



# Israel: History of a Colonial Settler State

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A Marxist analysis of the political and economic background of the Israeli state and how the creation of it was a racist act supported by Imperialism. Zionism, as a colonial settler movement during the first part of the 20th century, had to be strategically allied to one imperialist power or another. Not only did these powers provide the funds for settlement but more importantly they controlled the Middle East. British imperialism was hegemonic there from 1918 until 1947-53 when it was supplanted by the USA.

The conflict between Zionism and Britain was not an anti-imperialist struggle by the former. Rather, it was a conflict provoked by a switch of policy by Britain in 1939.

By then British imperialism accepted that in order to maintain control over strategic resources, such as the Suez canal, rail and air routes and the oil fields of Iraq and the Gulf, it would have to oversee the creation of pliant Arab semi-colonial regimes.

This involved propping up the monarchies of Egypt, Iran, Transjordan, Iraq and the Gulf states. But this in turn meant scaling down Britain's commitment to the Zionists.

This change was evident from 1936, when the Palestinian uprising indicated the threat of Arab nationalism. But it was retarded by the outbreak of World War Two and the support for Britain given by the Zionists. But during the war the Zionist right prepared for the eventual conflict with Britain.

While the Irgun guerrilla group suspended operations against the British in the war the 'Stern Gang' (LEHY) did not and even tried to make contacts with the fascists.

While the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem helped the SS in the war, Irgun and Haganah fought with the British. This helped transform Haganah into a professional armed force. Meanwhile the British disarmed and crushed the organisations of the Arabs in Palestine.

With the end of the war the conflict between Britain and Zionism resumed. The Zionists lobbied hard with US imperialism to get immediate permission for 100,000 survivors of the holocaust to be allowed into Palestine.

But the dominant Arabist faction within the British ruling class aimed to block this and negotiate a partition of Palestine between the Zionists and Transjordan, which would allow a strategic military presence for Britain.

But Britain both underestimated the strength of the new US-Zionist alliance and the resistance of the Palestinians to this plan. Three years of struggle to stop 'illegal' immigration, to suppress both Arab and Zionist 'terrorism' failed completely.

In February 1947 Britain announced it would end its mandate by August 1948. In fact, it did withdraw unilaterally in May 1948 in order to try and realise their plans by proxy, by co-ordinating an invasion of the so-called 'Arab armies'. In truth the only force capable of fighting the Haganah was the Arab Legion, led, trained and armed by Britain.

No serious threat was posed by the Arab forces (e.g. Egypt, Syria and Lebanon), partly because they were undertrained and underarmed as a result of previous British policy; partly because the Transjordan monarchy was only interested in a deal with the Zionists for partition around the UN proposed borders which would allow Britain a role.

But the USA was opposed to any British presence and rushed to aid the newly founded state of Israel. Stalinism too rushed to aid Israel. The Kremlin supported the creation of the state of Israel because it believed that it may have been able to exert political influence over the Zionists and so fill the vacuum created by the departure of British imperialism. In the face of this balance of forces the Palestinians suffered a historic catastrophe.

They were brutally driven out of their towns and villages throughout the area that the Zionists decided was militarily conquerable and holdable. Jaffa was attacked by Haganah and Irgun and its Arab population of 100,000 was reduced in days to 5,000. Atrocities such as Dir Yassin (250 murdered) were calculated acts of barbarity designed to spread panic and induce the Palestinians to flee.

Why did the Zionists not settle for the UN plan which the USA and Britain were happy to see? In essence because even the undemocratic UN planned partition (which awarded 54% of the area to 33% of its population that was Jewish) still left the Arabs as a bare majority in the proposed Jewish state, where they would own three-quarters of the land.

The pogroms and 1948-49 war was conducted to carry out a radical extension of the area under the control of Israel and a much reduced presence of Arabs within it. In the war the Arab states cynically grabbed what they could (e.g. Egypt, the Gaza Strip, Transjordan, East Jerusalem) but the Palestinians were left with nothing.

Israel finished with 73% of the area (including the mineral rich Negev desert) and in the process 750,000 Palestinians were driven off their land and from their homes in the wretched refugee camps into the surrounding pro-British semi-colonial Arab states.

