — for a Jewish state... And finally in these conditions the country cannot be transformed into a Jewish majority because [first, even in optimal conditions Jewish immigration will be inadequate to that purpose and second, the Arab national movement will oppose such levels of Jewish immigration.] In other words ... we need to speak only about a bi-national society in this country and of a bi-national state.

Still, he adds later, "there is a basis for assuming that the Jews here will not be such a small and hopeless minority here as in other countries." And also, it is conceivable in future that, like Switzerland, settlement may eventually allow for separate cantons in different parts of the country, each with a dominant national group.

In contrast to the visions of Mapai leaders, Tzirulnikov invokes the Austro-Marxist solution to the problem of multiple nations in a working-class state: supra-national unity of the working class, leading to a state which solves the national question by allowing "within the single state personal national autonomy for national minorities in regards to issues of national culture only." The crucial word here is "personal," by which he means that there are no "national units" that must be treated to parity despite their differences in size; rather the parity is at the level of individual citizens only.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> However, since national groups are recognized only for cultural affairs in any case, the fact that there is no parity of these groups should have no great consequence for cultural preservation. On the Austro-Marxists and the Palestine context, see Cohen.

Tzirulnikov was to add more details later, in the fourth and fifth pamphlets. In particular, in the fourth he provided an extended discussion of population, farming, and urban development to argue that the early claims of the Zionists, including Borochoy, that huge numbers would quickly move to Palestine had proven false, that in any case there was no likelihood that the present economy would sustain them if they came, and finally that the Arab national movement would be inflamed by such a development. Consequently, the future lay with a large, but significant, Jewish minority in Palestine, and that it would also be only a minority of world Jewry, whose fate was tied to the countries in which Jews lived. There was nothing wrong with the perception that Jewish workers required special organization (notwithstanding the Comintern criticism of that position) — and nothing wrong even in seeking a territorial solution. But under the circumstances of “history’s decree,” this meant that the territorial solution would have to be a bi-national state.

Well then, “a spiritual center?” That’s what we’ll be asked from those familiar with the usual Zionist formulas. No! The most healthy idea in Zionism and in Labor Zionism was precisely that they negated the “nationalist conservatism” of preserving “national values” as a principle in itself. . . . [Like Borochoy before] we today must leave this out of our evaluation of the Jewish enterprise [in Palestine], not only because socialism has nothing whatever to do with “nationalism no matter what” but also because such a “spiritual center” insofar as the concept refers to a center for Jewry in its dispersion, is a complete utopia. The spiritual life of a people does not draw its sustenance from imports out of “the national museum.” The sociopolitical future of the Jewish masses will be determined not by “the Jewish State” when most of the Jewish people will remain outside it, but by social and political factors in the countries within which those Jewish masses live... [For the same reason, the Jewish settlement in Palestine] is unlikely to solve the question of Jewish economic normalization...notwithstanding [that such normalization is a]... solution to “the Jewish Question” (not “the Question of Judaism”) in Zionism and labor Zionism.”

How much of this would all the members have signed on to is impossible to say, and this last set of arguments — the detailed analysis of population trends and the critique of the spiritual center — only appeared months after the Mapai leadership had decided, after the appearance of the third pamphlet, that these publications presented ideas diametrically opposed to those of the party. Nevertheless, the group as a whole presumably did indeed



agree with much of the basic bi-national agenda, including the statement that it was necessary:

to give up the aspiration for a Jewish majority and a Jewish State, and to consistently support the bi-national state ... [and to solve] all questions — including the specific Jewish national question, e.g., those of immigration and colonization — as questions for the country as a whole, for the Jews and the Arabs that comprise it.

This quotation comes from the protest that the *Reshimot* group sent to the Socialist International after being expelled from the party. They reprinted the protest in the sixth *Reshimot* pamphlet (January 1933), over the heading “by a group of members expelled from Mapai.”

Before turning to the Mapai reaction, we should return to the third pamphlet, of attend to the very bottom of the very last page of the third pamphlet. A small entry there, in especially small type, comments on a recent issue of the Austrian *Der kampf*. A group member (identified only by the initial “Shin”) uses the opportunity to comment:

Our ideal is ... liberation from enslavement to work, leisure, the possibility of humane values, construction of a culture by man for man, pleasure, happiness and creativity. It is well worth contrasting these things with the platitudes [*melitzot hanevuvot*] accepted among us about the sanctity of labor and the religion of labor, platitudes that are nothing but an expression of what twinkles in the minds of the petit bourgeoisie passing into a life of labor. We should not add hurdles on the path to the development of class-consciousness from the doctrines of Syrkin and Gordon ...

As Nachum Syrkin and A. D. Gordon were among the revered elders of labor Zionism and of Zionist pioneering work respectively, this passage was sure to hit home.

