

rekakh and the 18th conference

REKAKH, the Israeli Communist List, is the only mass-party inside Israel to defend non-or-anti-Zionist positions. As such, it has become the obvious representative of the Arab minority inside the country and has adopted a program defending a just peace in the Middle East, the existence of the State of Israel as a nation-state, the fulfillment of the national rights of the Palestinian Arabs, (including those living inside the "green line" or pre 1967 borders; the Palestinians in the occupied territories; and all Palestinian refugees).

REKAKH has a predominantly Arab membership but its cadres and leadership are constituted on a 50-50 basis, by Arabs and Jews. So is, usually, the Knesset or Parliamentary representation of the party. Those Israeli citizens, Jews as Arabs, who adhere to the party must accept the existence of Israel but oppose the policy of the Establishment as well as Zionist ideology.

The keynote speech at the 18th National Conference of the Communist Party, which was held in October 1976, was given by Knesset Member and one of the Party's leaders, Meir Vilner. His position, reportedly challenged by a strong minority inside the Party, but nevertheless decisive, can be resumed in the following quote, taken from that keynote speech:

"...The State of Israel is a Jewish State, since it expresses the fulfillment of the Jewish People's striving and right to self-determination. This right was recognized, together with the Arab Palestinian's right to self-determination, in a Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 29 November, 1947.

"But the State of Israel is not just a Jewish State, it is also a state which has a Jewish majority and an Arab national minority, which is very considerable.....the official statements contending that since the State is Zionist, the Arab population cannot enjoy full rights and has to be deprived of its Land in favor of the Zionist settlement and of the Judaization of the country - such a view cannot be tolerated and proves the racist character of these Zionist premises."

And further on:

"The Arab population in Israel, as a national minority inside Israel,

has full right to struggle against a policy of discrimination and national oppression, for equality of rights, civil and national, and the Arab population inside Israel indeed struggles for equality of its rights in the framework of the Israeli State.

"The Arab population in Israel, which is part of the Arab Palestinian people, has full rights to struggle for the national rights of the Arab Palestinian people, against Occupation and for a just and firm peace...." (ZU HADEREKH, 22 December 76).

STATISTICS

The Party has some 1200 full-fledged members; 60% of those, at least, are Arab. However, the Arab influence is far bigger, as most of the Party's elec-



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torate comes from the Arab Palestinian minority inside Israel. In the 1973 elections to the Knesset, REKAKH got 43,000 out of a total of 53,000 active Arab voters in Israel. The Party's influence on the Arab masses is well known to the authorities, and has never in the past been grounds for official worry. Only in the last two years, since Israeli Arabs have started mass-actions and protestations, strikes and have for the first time rioted to the takeover of Arab tilled and Arab owned land, has the Communist influence become both a scapegoat and a scarecrow, for the Zionist Establishment. This has been particularly apparent since the Day of the Earth troubles of last March-April (1976).

The reasons are not Security-based but rather - electoral. In 1977, some 210,000 Arabs will have the right to participate in the elections to the Knesset, i.e., some 8.5% of all voters. The Arabs in Israel have, then, the theoretical possibility to elect some 10 to 11 (out of 120) Knesset-

members. In the 1973 elections, REKAKH got 4 mandates, mostly elected in the Arab sector; the rest of the Arab vote in Israel went to three Arab lists connected with the ruling Labor HAAVODA party; one mandate went to the MAFDAL, the Jewish National Religious Party, that controls the budgets and power inherent in the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. One and a half mandates went to the HAAVODA party proper. There is little doubt that in 1977 the Communists will obtain far more than in the past. Moreover, not only quantity will rise, quality, too, will improve. REKAKH 1977 is a far cry from REKAKH 1976 or even 1973. At the same time, the Zionist

parties have lost face and reputation, both in the Jewish and the Arab sectors of Israel, and most particularly has been struck the Arab Policy of the Labor-led majority.

FIVE "BLACK" LISTS

The Establishment seeks to counter this, for itself, negative development by sending to the electoral battle no less than five Arab lists: one led by Sayef A-Din Zuabi and Sheikh Jabar Muadi, a Druze. This list won two seats in the 1973-elected Knesset. Another list is put forward in the name of the resettled Israeli Bedouins (one seat in 1973). A third list is presented by a senior adviser to the Minister of Trade and Industry, Advocate Kamal Kassem. List No.4 is led by Mahmud Abassi, a writer, and one of the heads of the "Peace and Change" group, also affiliated with the Labor party. The last, probable, Arab list may be headed by Jamal Trabiyeh, Mayor of the Sakhnin municipal council. (YEDIOTH, 1.12).