In the conflict between the Palestinian Arabs and the Zionists it was necessary to have been defeatist in relation to the Zionists and militarily supported the resistance of the Arabs. The 'War of Independence' was in fact a war to establish a pro-imperialist colonial-settler state in the Middle East, under the dominance of the USA. It was a war which denied the right of the Palestinian Arabs to self-determination.

It was correct to be defeatist in relation to the struggle waged by Transjordan and later Egypt in the War of Independence. The defeat of Israel was a Lesser evil as it would have seriously disrupted the attempt of Israel to establish a stable pro-imperialist regime in the region, and one based on the expulsion of the mass of Palestinians from their land. However, we would not have supported the war aims of the Arab League which were annexationist.

We would have fought the Arab League's attempt to enforce its own version of partition, exposed the attempted deals struck with Israel against the interests of the Palestinians and been intransigent foes of the Arab League's anti-Semitism.

### Class and nation in Israel

Despite the political role that Israel plays in the Middle East Israel itself cannot be considered an imperialist country in economic terms. Although it possesses many unique features, it should be understood as a special type of advanced, privileged, 'subsidised semi-colony'.

The most decisive structural feature of Israel's economic subordination to imperialism has been its overwhelming dependence on capital imports for investment. Between 1952 and 1985 Israel has received some \$40 billion of long term capital imports in the form of grants, reparation payments from West Germany and donations from the Jewish diaspora, none of which have needed repaying.

In addition, low interest long term loans from the USA have furnished the means for capital investment in Israel. Since Israel's exports of goods and services have never been more than 65% of the level of imports (including capital) as a consequence Israel has run a permanent balance of payments deficit.

Over time the weight of reparations payments and donations from world Zionism has fallen and loans and grants from the USA have risen. Since 1973 the USA has contributed between 45% and 51% of all capital imports on an annual basis and between 60% and 80% of all long term loans.

In the period between 1950 and 1973 Israel's economy grew at a fast pace, suffering only one recession in 1965-66. The massive influx of immigrants together with the import of capital allowed expanded accumulation to take place in the context of a long boom for world imperialism.

This period witnessed the displacement of citrus fruit production and diamond polishing industries by the growth of import-substitution manufacturing industry, especially in textiles, food processing and later in chemicals and mining.

Despite this growth the main structural change in imports has been in consumer durables. In the forty years of existence Israel has reduced its share of these in overall imports from 31% to 8%. But dependency on oil for energy has tripled and raw materials imports have grown while the proportion of capital investment goods imports has only dropped from 22% in 1949 to 18.7% in 1984.

Throughout the transformation process there was negligible foreign ownership of fixed capital. This remains the case today with the virtual absence of exploitation in Israel by imperialism. Moreover, the export of capital from the USA and Europe was undertaken not in order to realise a 'surplus profit' but to sustain the state of Israel for political reasons.

The import of capital in such huge amounts allowed the rapid accumulation to take place without the super-exploitation of an internal section of the working class or through massive taxation as in many of the less developed countries (LDCs). On the contrary, the accumulation took place alongside an expansion of living standards for the majority of the population.

By the end of the 1960s Israel possessed a highly monopolised and modern industrial economy, including a banking sector. Its internal market was saturated, its export orientated industries growing. But, unlike South Africa these were not to prove sufficient preconditions for Israel to make the transition to a minor imperialist power. There are several reasons for this;

(a) The end of the long boom during 1971-73, the massive shock to Israel of the 1973-75 recession, the curtailment in export markets.

(b) The inwardly directed nature of investment by Israel state and private monopoly capital due to the very nature of the Zionist state. Finance capital had up until 1973 small amounts of foreign capital abroad (petro-chemicals, loans) but insignificant in scope; since 1973 Israeli banks have persistently had net foreign liabilities. Between 1980-84 net total portfolio investments of Israeli finance capital abroad was a mere \$12 billion; net direct fixed investments was negative for the same period.

Above all, the need to consolidate the whole Jewish population behind the state undermined the process of class differentiation and compelled investment to be internal to sustain jobs, welfare, housing, wages, rather than look for super-profits abroad by recycling externally the capital imports from the USA and elsewhere.