## **MAPAI’S LEADERS TAKE NOTE**

At the August 30, 1931 meeting of the Mapai Secretariat, in the same month that the third pamphlet appeared, Haim Shorer, the Secretary of Mapai, first raised the issue of the pamphlets, quoting a series of passages.<sup>14</sup> He emphasizes that the publication declares

---

<sup>14</sup> All references to the meetings are from the “Protocols” for the date mentioned.

that those responsible for publication are members of the Mapai party. The articles touch on:

[M]any questions: the regime in Palestine, development plans, defense of [Arab] tenant farmers, the coalition in Zionism, the idea of work, Gordon, Syrkin, etc. On all these matters the position is opposite to that taken within the party. In addition, a mocking and contemptuous tone is generally taken to party views, to its personalities, and so on. There is no common ground (shituf) between these members and the party, and the appearance of pamphlets like these cannot be allowed to appear under the label "members of the Mapai party." We have to call in these members and tell them that in our opinion they have no place in the party and to suggest they leave it.

Zalman Aranowitz [Aranne] then provided details about the little group's members. They amount to "no more than 12-13 members; they have no influence. They are out of touch with reality and with responsible action." They're not important enough to expel from the party, but they should be forbidden to publish under the label of party members. Aranowitz, himself, was only a few years older than the group's leaders, (born in the Ukraine 1899). Moreover, he, too, was a recent arrival in Palestine (1926) and probably shared many of their experiences from post-Revolutionary Russia. He may well have known them personally, or he and they may have shared mutual friends; Jewish Palestine was a small place. Ben Gurion then suggested, "We have to contact them and tell them that they have no right to publish pamphlets under the label 'members of Mapai'." And so it was decided that he and Aharonowitz would read the pamphlets and suggest a strategy relevant to their appearance.

Some four months passed in which Ben Gurion and Aharonowitz failed to follow through. Shorer then raised the issue again: in the meantime, he said, the group had "also undertaken organizational actions which are known [peulot iguniyot iduot]." He doesn't elaborate, but it becomes clear from the later confrontation of group members and party leaders that he is referring to meetings that were reported to have been closed to party members and oriented to more leftist individuals, from the Poale Tzion Smole (Left Poale Tzion, a rigorously Marxist offshoot of the Poale Tzion party) and the Communists. From the way the minutes phrase the summary it is clear that there was fuller discussion, either there or before. He suggests that the same two party members (Ben Gurion and Aharonowitz), plus Sprinzak, should meet members who speak for the "opposition" group and after that the Secretariat can determine its position on the matter.

## LEADERS AND OPPOSITION MEET

And so, about a month later (on February 9<sup>th</sup>) the meeting was held. A transcript of the meeting kept by Mapai runs to three pages single-spaced. While the statements are written in a conversational tone, the transcript is obviously not a full record of everything that was said, but rather more like minutes — meant to capture essentials. Also, except when the discussion concerns procedure, the party leaders appear to simply ask brief questions, in order to clarify the opposition's view of themselves. There may have been a somewhat freer exchange than the transcript conveys, with arguments back and forth. But it is also entirely possible that the party leaders had no particular interest in debating the fundamentals with these young and powerless nobodies. Ben Gurion and the others had heard related arguments for decades, whether or not packaged in just the same mix. Moreover, the leaders present came from different wings of the new party, and may well have held somewhat divergent views among themselves, a fact they would not have wanted to highlight to each other or the opposition. Sprinzak, for example, had come out of the more conservative Hapoel-Hatzair constituent wing of Mapai. In any case, Mapai's representatives at the meeting included not only the three that Shorer had suggested, but also Shorer himself and Tabori. From the opposition group, Tzirulnikov, Oguz and one other member (Nehorai) attended, but only the first two are quoted in the transcript.

The transcript indicates that the meeting was held on one particular day, but Tzirulnikov's biography recalls several meetings. In any case, if we can trust Tzirulnikov's memory after some 55 years,

The clarification continued over several sessions, and it was quite wide ranging ... These discussions were an exciting episode in the little Palestine of that time. Ben Gurion had recently moved to his apartment ... which was outside [the then] city limits. At 10 o'clock in the evening he would be standing already at the door, rushing to the last bus. We exchanged our last words standing. In general, it can be said that there was a good spirit in these discussions, the clarifications having chiefly an intellectual character. So we were surprised [later by the outcome]...<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Tzirulnikov, 39.

Shorer opened by explaining the Secretariat's view of the need for "clarifying the character and direction of the group and its place in the party, because there's no possibility of continuing the present situation." Oguz jumped in to respond. The present situation most certainly cannot continue. Members can't be forbidden from declaring themselves as such. Also, the group's members are being rejected for participation on branch committees. And finally, Oguz says that Shorer has claimed at the Tel Aviv branch committee that opposition members set up meetings with non-party and anti-party people — "false rumors that he has no right to repeat."

Ben Gurion steps in to make things clear:

You have been invited here as accused, not as accusers. We are to clarify in this meeting what this group is, its organization and character. Afterwards we will determine whether the existence of such a fraction [fraktzia] within the party is possible, and especially if it has a programme that does not correspond to the programme of the party. We have never been officially informed of the existence of this group.