The appearance of these lists reminds one strikingly of the racist document published by Mr Kenig, District Officer for the Northern Area at the Ministry of the Interior, who wrote inter alia: ".....A sister party should be created by the Labor party and inside the sister party the leading ideas should be Equality, Humanism, Culture and Language, Social Struggle and rising aloft the banner of Peace in our area. The authorities should prepare A HIDDEN RULING PRESENCE IN THIS PARTY." (See Kenig Report, I&P No.52, our emphasis).

Following Itzhak Rabin's statement on the Cabinet resignation, Knesset Member Meir Vilner used the Parliamentary tribune to outline his party's main program as follows:

"...The peace program which we propose is the right one and the most realistic one. Israel can get, at best, the 4 of June 1976 borders, in the framework of a peace settlement with international guarantees. More wars will not grant Israel more land, only more dead..." going on to depict in detail the Resolutions of the 18th Conference, Vilner then said: "We shall go to the Knesset elections in a front-list for peace and democracy, a Jewish-Arab front list, based on a program which will not adopt our maximalist positions but only five main points: A just peace, based on full recognition of Israel's rights and sovereignty inside the pre-1967 borders, and on full Israeli territorial integrity; recognition of a Palestinian independent State in the West Bank and in the Gaza strip and, of course, in the Arab part of Jerusalem; A just solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees; Free navigation towards Israel, by vessels of all nationalities; and all this in the framework of contractual agreements. This is point No. 1. "Point No.2: Defending all democratic rights. No.3: Defending the Rights of the Workers. No.4: Ensuring full equality of rights, both national and civil, for the Arab population in Israel. No.5: an end to discrimination between Oriental and Occidental Jews. (ZU HADEREKH, 22 Dec.76).

The reasons given for adopting this minimum, peace-front program may be found in a Report to the 18th Party Conference by the Central Committee of REKAKH, and read at

the conference on the 15-18th of December. A wide front to the electoral campaign is necessary, the Central Committee estimated then, because the peace forces in Israel suffer from one main weakness - a lack of unity. Struggling for peace one may unite in battle Jews and Arabs, Communists and Zionists, Religious persons and others, since the main divide in Israel is not along Communist-Zionist lines but rather a class and political separation: workers and Capitalists, peace forces and war elements, democratic forces and those leading to Fascism.

According to the Central Committee of REKAKH, the struggle for peace is linked to the struggle for the workers' interests. The dire economic situation of the Israeli masses is, first and foremost, the results of the fact that Israel is a class state and that Government policy is a class-policy favoring the Capitalists - according to this Report. The regime lets the working classes carry the brunt of military expenditure, and the capitalists get rich. The Central Committee sees such military expenditure as the most serious aspect of the economic crisis; since 1973 expenditure grew amazingly, as the 1976/77 budget earmarks two thirds of its 85 billion-Lirah budget for military, and militarily-linked expenditure. As a direct result, the budget for educational expenditure was cut, in the years 1972-1976 and according to official statistics, from 10.5% of the national budget to 5.3%; Health - from 3.1% to 2.5%; Housing - from 6.8% to 3.9%. Taxation, particularly indirect taxation, also rose. The government started, on 1 July 1976, a new Added Value Tax, which immediately caused basic staples to rise. The government also cut subsidies to basic staples. The first signs of lowered production and of unemployment are felt this year. The picture, in the fall of 1976, is rather black, in Israel: the country has yearly importations worth eight billion dollars, and exports goods for about half this amount. Therefore, it is expected that Israel's national debt will grow to a staggering nine billion dollars, by 1 January 1977..

The Report concludes by stating that the main reason for this are immense quantities of arms bought by the regime; American economic grants and loans (half and half of each kind of US assistance); and all this intended only for payment of American produced armaments sold to Israel. In point of fact, Israel gets weapons, not dollars from the American government - and is forced to incur considerable debts to ensure their payment and interest paid on the American loans. (ZU HADEREKH, 22 December 1976).

Therefore, the Party estimates that only a just peace can lead to social redressment; and for this reason it is willing to go to the elections with other non-Communist, even Zionist groups. The question is - will the Communist Party find any willing, and important partners for such a peace-front?

SHASSI'S AND ELIAV'S REACTIONS

Three factors must be mentioned in this context. First, the adhering of SHASSI (The Socialist Israeli Left group - an outcome of the demantelling of SIAH, members of which went to MOKED) to the proposed



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REKAKH-led peace-front. SHASSI, a small but very active socialist group, will remain independent but wage a common electoral campaign with REKAKH.