On the other hand it has been impossible politically to mimic South Africa and rely upon a massive super-exploited working class within the nation. The contradiction of a 'Jewish closed economy' prevented the evolution of Israeli finance capital into an imperialist capital. Israel's development was frozen. There is no internal self-sustaining dynamic of capital accumulation and this leads to limited class polarisation.

(c) Finally, Israel cannot be considered an imperialist country even by virtue of its relationship with the occupied territories since 1967. The West Bank and Gaza do provide a constant source of surplus cheap labour for Israel and a captive market for the high productivity citrus fruit agribusiness of Israel.

But this has to be set against the fact that as a result of the war of 1967 Israel was cut off from its large natural hinterland in the rest of the Middle East. It has to be set against the fact there is no industrial or infrastructure development in the Occupied Territories under the spur of Israeli finance capital.

The parallel here is more the economic relationship that exists between the Philippines and the more developed LDCs

in South East Asia or even Peru's dependency on Brazil. Finally, it has to be set against the huge costs to Israel of military occupation.

Israel then is not even a minor imperialist power, despite its pro-imperialist proxy role in the region (and in Latin America and South Asia etc). Israel is a special type of semi-colony, one whose condition is masked by its relationship to imperialism rather than fundamentally altered. We can characterise its advanced or privileged semi-colonial status thus:

(a) Its semi-colonial dependency is not based on the repatriation of super-profits from fixed investments. Between 1952 and 1984 there was a mere total of \$2 billion of foreign investment in Israel.

(b) The debt burden, while it is a channel for exploitation through interest repayments, is more a burden on its future than its present. On the one hand, as the size of the capital imports has grown in the 1970s and 1980s, as weight of loans over grants has increased and as the Israeli economic growth has faltered badly in the post-1973 period, then the for-foreign indebtedness of Israel has grown apace.

In the 1980s this has been exacerbated by an increasing tendency for Israel to rely on short term loans. By 1986 Israel's foreign debt was \$24 billion and growing. In 1985-86 debt repayments were \$8 billion out of a government spending total of \$21 billion.

On the other hand, interest payments are a much smaller proportion of export earnings (17%-20%) than in Brazil or Mexico and they are far outweighed by the inflow of new capital on favourable terms as well as grants. Since 1982 while there has been a heavy net drain of capital from Latin America, Israel continues to enjoy a net surplus (i.e. new loans exceed net repayments).

(c) The subordinate nature of Israel's economy flows from its dependency on continued privileged treatment over its debt and from the privileged access that Israeli exports have to many European and US markets as well as access to markets that the major imperialists would prefer not to have, or have only through Israel.

Like certain other semi-colonies in Africa, Israel is not an economically profitable semi-colony considered in isolation. But its presence and role in the Middle East helps to ensure the continued super-exploitation of other Arab semi-colonies in the region.

The political independence that Israel shows vis a vis the USA flows not from any independent economic power but through its ability to lean upon the economically powerful Jewish community in the USA itself whose Zionist big bourgeoisie is an important sector of the US ruling class.

Whereas Israel's growth rates were favourable in comparison with the OECD nations in the 1960s in the 1970s and 1980s they have been lower than OECD and LDC (especially Newly Industrialised Countries) averages.

In terms of material consumption levels, provision of social welfare, literacy etc Israel is comparable to Spain, a level sustained only by massive external aid rather than any internal self-sustaining cycle of accumulation. In general falling immigration and rising emigration bear witness to the unfavourable development of Israel since 1973.

Since 1973 Israel's economy has lurched from crisis to crisis; massive inflation, spiralling indebtedness, low growth. Unlike Brazil and others, Israel was not able to undertake accelerated industrial growth after the 1973-75 recession via recycled OPEC petrodollars, partly due to political reasons and partly because of its already heavy debt burden.

The internal structure of the manufacturing sector did change in the 1970s and 1980s with electronics and weapons coming more to prominence in the export sector. This has been mainly as a result of US and South African investment whose purpose is to sustain outlets for these goods to areas of the world which South Africa and the USA find it difficult politically to relate to directly.

The 1980s have brought the highest inflation in the world (1981), a disastrous and costly military adventure in Lebanon (1982), and a stock market collapse (1983) with growth hovering at an average below 2% per annum for the decade.

It has taken an unprecedented national coalition since 1984 to be able to stabilise the economic situation to a degree, introduce monetary reform, get inflation down to low double figures and introduce austerity.