Ben Gurion's comments are not only pointed and hard-hitting, they also reveal his interest in the practical nature of the group, not merely its ideological positions. In any case, Tzirulnikov responds that while they have not formally approached the party organs, they did once meet with Ben Gurion to "clarify several questions." Tzirulnikov is probably referring to the meeting at Ben Gurion's apartment in the wake of the 1929 disturbances. In any case, Oguz reminds the group that in Ahdut Haavodah [that is, before it's merger with Hapoel Hatzair to form Mapai] "there was a group like this — Avukah." And Ben Gurion retorts, "Indeed — and it was expelled." This exchange was especially loaded because, as Ben Gurion may well have recalled, Oguz himself had been a member of Avukah.<sup>16</sup>

Oguz then presents a pithy overview of the group's positions. The present group's outlook can be understood from the three pamphlets it has circulated. "We understand the essence of our movement [i.e., the labor movement] differently than does the party." The party concentrates on youth to create a worker nation [am oved]; we concentrate on the worker movement and on socialism. "In Palestine, we [the party] have no independent

---

<sup>16</sup> Od, 174ff.

value except insofar as we rest on word socialism. The entire orientation of the movement here is on a complete negation of the exile [golah; Jewish dispersion]; we by contrast do not believe that the exile will cease to exist. And hence first of all our anti-Palestine-centrism.” He continues,

We oppose coalition with the [World] Zionist Organization generally and with the Zionist bourgeoisie. Our involvement in the Zionist funds is impossible. Some of our members reject any involvement in these funds. In any case, if involvement is possible, it can only be as an opposition and on no account as an organic whole. With regard to politics in general, we regard our relation to the Arab nation as the basis of our existence here, and we reject as primary our relationship with England, the League of Nations, etc. Our orientation — with regard to democratization: a parliament of which we will be a part. This follows from our socialism. The problem of joint organization must be fundamental and central. We oppose the slogan of Pure Hebrew Labor, even in the Jewish economy — since this creates a wall between us and the Arab worker. The paths our movement has taken to date — are impossible, such as: a national contract with the farmers, expelling Arab workers, etc. We think that Palestine will be a very important center for the Jewish masses (but not in a complete ‘ingathering of the exiles’). As to what Zionism is in general, the party also [i.e., like us] does not define this clearly.

Sprinzak then asks, “And in what ways, then, do you think of yourselves as party members?” Oguz responds, “in our socialism and in our Palestinianism.” The party seeks to unite all socialist and workers’ forces — and the opposition also negates any efforts at division whatsoever, and sees a responsibility to work within the general movement.

Ben Gurion presses on the territorial question: if there were to be established in Palestine a social-democratic party, “like in America, like the Bund [the east-European Jewish socialist group that advocated separate organization of Jews, but within the countries in which Jews lived — and therefore anti-Zionist] without hatred of Palestine. Don’t you think your place is more there than with us?” But Oguz responds that we would think they, too, should enter our party. And Tzirulnikov adds we don’t think the Bund’s failure is only in its *hatred* of Palestine; “we have a *positive* attitude to Palestine; it could come to have a unique, perhaps a central value.”

Oguz observes that one might ask instead why the group doesn’t join Poale Tzion Smole. “But first of all, a) Poale Tzion Smole are Palestine-centered; b) their

Communism; c) and their divisive method [shoat haperud]" [i.e., factionalism within the organized working class]. Tzirulnikov adds that Palestine-centeredness is not the same as Zionism.<sup>17</sup>

Aharonowitz asks what the group's relation is to "health [the pioneer]." Oguz responds that insofar as they are youth aspiring to a life of labor, they should be seen in a positive light, but that's not a reason to identify with them, and they mustn't be the social basis of the [Palestine workers'] movement. Tzirulnikov turns the discussion to the critique of Hebrew Labor slogan. Productivizing bourgeois youth is important, of course, but that this is no reason to accept the concept of Hebrew Labor (that is, of forcing Arabs from employment to make jobs available for Jews). True, he admits, "the other path — internationalism — does not yet exist, and so we will not be able to speak clearly about the solution from that side." Nevertheless, the party has to take initiative and be energetic in forming new patterns of struggle, primarily international ones.

And what follows from all this organizationally? That (as Oguz volunteers) "our task is to form those groups within the party that will be able to help it shift to new paths.... We have no intention whatever to work within the party against the party. In our pamphlets and meetings we called on everyone to struggle within the party." And indeed, he adds, it would be impossible elsewhere: "In other parties it would be impossible to act as we can in this large party, that relates with tolerance to the various parts within it." And far from being anti-party, opposition activities may draw in new elements still outside. He returns to the example of Avukah: the members of the *Reshimot* group who had been Avukah members had opposed the latter's separatist politics. Moreover, he concludes, our members "do not seek to capture positions in the institutions" of the party, but only to disseminate ideas through pamphlets, through appearances in party contexts. "But in the atmosphere that has been created around us — it's impossible to act."

To all this Ben Gurion asks simply, "Does this group have a constitution?" But Oguz replies they don't; "sympathetic members [simply] come to our meetings."

---

<sup>17</sup> And with regard to the differences with PZS, "I would add the participation in the [Zionist] Congress, with which only some of us oppose completely, but all believe should be limited to temporary and oppositional roles."