More significant in influence if not in numbers is the telegram of greetings sent to the 18th REKAKH Conference by the Socialist Independent Party (Zionist) led by Knesset Members Arieh Eliav and Masha Freedman. As well as another telegram sent by the populist BLACK PANTHERS movement which delegated to the 18th Conference its left-wing leader, Charlie Bitton, who stated that "our Movement will struggle hand in hand with the Communist Party against the dangers of Fascism". (At the same time, the BLACK PANTHERS officially stated they would go to the elections alone, and even held talks, simultaneously, to no avail, with General Yigael Yadin's DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT and with General Ariel Sharon's right-wing SHLOMTZION.

ARAB COUNTRIES COMMUNISTS STAND

Also significant, are the positions coming to the surface in greetings sent to the 18th Conference by Com-

munist Parties in the Arab countries. The Communists of Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Morocco sent greetings; even more important, the Jordanian Communist Party, and the Palestinian Communist Organization, which acts clandestinely inside the Occupied Territories, wrote.

The Jordanian Communist Party's communique stated, among others: "We underscore with the greatest satisfaction that both our Parties have identical views on basic problems and concerning a just and realistic solution to the ME conflict and to the Palestinian problem. This joint position was expressed in a joint statement, published by both our parties in July 1976".

(The joint statement of the Jordanian Communist Party and of REKAKH included a call for a just and realistic solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict; based on UN resolutions, Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, the creation of a Palestinian state besides Israel and a solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees). (ZU HADEREKH, 2 August 1976).

"Our Party stands unhesitatingly at the side of the Palestinian Resistance and at that of the national, progressive movements in Lebanon, Morocco, against the plots of Imperialism and Reaction," the Jordanian Communist document goes on to say, "Our Party struggles towards an independent national rule in Jordan which can fulfill its national duties against Israeli

occupation and will prove its solidarity with the Palestinian movement".

The Palestinian Communist Organization, sending its greetings from the West Bank where it works underground, said among others: "Our Communist Organization in the West Bank fulfills the tasks ordered by the Central Committee of our Party (i.e. the Jordanian Communist Party). Our Movement acts according to the joint document published by the leadership of the Jordanian and the Israeli Communist Parties. Our Organization sees as its main task increasing the struggle against Israeli occupation, for freedom and the return of lands conquered in 1967, for the creation of a Palestinian state on that land, and for Palestinian political return to their land."

19 Communist parties throughout the world also were present at the 18th Conference. At their head: a delegation from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, headed by N. Axionov, who stated on this opportunity that the Soviet Union "was ready to renew diplomatic relations with the State of Israel as soon as Israel will drop its aggressive policy and will adopt a policy of peace and of good neighborhood with the Arab states".

Also noteworthy: quite to the contrary of what is usual in the Israeli press, that tends to tuck away in small corners newsreports on the non-Zionist opposition, the Conference of the Communist Party was widely covered in all newsmedia. ●

new general strike on west bank

A new wave of strikes and protest-actions broke out in the West Bank in December 1976. Participation was perhaps the widest yet: businessmen, Mayors, workers, agricultural workers as well as students and high school pupils started a series of demonstrations against Israeli occupation. The first act opened with a businessmen strike, in which storekeepers protested against the imposition of the new Israeli Added Value Tax which Israel had adopted in the summer but imposition of which in the Occupied Territories had been postponed in the wake of former general strikes.

On 4 December the Chamber of Commerce called upon its members to hold a strike, and at the same time approached the Military Authorities with a request to stop application of the new tax until April 1977, hoping to find meanwhile some kind of arrangement which would free the Territories from the AVT, altogether.

Only Hebron held a full-dress general strike on 6 December, according to YEDIOTH of 7 12 76.

On 7 December the strike widened, particularly in Nablus. Hundreds of high school pupils started throwing stones at Security Forces, piled up rubble and put up barricades, then proceeding to burn tires, in the time-honored protest-style of the Occupied Territories. All shops in central Nablus were closed. The Military Governor, Lieutenant Colonel Yossi Cohen, ordered a curfew to be imposed on this part of town. The Kasbah, at which entrances heavy gates had been installed last year by the Security Forces, was cut off and several "provocators" were arrested. Meanwhile, the Nablus Municipal Council had held a meeting, at which the Chamber of Commerce members and those of the Trade Unions participated, deciding to organize action coordinated with the

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