Hence we conclude that Israel is a capitalist state, a relatively well developed one. But it is not an imperialist country; rather it is a type of semi-colony, one which is subordinate to US (and to a lesser extent European) imperialism. The majority of its workers in no way suffer exploitation or super-exploitation by imperialist capital. On the contrary, its non-Arab workers benefit from the import of imperialist capital.

The unique character of this state is to be understood in the colonial project of Zionism and imperialism to have a local gendarme in the Middle East. This coincidence of interests alone accounts for the materialisation and continuation of the reactionary utopia that is Israel.

Were imperialist finance capital to remove its support the Zionist state would collapse into economic chaos, class conflict and heightened struggle by the Palestinians for national liberation.

The structural features of ownership and control of Israeli capital in the post-1948 state were laid down in the Yishuv. The colonising project of Labour Zionism under the British Mandate was controlled by the Histadrut, founded in 1920 by the left Zionist parties.

It sponsored and organised the growth of the Zionist agricultural settlements in Palestine—the kibbutzim and later the moshavim (rural settlements, mainly Oriental Jews using larger landed tracts based on individual ownership but marketing goods on a co-operative basis).

Indeed, in the immediate post-foundation years the bulk of Israel's GAP and exports were products of the kibbutzim. Apologists for Zionism have long pointed to these settlements as evidence of Israel's social democratic nature or as islands of 'socialism' within Israel.

In origin they were the advanced guards of colonisation. After 1948 they were the border garrison posts of the new state. In reality their famous co-operativism and egalitarian self-denial was a product of economic necessity. Jewish labour came from an area with a higher historic cost of reproduction than Arab labour which would in Palestine mean that Arab labour would always undercut Jewish labour in a free market.

Jewish labour thus had to exclude Arab labour from competing and at the same time 'exploit itself' in order to promote rapid accumulation. They have always been organised in order to create a surplus for profitable sale in the export market. The post-1948 formation of the moshavim was a further sacrifice of the 'co-operative' ideal to the laws of the market.

Today, the kibbutzim are more marginal to the economic life of Israel, more capitalistically run (capital intensive), are regarded by many Jews as a 'planter aristocracy' and are almost totally supporters of Labour Zionism. They only embrace 3% of the Jewish population (almost exclusively Ashkenazi) and involve the super-exploitation of the oriental Jews in the menial tasks who do not live on the kibbutz.

As a result of its origins in the 'pioneer settlements' of the Mandate period the Histadrut in the early 1980s was responsible for nearly 80% of the total employment in agriculture. It played a decisive military, economic and political role in the colonisation project of Zionism by driving Palestinians from their land. They did nothing to promote class based unity and solidarity among all workers of the region. Rather they deliberately sought to bar the Palestinian workers from the unions and denied them their democratic rights in general. In sum the Histadrut was never in its predominant character a trade union and has become less and less so in the forty years of the existence of the Israeli state. We must fight to break up the Histadrut and build new unions.

Since 1948 the Histadrut has diversified its capital ownership into construction, banking, some transport and manufacturing. Its industrial conglomerate, Koor, employs 20% of the Histadrut membership; its construction monopoly, Soch Boneh, employed 26% of the membership in 1976. It owns Bank Hapoalim, one of the three big banking monopolies. In all the Histadrut owned businesses account for some 23~70 of GAP (1980).

Consequently, it is naive to portray the Histadrut as a trade union even though today some 60% of all Israelis are members of this "trade union" which embraces workers, housewives and employers of five or less workers all of whom are eligible to join. In origin it was the main institution of colonial settlement, run by Labour Zionism. As its economic interests evolved beyond the petit bourgeois confines of the early kibbutzim into industry it developed a Labour Department to represent the interests of the employees that it in part employed! The top personnel of the Histadrut's companies, unions and the Labour Party are interlocking or even identical. In addition it also organises the health insurance for the whole of Israel's population, which accounts for over 60% of the membership's dues. Nevertheless, it is where the Jewish (and Israeli Arab) workers are organised as workers on the economic front and it is necessary to work within it to accelerate the development of class consciousness, both trade union and political.