Tzirulnikov added that the issues raised by their group were not going to be swept away. Freedom of belief implied freedom to preach those beliefs, including putting out pamphlets “and the beginnings of organization.” But here “there is no issue of a faction [fractzia]. What matters to us is to exist within the party, putting out pamphlets; and if this has a place in socialist parties, so much the more so in this one, which is closest to the condition of a ‘movement’.” Consider, he says, “the great distance also from ‘Gordonia’ [an agricultural pioneering movement named for A. D. Gordon which eschewed socialism] to ‘Marxism’.” Yet both, he means, exist within Mapai.

Ben Gurion returns again to the question of Zionism and the analogy of the Bund. What if a person came along “who is a Bundist, but lacks the hatred of Palestine and Zionism — could he be a member of your group?” Hard to say, answers Tzirulnikov; we never had such a case. But we would be for the party itself absorbing someone like that, too. There’s a danger, Ben Gurion responds, “that such a group could turn into a focus [constructzia] for all the a-Zionistic elements.” Tzirulnikov points out that the opposition group can only take in party members.

But why, Ben Gurion asks, is it important for you to print on the pamphlets, “members of Mapai?” We want continually to stress the fact that we are, Oguz answers, so that we can also influence members who think there is no place for them within the party. In any case, we don’t thereby turn the pamphlet into an official party publication. And Tzirulnikov adds, even if we don’t mention it on the cover page, it will be obvious from the contents of the pamphlet that we are party members.

Shorer concludes the meeting by referring back to Oguz’s opening accusations:

We were informed that you organized a meeting outside Tel Aviv, and that they were *closed* to party members, and open to all sorts of non-party and anti-party elements, Poale Tzion Smole and even Communists. This is not in accord with your testimony. However, in my opinion, what’s most important is your ideology and not such organizational efforts — whether or not these were as we’d been informed. And when we were told about those meetings, we took the decision to meet with you and discuss the whole matter. So you have no reason to protest against us. Now we’ll review the information obtained in this meeting and inform you of our conclusions.

## THE LEADERSHIP DISCUSSES WHAT TO DO

Five weeks later (March 14, 1932), the Secretariat takes up the question of the group, in the light of the transcript. Shorer observed that Secretariat members had all now read the transcript.

No single one [of their opinions] alone is perhaps so terrible, but taken together amount to a conception which has no connection to our party. The party is not the Histadrut [which is meant to include all Jewish workers in Palestine]. The party is tied to a particular ideology, and while our party encompasses many nuances it nevertheless has a clear ideology... These may be excellent members, developed — but in our party I think they have no place. There's a view that we need only to prevent them from appearing in print and in the name of the party. But if they're party members, how are we going to stop them from putting out a pamphlet, and how ask them to hide their affiliation to the party?

Shorer's view of the party ideology is striking: no single opinion of the opposition can be pointed to as the justification for expulsion. As Tzirulnikov had observed in the meeting with party leaders, the party included such a diverse range of views that any of those the opposition held could be found among party members. And yet, the sum total of the views “amount to a conception” that is foreign to us. Whether or not the party ideology was as clear as Shorer claims, it could not abide the combination of views the opposition put forward. One wonders, however, whether this is quite true. The insistence on class conflict, and separation from non-socialist Zionist institutions, might, in practical terms, be hugely important, but one feels they could be finessed as a matter of nuance — after all, no one said that there should not be unionization and strikes in Palestine over working conditions. And opposition members were themselves divided on whether there could be a cooperation of *some* kind with these Zionist institutions. So too, no one was climbing the barricades over whether the Jewish communities of the diaspora would disappear or only decline in importance in the face of the Palestinian Jewish society — no matter how important the point was for labor Zionist morale. However, the opposition insisted that loyalty to the conception of the working class meant a thorough-going internationalism that allowed for some Jewish



immigration to Palestine, but not for a separate Jewish working class there, and that the struggle for “Hebrew Labor” was illegitimate, and that the outcome of Zionism would be a bi-national state with a Jewish minority limited to cultural autonomy — these were the complex of views around an anti-nationalist position that was probably the critical ideological factor that the leadership could not accept.

In addition, there was the fact that if members *quietly* held views the party did not share — “don’t ask, don’t tell” — they could believe whatever they wanted. By contrast, this group of party members was challenging party discipline by explicitly arguing for inimical positions, and with a mocking tone towards the leadership. *Any* of these positions — not merely *all these positions together* — might therefore have been enough to bring about a response if the leadership thought, as some clearly did, that the group’s presentation of views involved an internal faction.

In any case, all this leads Shorer to urge expulsion now. But Sprinzak is less comfortable about throwing them out, on grounds of procedure and content.

I don’t see an adequate basis for expelling them from the party. I do see an adequate basis on which to prohibit them from publishing a pamphlet as party members. They have perverse views that have not yet solidified. Yet they affirm the party, respect it and they are for unity. The investigation is an inadequate basis for expelling them from the party. I have no sympathy for them, but I don’t find we have to expel them. And if we expel them, we’ll thereby solidify a certain group. Such as strategy is not so necessary. We are in a period of crystallization of many concepts anew. It’s an inappropriate moment to expel members who did not betray [the party] and did not undertake harmful acts.

