

THE WAR AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN ISRAEL

Hans Lebrecht*

(The first part of this article, which originally appeared in Novy Mir, No. 1 of 1971, recounts the situation in Israel-Arab relations following the cease-fire of August 1970.

The second part, given here slightly shortened, deals with the internal situation in Israel. Ed, LM).

THE war cost a lot of blood and enormous amounts of money. This year's budget deficit, originally estimated at 600 million Israeli pounds (3.5 IP=one US dollar), has actually exceeded 1,000 million pounds. Officially, this is attributed to what is described in Israel as 'defence', in other words, to the continued aggression and occupation of Arab lands. The foreign currency reserves, which in the summer of 1967 exceeded 900 million dollars, have now dwindled to 400 million. After all, a Phantom bomber costs 3.5 million dollars, plus heavy interest charges for the credit.

Israel could not, of course, bear the cost of its adventurous policy but for the lavish support of the American and other imperialist circles and the financial assistance rendered by the Zionist organisations. But to attempt to finance the insane policy of strength is like attempting to fill a bottomless barrel, and this support, disguised as 'aid', will not last for long.

In an interview published in the Israeli newspaper *Davar* (October 9, 1970), Finance Minister Pinkhas Sappir said that Israel's war expenditures alone in the next two years would amount to 1,600 million dollars in foreign currency, or 800 million dollars a year. Israel hoped to receive 1,000 million dollars from Zionist organisations and the American imperialists. Where would the rest come from? The Minister gave no answer.

Before granting Israel the last big loan as part of their financial 'aid' for the aggression, the Americans demanded that Israel undertake extra expenditures itself. In reply, Sappir and Golda Meir did not come to Washington empty-handed. In August 1970, the 'defence-budget' was swollen by another 1,175 million Israeli pounds, amounting altogether to more than 6,000 million pounds.

* Hans Lebrecht is an Israeli journalist.

This tremendous sum, according to the Finance Minister's statement published in the newspaper *Maariv* on August 21, 1970, amounted to 30 per cent of the gross national product. The war expenses alone swallow up about 55 per cent of Israel's budget. This, in addition to interest payments on debts incurred earlier for the purchase of arms and the repayment of part of those debts. Together, these two items of expenditure make up more than 70 per cent of the Israeli expense budget.

Is it any wonder that the burden of taxation steadily grows and the economy is under mounting pressure, leading to a constant rise of prices and reduction of expenditures on the social services, education, health, etc.

But this is not all. The government, which calls itself a 'Labour government', is actually guided by the interests of the bourgeoisie, the foreign capitalist monopolies in the first place. It therefore exempts the banks, the big enterprises and foreign investments from taxation either fully or in considerable part and even guarantees them minimum profits. The greater part of the burden of taxation as well as the cost of repaying debts, must therefore be borne by the working masses. This takes the form of a countless number of direct and indirect taxes. The interminable growth of the turnover tax and customs duties keeps prices soaring. The prices of consumer goods and food products alone, according to official figures, went up by more than 10 per cent in 1970. Actually, the price rises were even higher than officially admitted as statistics invariably undergo a certain amount of doctoring.

Even before the August increase in the turnover tax and the subsequent rise in prices, the situation of the working masses in Israel was far from satisfactory. According to official data for 1969, the monthly incomes of 51 per cent of wage workers' families were below the subsistence level established by the Board of Statistics. The government social security director published a report in July 1970 stating that 160,000 Jewish children below the age of 14 (or about a quarter of all Jewish children in Israel) were constantly underfed, while others were actually starving. As to the Arab children who are avowedly discriminated against, no official statistics concerning them are ever published.

Such are the realities in what Zionist propaganda loudly proclaims to be 'a paradise for Jews'. But it is a true paradise for both Jewish and non-Jewish big business.

As real wages have steadily declined over the last several years (the official data do not always reflect the real situation), the profits

of the banks and the industrialist tycoons have increased from year to year. The officially registered banking profits, that is profits from declared incomes, and there are plenty of incomes remaining undeclared to evade taxation, were 45 per cent higher in 1969 than in the previous year. In that same year the industrial magnates, with the energetic support of the 'Labour' government, pocketed profits amounting to 1,300 million Israeli pounds (again discounting the millions hidden from the tax authorities), 30 per cent more than the year before.

To justify this policy the government has advanced the following thesis: 'Limitation of consumption by the masses is required to finance Israel's "security" and lessens the trade deficit.' However, the workers often complain: 'The war costs money, and our rulers are putting the entire burden of its cost on us.'

Is it any wonder, therefore, that wave after wave of strikes and other actions for higher wages are sweeping Israel, the same as other capitalist countries? During the first nine months of 1970, 98,000 workers and office employees took part in strikes, 127 strikes lasting more than 24 hours each, and all of them together causing a loss of 172,000 man-days. For comparison, it should be said that in 1969 there were 90 strikes, involving 38,000 men and costing 72,000 man-days. There were also 44 partial strikes in 1970.

During the last three months of the past year, after all the big leaps in taxes and prices, the workers began to defend their rights more vigorously. How many times were the towns of Israel plunged in darkness night after night! The technicians at the power stations were on strike. In fact, in the autumn of 1970 about 100,000 factory and office workers took an active part in the class struggle: 100,000 is 15 per cent of the total work force.

The El Al national airline has more than once had to cancel most of its international flights because of strikes by its ground personnel. The secondary schools too had to be closed owing to strikes by teachers. Partial strikes continuing for many days were conducted by the port workers of Ashdod and Haifa during the height of the season (the export of citrus fruits), enraging the employers and the government.

In the middle of November such a strike ended in a victory for the workers, who won a 24 per cent wage rise. After this Ben Aharon, General Secretary of the Confederation of Labour of Israel (Histadrut), and one of the leaders of the governmental 'Labour Party', headed by Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan, made a statement to the effect that this rise in nominal wages did not even make up for

the loss in real wages. This was the first official recognition of the fact that the workers' standard of living had been systematically declining.

The Communists on the shop floors, the Communist members of the Knesset and trade union councils, who maintain close contacts with the factory and office workers, are the most consistent defenders of the interests of the workers. In the urban industrial centres they distribute leaflets and newspapers containing concrete demands by workers of individual factories and complete industries.

Measures are taken one after another designed to paralyse the activities of the Communist Party of Israel. Hesitating at nothing, the rulers of Israel bait and persecute the members of the Communist Party and throw them out of work for entertaining views offensive to Zionism. The active members of the Party are victimised particularly. With the backing of the trade union bosses and the secret police, the employers fire Communists who organise strikes or are members of the workers' councils. In October 1967, a vile attempt was made on the life of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Israel, Meir Vilner, who had consistently opposed the aggressive policy of the government. The Communist Party of Israel will not be intimidated either by repressions or by Zionist slander against it, and the workers continue to put their trust in it.

What Israel and its people need is peace rather than 'perpetual' war. The efforts of all peaceful and progressive forces in the world, of the Soviet Union and the socialist states, of the international labour and the anti-imperialist liberation movements, are aimed at converting the temporary truce in the Middle East into a just and lasting peace. . . . The democratic, peace-loving and progressive forces of Israel—the Communists, the working masses and the creative intelligentsia—have the same interests at heart and are fighting to achieve this goal. True, the ruling circles have so far succeeded in duping the majority of the country's population by their false chauvinist propaganda, but the day will inevitably come when the people of Israel will be able to proceed with the building of a new—peace-loving and progressive—Israel.

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