

Israel moves right (again)

TURNING BACK THE CLOCK

Israel is set to be run by the most right-wing government in its history. In the protracted negotiations which followed the indecisive November election, both the Likud and Labour parties offered big concessions to the reactionary religious parties which now hold the balance of power. This reflects far more than the opportunism of the major parties; it symbolises the ever-rightward shift in Israeli politics. A year after the start of the *intifada* (Palestinian uprising) the Zionist state is further than ever from making concessions. The new coalition seems sure to lay into the Palestinians with renewed vigour.

can be no compromise between the existence of the Zionist state and the Palestinian demand for self-determination.

Israel's Labour Zionist founders created a state which can survive only by discriminating against Palestinians. Israel was a colonial settler state built on Palestinian soil, founded at the expense of the indigenous inhabitants. In 1948, Zionists carved Israel out of Palestine by forcing 750 000 Palestinians off their land. Ever since, the Zionist state has ruthlessly countered any expression of the Palestinians' will to be free.

Israel is inevitably a bastion of reactionary beliefs. A

state. The Labour Zionists created the Histadrut, a huge Israeli business conglomerate which included a 'trade union department'. Labour leaders organised violent pickets to prevent Jewish employers from hiring Palestinian labour, and to stop Jewish housewives buying Palestinian produce. Today the Histadrut still protects the privileges of Jewish workers against Palestinians.

The Six Day War of 1967, when Israel defeated its Arab neighbours and occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights, was a watershed in the contest between Labour and the revisionists. The occupation brought much of the Palestinian working class into the Israeli labour market. Israel's Likud-supporting private capitalists and small businessmen were able to prosper by exploiting cheap Arab labour. Israeli workers could climb upwards on the backs of Palestinians who did the menial jobs. At the same time, the incorporation of Palestinian workers into the economy brought Israel's enemies close to the heart of the state. These factors combined to harden reactionary attitudes, and contributed to the first Likud victory in 1977.

Right turn

The current crisis inside Israel has pushed it still further to the right. For most Israelis, the 12-month *intifada* has confirmed the need to crack down harder on the Palestinians. As Israel's economic problems mount up, much of the Histadrut business sector is threatened with collapse, and thousands of jobs could go. The response of many Israeli workers is to seek to protect their privileges at the Palestinians' expense.

Israel's secular right-wing movement has grown in recent years, around figures like General Rehavam Ze'evi, whose Moledet (Motherland) Party openly demands the expulsion of all Palestinians, and Rabbi Meir Kahane, whose ultra-chauvinist Kach Party was banned from the elections.

The most telling shift, however, is the rise of the religious Zionists. They oppose anything modern, insist on the subordination of women, and are determined to preserve the 'purity' of Israel. They have played a part in every Israeli government. But over the past decade, they have moved steadily rightwards, from an alliance with Labour towards Likud and beyond. This is significant because the religious Zionists' main base is not among orthodox Jews,

but within the predominantly Oriental Jewish working class. The National Religious Party, representing the old establishment, is being superseded by ethnically-based fundamentalist parties. Some religious Zionists also support the fanatically anti-Palestinian Kach.

Moral collapse

Secular Zionism is now well on the way towards becoming a political minority, as the religious Zionists gain influence and the major parties move on to their terrain. The growth of religious mysticism is a product of the crisis of the Zionist state. The longer Israel survives, the harder it becomes to justify its existence. The tragedy of the Holocaust has provided Zionists with their most powerful case. But as Israel lurches from one military adventure to the next, the old arguments about escaping from oppression begin to wear thin. Zionists are forced to plunder biblical myths for arguments to justify their own oppression of Palestine. The election shows Zionism in a state of moral collapse, and taking flight into mysticism.



Israel is in crisis, and mysticism is on the rise

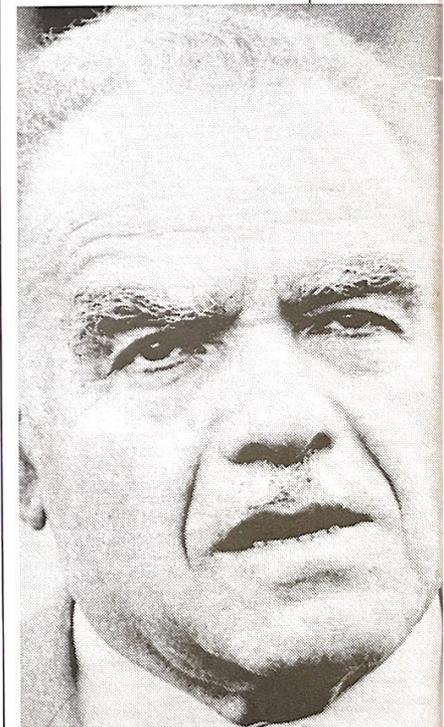
Just how far Israeli opinion has moved can be seen by putting current events in some historical perspective. Yitzhak Shamir, the Likud leader, used to be known as the spokesman for Zionism's far-right fringe. Now he represents the Zionist mainstream. Zionism has traditionally been split between two main strands. Labour controlled Israel from the foundation of the state in 1948 until the 1977 elections. The election of the first Likud government 11 years ago was hailed as an historic victory for 'revisionist Zionism'. The revisionists earned their name by going beyond the original Zionist programme, and claiming the East as well as the West Bank of the River Jordan for Israel.

Many critics of Israeli policy hope the Zionists can be persuaded to make concessions to the Palestinians. But a look at trends in Israeli politics confirms that there

society built on the oppression of another people breeds the most backward ideas. Ordinary Israelis are brutalised by living in a siege state, on a permanent war footing against the Arab world. Reaction is rife inside Israel. A recent poll showed that 49 per cent of Israelis want all Palestinians driven out of the occupied West Bank and Gaza, and scattered around the Middle East.

Through its 40-year history, Israel has had to take increasingly drastic measures to preserve its artificial existence. The dynamic in Israeli politics has thus moved to the right, from the early years of Labour rule, to the rise of Likud and the revisionists, and now further towards the extreme.

When Israel was founded, Labour began consolidating a reactionary bloc in Israeli society. Labour Zionism aimed to integrate a loyal Jewish working class into the



Yitzhak Shamir: from extreme to mainstream

Zionism has entered an intensely dangerous phase. A society that is prepared to adopt the most repressive customs and laws, and to turn back the clock on civilisation, will stop at nothing to secure its survival. It will give no quarter to its enemies. Those who look to Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians today are swimming against the tide of history.

Daniel Nassim