Thus, while Shorer’s position admits that the basis for expulsion is no single position, Sprinzak, in effect, says that party ideology, especially (he probably means) just after the creation of Mapai, is in flux, and the criterion for expulsion should be active betrayal only. Golomb takes a similar line, although he distinguishes the present case from oppositional opinions on marginal issues, which should be allowed, even in pamphlet form. But in this case, the views are about fundamentals and as an organized group it should be expelled. The individuals, however, can remain in the party.

Ben Gurion then weighs in on both “the views of the group and its organization.”

No single opinion is so bad [pesula]. But when all are put together — well, this is already dangerous. This sort of thinking [halach machshava kازه] cannot be legitimate in the party. This will simply smooth the path to *Haor* [the journal “The Light”]. More dangerous — the organization. This is the nucleus of a party. Their idea of “class unity” [requiring one party] I don’t believe. There’s a lack of honesty in it. This is the beginning of a division. The group can’t exist as a faction [fractzia], can’t put out pamphlets. As individuals we can leave them in the party.

Ben Gurion thus explicitly rejects the opposition’s emphasis on party unity: “There’s a lack of honesty in it. This is the beginning of a division.”<sup>18</sup> For him, similar ideologies exist outside the party, and the opposition group can be seen as facilitating a split towards the outside opponents of the party. He said almost as much in talking to the opposition when he asked if they could become a focus for anti-Zionist outlooks.

Thus, one striking feature of Ben Gurion’s comment is the organizational emphasis. However, Ben Gurion’s ideological observation is just as revealing. Like Shorer, he believes that “no single opinion is so bad,” but Ben Gurion is clearer than Shorer about the danger inherent in the totality of the opposition’s outlook: “This will simply smooth the path to *Haor*.” The journal, *Haor*, was produced by a Tel Aviv lawyer holding Trotskyite views. The journal seems, therefore, to have represented — like the opposition group — a mouthpiece for internationalist socialism, in which nationalism is definitely subordinated to socialism. Of course, there the Palestine Communist Party also fit this description; but Ben Gurion must have known the opposition routinely criticized the adventurism and dictatorial qualities of that party and of the Comintern generally. Thus the opposition group could not be said to “smooth the path” to the PCP or the Comintern. Nevertheless, Ben Gurion is expressing his discomfort with the privileging of internationalist socialism over national goals — without affiliating

---

<sup>18</sup> Ben Gurion’s comment on “their idea of class unity” could, out of context, refer to other aspects of their views (e.g., Jewish-Arab working class unity); but given the way he continues, it is clear he means the organization of the class: the party.

the group with the Comintern, or for that matter, even with any formal Trotskyite alternative, since *Haor* appeared to be the work of a few individuals, not a party.<sup>19</sup>

Lubianker [Lavon] also struggles with the issue of party ideology, and what constitutes grounds for expulsion. There are, indeed, times when the party can allow disagreement; but there has to be a common core [hut shidra meshtefet] of beliefs. “Although the party has not engaged in ideological clarifications — basic matters are still agreed upon. This group’s conception is Bundist.”<sup>20</sup> Also, the direction for development they envision differs from the party’s. So the question is whether the party can tolerate such perverse notions in its midst. “Lufban [editor of the party journal] would not be able to publish an article of theirs, in the branch members may not want to hear such views.” So, like Shorer, Lubianker wants to expel. But Lufban himself speaks up to draw the other conclusion from the loose-knit nature of party views. The party has specific views, and members are to accept its yoke; apart from this there can be a range of opinion within the party. But whether these individuals have accepted that party ideology, he does not clarify; probably he would have thought they had not accepted it, given the other opinions. In any case, considering them as individuals “there is no reason to persecute them [lerdof otam] since that will only solidify their positions.”

The Secretariat then adopted the position of Ben Gurion: “to break up the group as an organization within the party, to forbid its appearance as a group in speech and print.” However, they did not expel the individual members.

It was now up to the group to decide what to do. When the Central Committee met a month later (April 18), Shorer reported that the party had received three replies from the group: a protest to the Central Committee; and a public protest (presumably to the party journal). Finally, there was a letter “from one of the members of that group, Shlomo Tzirulnikov, in which he indicates that *he* intends to publish pamphlets that will serve as a Marxist forum for party members.” It may be that the other group members were more inclined to accept party discipline, at least for the moment. On the other hand,

---

<sup>19</sup> Many issues of *Haor* may be found in Israel’s National Library and other Israeli libraries. At least by the late thirties, the journal masthead read, “A political, economic and literary bi-weekly dedicated to issues of the workers without distinction by nation, people, religion or race.” My thinking about the role of *Haor* in Ben Gurion’s remarks profited from discussions with Nachum Egoz and Shlomo Egoz (son and grandson respectfully of Tzvi Oguz).