In its totality the Histadrut is one of the three pillars of Zionist capitalism serving to retard and repress class differentiation and polarisation. Along-side the Histadrut the state sector (a coalition of government, Jewish Agency, National Fund and United Jewish Appeal to the USA) controls up to 25% of the economy (30% of employment in 1982) and is the main conduit for capital imports.

The state and Histadrut embrace the large modern plants in weaponry, chemicals and are heavily export oriented and, with the exception of construction, are mainly employers of Jewish labour. Private sector business interests are overwhelmingly concentrated in small and medium sized manufacturing units with an emphasis on consumer produced goods for the home market.

Some two-thirds of the workforce in this sector are Arabs from inside and beyond the Green Line. As a result the weight of the private monopoly sector has grown in Israeli economic life as manufacturing has accounted for an increasing proportion of domestic production and exports.

Over the course of the last forty years the Israeli Jews have become a nation. They have revived an archaic language (Hebrew) to become a first language amongst a majority of Israelis; a national culture transcends the ethnic divisions.

The main bearers of this national culture and consciousness are the Sabra (i.e. Israeli-born Jews) of all ethnic groups. But an important element of the national consciousness of the Israeli Jews is its chauvinist and oppressive attitude to the Arabs.

The Israeli Jews, while they have forged a national consciousness in the last forty years which is distinct from their sense of themselves as part of world Jewry, are part of an oppressor nation; their national consciousness has been forged only by a simultaneous denial of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians to self-determination. Consequently Israel is an oppressor nation and as such we do not recognise its right to exist as a nation state.

Yet in considering the question of Israeli national identity account has to be taken of the enormously powerful disintegrative aspects of the ethnic and class contradictions both between the Israeli Arabs and the Jews and within the Jewish community itself.

To begin with, the state of Israel is in reality a creation of the Ashkenazi Jews, the half million or so who colonised it under the mandate and carved it out (arms in hand) in the period 1948-49. To a large extent it remains their state whichever party holds the governmental power.

At every level they have the best jobs, hold the key levers of economic power, enjoy the best pay; their "culture" is taken as dominant and they are the main channel to the economic reservoir of world Jewry which is Ashkenazi above all.

But the Ashkanzim found themselves in possession of a state with too few people and with a class structure that was top heavy. The Zionists always recognised the need to draw in oriental Jews under the Mandate to provide a labour force for the un-skilled and semi-skilled jobs.

This became a burning necessity in 1949. Even then the Ashkanazi were 85% urban, concentrated in administration and the service sector together with a small rural elite in the kibbutzim. Today the Ashkanazi Jewish workers are a veritable labour aristocracy within the state or Histadrut owned industrial sector and in the middle and upper echelons of the state bureaucracy.

From 1949 until 1951 in an unrestricted way and thereafter with some restrictions, the Labour Party government sucked in hundreds of thousands of Jews. In three years (after May 1948) the population of Israel jumped from 0.6 to 1.6 million.

Only half the new arrivals could be considered survivors of the Holocaust, the rest were oriental Jews, drawn to Israel not because of any suffering as Jews in their previous countries but because of the promise of a better life.

Despite the desire to do so Zionism has been unable to attract significant numbers of Jews to Israel from Europe or the USA where life is for most at least as comfortable. They have not been much more successful with Soviet Jews, some 70% prefer-ring not to go to or to stay in Israel after leaving the USSR.

The orientals were used first to colonise the vast acres of land from which the Palestinians had been expelled; located in 'development towns' strategically placed behind the border kibbutzim. Secondly, they were to provide the vast reservoir of urban semi and unskilled proletarians for Israeli capitalism. This need accelerated in the concentrated period of industrial growth after 1958.

The oriental Jews are discriminated against within Israeli society and are subject to an element of racial oppression from the European Jews. Through the mechanism of educational qualifications, amongst others, they are concentrated in manual, lower paid jobs within the state/Histadrut industrial sector, and to a lesser extent the lower rungs of clerical occupations.

Today, the oriental Jews are the bulk of the industrial proletariat. Until recently they have rarely risen through the political administration to positions of prominence or power which have largely remained Ashkanazi/Labour Party controlled.

But since the 1967 war and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip the oriental Jews have experienced a degree of social/class mobility which has both further stratified them and consolidated the whole Jewish population of Israel into a shared common oppressive and exploitative relationship to the Palestinian Arabs.