<sup>20</sup> It is curious that Lubianker’s analogy is quite different from Ben Gurion’s: *Haor*, which Ben Gurion saw as the crucial analogy, was not Bundist.

it may be, as Shorer goes on to interpret the letter, that this is simply a dodge, continuing the old group under a new label. “I suggest we don’t publish the letter in the paper. They can bring their protest to the branch or to the party council [moetzet hamiflaga]... We should not allow Tzirulnikov to publish such pamphlets since they will be the same...” as before. Ben Gurion suggests, and the Central Committee agree: let him put out the pamphlet, and we’ll judge it then.

A month later, in May 1932, the fourth pamphlet, indeed, appeared. It no longer was presented as the work of “a group within Mapai” but rather as “A forum for Marxist analysis [raayon] within Mapai.” The brief opening article by Tzirulnikov includes a statement of response to the party leaders’ decision.

A group of Mapai members put out several pamphlets which attempted to evaluate questions facing the working public from the point of view of the Marxist left. This produced an internal party struggle for these members, and this collective publication effort has ceased. This matter must be resented...especially because the [group’s] protest letter was not given a place in *Hapoel Hatzair* [the party journal]. ... The old formula, freedom of thought, unity of action [remains, and while]... one can argue about the place of factions in the party....[Still], if the process of unity...involves severe intolerance to consistently socialist views in the party — well, it is a very bad sign.

Tzirulnikov’s long article about Zionism and the Jewish working class (discussed earlier) also appeared in this issue. The upshot was that about two-thirds of the pamphlet was written by him. It is likely, then, that he personally was especially willing, or eager, to take on the leadership. In any case, with the exception of the substitution of wording in the subtitle, it is indeed impossible to see any difference between the fourth pamphlet, which supposedly responded to leadership dictates, and the third, which preceded those dictates. Whether the group’s other activities changed — seeking positions within the party, holding meetings for interested audiences — I can’t say.

In June, Shorer brought word to the Secretariat that this fourth pamphlet had appeared, under the new heading (“forum for Marxist thinking in Mapai”). The content is:

a collection of ideas and outlooks that are all absolutely opposite to the opinion of the party. All this requires, finally, the determination of a clear and decisive stand on the part of the party, and soon, since its impossible that they should put this out and not get a response from us for a long time.

The Secretariat agrees to take the issue to the Central Committee at its next meeting.

However, the matter didn't make it to the Central Committee then, and slipped to a back burner. Four months later the whole question exploded. The fifth pamphlet now appeared with several critical articles. There was another by Tzirulnikov; the contents were predictable from his earlier writing, but this time the whole was couched as a mocking analysis of Ben Gurion's many statements about the relationship between class and nation in connection with party directions:

So what is Ben Gurion's New Testament? ...[He] begins with a declaration that general Zionism is bankrupt, and ends in establishing the need for a Zionism generally national... Ben Gurion says "in Zionism, as in the Yishuv [the Jewish society in Palestine] we must see ourselves not only as the party of workers; but rather as the party of the nation.".... The national-constructivism that has ruled in the party, is transformed in the context of the developing capitalist conditions into national-reformism of the worst and most dangerous kind. *Sic transit.*

and so on, over eight double-columned pages. We can't be sure that it was this article that did the trick, but within two weeks of this fifth pamphlet's appearance, Ben Gurion himself raised the matter of the pamphlets at the Central Committee (on October 16<sup>th</sup>) as the first item on its agenda.

A pamphlet of the "opposition" group has again appeared. Why didn't we enact our decision, to remove them from the party? This pamphlet is just like one of the pamphlets of *Haor*, and we have to expel these people from the party without delay.

It is striking that when Ben Gurion searches for a way to classify the *Reshimot* pamphlet, he uses the identical referent that came to his mind seven months earlier —the journal *Haor*. But now there is a slight difference, perhaps significant to him in helping him resolve what to do. Earlier he had said of the group's statements, "This will simply smooth the path to *Haor*." Now he says, "This pamphlet is just like one of the pamphlets of *Haor*." The new *Reshimot* pamphlet is not a tendency in the dangerous direction of internationalism; it is in the same ideological space as *Haor*. Hence "we have to expel these people."

Shorer then reminded everyone that back in June they had agreed to bring the matter to the next meeting of the Central Committee. And within three days they had written to Tzirulnikov informing him that this would be done. “But, as is common with us, the question was removed from the agenda several times” and time passed. Here again, as earlier in the Secretariat, Sprinzak points out that “The decision to expel party members has to be taken on the basis of some procedure. We don’t yet have a set of regulations [takanon]. At a minimum the Central Committee needs to do this after adequate investigation. And there are many members here who haven’t yet even read the pamphlet.”

This is the first time that the issue comes to the Central Committee, and so it is the first time that Beryl Katznelson, who was not in the Secretariat, is involved. “I for one have not read it, yet I’m willing to rely on the members who have come and said they have read it and that these people must be expelled from the party. Of course, in a legally specified [hukit mesuyemet] way.” But Katznelson also wants the matter to serve “an educational benefit to the thousands of members in the party and outside it.” The decision has to be well formulated and to provide adequate clarification and be instructive. So, says Katznelson, one member has to be designated to bring such formulations to the next meeting.

Beilinson says he has read the pamphlet and agrees that the group has to be expelled. He asks whether Sprinzak thinks a trial is necessary. Sprinzak thinks not; “but this is an expulsion of members and a decision of the Central Committee. This is a matter that will be publicized in the party, and in the public generally. Something like this has to be done with full responsibility and deliberation.” The upshot is that Katznelson himself is designated to bring formulated conclusions to the next meeting of the Central Committee. That Katznelson was regarded as both a formulator of party ideology and an educator surely made the choice appear especially legitimate.

## KATZNELSON'S CONDEMNATION

He reported back eight days later on October 24, 1932. That meeting, too, opens with this item. Katznelson first presents his conclusion and then his draft of a text to be released to the public. The conclusion is illuminating for its tone.

As instructed, I reviewed two pamphlets of *Reshimot Sozialistiyot* [he read the fifth, and probably the fourth]. I join the opinion that their editors and supporters have no place within our party. The matter is to be viewed not as an intellectual deviation on one detail, but rather as something completely alien to the chief values of our movement. Their very presence in the party appears at first sight as a curiosity; but this is more than a curiosity: here is an infiltration [hadira] of an alien and enemy body, whose purpose is to utilize moments of confusion and weakness..."

The accusation of conspiratorial motives, aimed at exploiting weakness within the party, is even more explicit than in Ben Gurion's earlier evaluations. And in Ben Gurion's comment, "I don't believe the claims...this is dishonest," there is a certain ambiguity as to whether he thinks the group is deceiving themselves or trying to deceive the party. By contrast, in Katznelson's statement there is no such ambiguity; he ascribes the worst motives. And so Katznelson proposes that the Central Committee release the following statement — which clarifies his concerns.

The propaganda conducted in these pamphlets, conducted explicitly and in a hidden way stands in complete contradiction to the principles and values of Mapai... Denials of Hebrew immigration, alienation from the needs of the Jewish masses [in Palestine] who seek work and a homeland, elimination of the working settlement and of the creative constructivist efforts of the Palestinian workers' movement, negation of the Hebrew worker's right to employment. The Hebrew worker's life-struggle for the right to work (this is the struggle necessitated by fate [mechuyevet-hagoral] without which the Jewish worker has no part and place in the socialist struggle and its realization) the *Reshimot* group sees as "a clear and sharp contradiction to the elementary demands of class solidarity," and the efforts of the Hebrew worker to guarantee his right to work as "the politics of a narrow nationalism"; the "national-political goals" of the workers movement as a contradiction to cooperation with the Arab laborers, and the central location accorded to Palestine by the movement as the "original sin" of Poale Zion, the removal of which will open "a chance to the unity of the Jewish workers movement."

Holding these positions, "The *Reshimot* group thereby aligned themselves with the camp of the enemies, open and disguised, of the Hebrew worker in Palestine, and in doing the

work of distortion and misdirection they have not restrained themselves from disguising themselves as members of Mapai.” And so “they have put themselves” outside the ranks of Mapai.

Thus, the positions of the group amount to a call for the end of constructivism (based on cooperation with the WZO), restriction of Jewish immigration, and of the end of the “Hebrew Labor” campaign. These amount to a denial of the “masses who seek work and a homeland” and “the Hebrew worker’s life-struggle for the right to work...necessitated by fate.” Katznelson avoids mentioning explicitly that the “Hebrew Labor” campaign closes out Arabs, or that this policy will inflame them; he has his own terminology. And at the end he says the members are disguised as Mapai party members. Here again, the emphasis is on conspiracy and leftist infiltration. Shorer seems to have noticed just this emphasis, for he now suggests removing the phrase about “disguising themselves as members of Mapai” because it makes the group appear as provocateurs, and “for such an accusation there is at present no basis and there’s no need to put this added blot upon them.”

Committee members also debate how wide an expulsion: Shorer wants those in charge of *Reshimot* and their regular supporters out. Ben Gurion, by contrast, wants simply to reword the last sentence so that the group itself is removed from the party. Aharonowitz suggests listing the names of the expelled members, and Shorer assures him that will in fact be done later “together with the committee of the Tel Aviv branch.” Berl Locker notes that “in such cases it’s common” to mention the possibility of appeal; Ben Gurion sees “no need to detail this in advance. If the expelled group will appeal to the [party] congress [veidah] the presidium [nesiut] will appoint a committee to investigate the appeal.” The decision was therefore taken to expel the group from Mapai, and to announce the decision with Katznelson’s text, as modified, in the party journal.

We should pause to reflect on the hesitations about, and criteria for, expulsion. Recall Sprinzak’s insistence on a procedure and on clear reasons, and recall the ruminations of other leaders that no individual view of the opposition is so terrible, but that taken together they have nothing to do with the party. In essence, after all, the clear procedure amounted to receiving the reading and opinion of Berl Katznelson. The listing of reasons for expulsion amounted to recounting some of the implications the party



claimed to find in opposition views. In addition, Berl added, but others rejected, the claim that the opposition were cynically infiltrating the party. And such “educational purpose” as Berl wanted to achieve was presumably met by the letter he drafted. By contrast, Ben Gurion seems to have expressed an overriding interest in organization: the group constituted a potential “fraction” — as judged by views, tone and, “more dangerous,” organization; if they had agreed to disband and keep quiet, well and good. Since they were unwilling to do that, they had to be expelled. The announcement appeared in *Hapoel Hatzair* on October 28, 1932. And this was the end of the party’s explicit dealings with the group. That is, group members did not appeal to the party and, while they continued to publish and hold also some meetings, this activity was now entirely outside the party.

## **CONCLUSION: THE GROUP MEMBERS REACT TO THE EXPULSION**

In January 1933, the group printed the sixth *Reshimot* pamphlet, this one subtitled simply “A Forum for Marxist Thought,” without the added phrase “in Mapai.” On the last two pages of the pamphlet, they print the announcement of the Central Committee, expelling them from the party and respond, showing that they are not to be outdone in the attribution of evil intentions.

[M]ost of the items mentioned in the announcement of Central Committee Mapai are intentional lies and fabrications based upon the pathetic and unconscionable ground of combined distortions...In our pamphlets, our appearances at party discussions, at the investigation held by the Mapai Secretariat early in the year, we emphasized that we support the principle of immigration, entry into the labor force and settlement in Palestine, but that we oppose the ways in which Mapai today deals with these questions — the ways of closed-in nationalism, organic unity with the Zionist bourgeoisie, opposition to democratization of the country and its government...

Most of the response repeated the essentials of the meeting with the Mapai leaders.

The response also noted that in their expulsion the Central Committee violated party democracy, a fundamental of socialism and the International, “and follows in the same path of strangling all free thought and attempt at criticism of accepted ways that the Comintern parties follow, destroying thereby the workers movement.” And finally the

group announced that it had protested its expulsion to the Socialist International. That protest, in turn, takes much of its language from the pamphlets themselves.

Group members soon refashioned themselves as the “Organization of Internationalist Socialists in Palestine,” which put out pamphlets and held meetings until the early forties, a tiny splinter group on the left, very much smaller than Poale Tzion Smole or the Communists, for example.<sup>21</sup> If the International ever took up their plea, I have found no record of it.

---

<sup>21</sup> Peretz Merhav (134) says this was “mostly a group interested in intellectual clarification and propaganda.” They took an active part, he notes, in opposing the Ben-Gurion—Jabotinsky agreement; later they “were active in getting support, help and volunteers for the Spanish Civil War.” Later still, the group devoted “all its efforts towards support of the Soviet Union’s struggle against Nazi Germany,” acting, for all its disagreements, with the Communists. Disagreements existed among its members “especially concerning the evaluation of the Zionist enterprise” and this disagreement “became sharper during the cooperation with the PCP [Palestine Communist Party] and brought about the disbanding of the group in 1943. Its members “found their way, with hesitations” among the ranks of Mapam [the left group that split from Mapai in the mid-forties] or the Communists; “still others remained outside all parties.” Merhav cites no sources other than the pamphlets themselves.

## REFERENCES

Cohen, Mitchell. 1987. *Zion and State: Nation, Class and the Shaping of Modern Israel*, New York: Columbia University Press.

*Haor [The Light]*. Bi-weekly published in Tel Aviv; v. 6, 1937. Available in Harvard College Library.

Hattis, Susan Lee. 1970. *The Bi-national Idea in Palestine during Mandatory Times*, Haifa: Shikmona.

Merhav, Peretz. 1967. *Toldot Tenuat Hapoalim beErtez-Yisrael [History of the Israeli Labor Movement]*, Merhavia, Israel: A. S. Barnes and Company.

Metzer, Jacob. 1998. *The Divided Economy of Mandatory Palestine*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Od, Baruch. 1977. "Ha'Avukah': Opositzia be'Achdut HaAvodah' HaHistorit" ["The 'Avuka': Opposition in the historic 'Achdut HaAvoda'."]. MA thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

"Protocols of Meetings of the Secretariat and Central Committee of Mapai" for August 30, 1931-October 24, 1932. Available at The Archives of the Labor Party, Beit Beryl, Kfar Sava, Israel.

*Reshmot Sozialistiyot [Socialist Notes]*. Stencils May and September, 1930; printed in Tel Aviv, August, 1931; May and October, 1932; January, 1933. Available at the Lavon Institute Archives, Tel Aviv.

Shapira, Anita. 1984. *Beryl: The Biography of a Socialist Zionist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1996. "'Black Night — White Snow': Attitudes of the Palestinian Labor Movement to the Russian Revolution" in Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira, (Eds), *Essential Papers on Zionism*, New York: New York University Press.

Shapiro, Yonathan. 1976. *The Formative Years of the Israeli Labor Party: The Organization of Power: 1919-1930*, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Shimoni, Gideon. 1995. *The Zionist Ideology*, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Teveth, Shabtai. 1987. *Ben Gurion: The Burning Ground, 1886-1948*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Tzirulnikov, Shlomo. 1985. *Al Atzmi, Shnot hatehila vehabuz* [*About Myself: the Years of Glory and Shame*], Tel Aviv: Mabat Press.