The large absorption of Arab labour into the Israeli economy since 1967 has done several things. First, it has allowed large numbers of Jews to move out of the proletariat and become small employers of cheap Arab labour. Secondly, because cheap Arab labour undermined the wages of the Oriental workers minimum wages have benefited these workers in the mixed sector.

In the closed (Jewish only) sector labour has been scarce, acting as a forcing house for capital intensive industry and creating demand for skilled labour, which has again benefited the Ashkanazi Jews. Everyone wins, so long as someone else (imperialism) foots the bill.

From these developments it is possible to discern a broad common attitude amongst all Jews in Israel to the continued occupation of the West Bank; no party wishes to end the cheap supply of labour across the Green Line. Without it the most of the small Jewish capitalists will lose out as will the workers. At the same time the extreme right is marginalised because its plans for a 'Greater Israel' free of Arabs would have the same effect.

In addition to the ethnic/class differentiation within the Israeli Jews there exists considerable ethnic differentiation

within the camp of the oriental Jews. There are at least four religious groups: Sephardi (Spain), Bavli (Iraq), Roman (Italian) and Yemani. Moreover, the first have their own language (Ladino, a Castillian dialect with Hebrew alphabet) while the rest speak dialects of Arabic. Outside of these groups there are also the Moroccans (the majority of orientals), the Kurds, the Persians etc. Moreover, Yiddish is spoken by a minority.

There is hostility between these groups as well as a deep rooted ethnic and cultural diversity. It is well known that there is an economic stratification within the oriental Jews from Kurds at the bottom to the Sephardi at the top. All these distinctions are deliberately fostered by the Ashkanazi.

In addition during the last two decades Israeli Arabs have become less Israeli and more Palestinian in their consciousness as a consequence of the West Bank occupation. The Israeli Arabs form 18% of the population and nearly 80% of them are Muslim with the rest being Christian or Druze. They are citizens in a Jewish state, people or descendants of people who were trapped inside Israel after the 'War of Independence' in 1949.

Many of these have had their land taken away from them subsequently. Today they are among Israel's most super-exploited and op-pressed citizens. They are denied access to many jobs, and are concentrated in the construction sector (over 40% of all Arabs are employed here). Many also work in the small-scale establishments of the private service sector that grew up in the post-1967 period.

Their wage levels are up to 30% lower than those of the Ashkanazi and 10%-20% lower than for oriental Jews. In the 1970s their relative wages fell, under the impact of the flood of new labour across the Green Line as they found themselves in competition with their Palestinian brothers and sisters.

The oppression of the Israeli Arabs is justified by the most vicious anti-Arab racism which again confirms that Zionism, far from transcending anti-Semitism is parasitically dependent upon it. This unity of opposites reaches its most extreme form whenever both Labour and the Revisionists portray the Arabs as 'stupid', 'dirty', 'lazy', 'violent'?all of which is the stock in trade of western imperialist racism. Such racism can be used to justify atrocities from Dir Yassin to Sabra and Chatilla.

Zionism is a national chauvinist ideology that justifies itself through the use of racism. Is Zionism therefore simply racism? No, this does not follow at all. No ideologies are without contradictions, even those which are predominantly reactionary. There are Zionists who do seek to extend rights, even land to the Palestinian Arabs. But this progressive, anti-racist, democratic element within Zionism forms a distinct minority.

Nor is this to deny that there are reactionary elements in the relatively progressive democratic and anti-imperialist movements. They can even change their whole character when the progressive struggle against national oppression is concluded.

Arab nationalism can and does contain anti-communist, anti-working class and even anti-Semitic elements. But because the Palestinian struggle is a progressive one these components have a limited and subordinate impact. They draw their roots from economic backwardness in the Arab world (even feudal and semi-feudal forces), from the impact of imperialist exploitation on the urban poor and from an unthinking reaction to Zionist racism.

All this imposes a twin duty on revolutionary communists. On the one side, to fight alongside Palestinian nationalists while at the same time combating religious obscurantism and any anti-Jewish outburst.

On the other, while fighting against Zionism and for the destruction of a state that fosters national and racist oppression of the Palestinians it is essential to strike tactical alliances with left Zionists (such as the Progressive List for Peace, Stalinists, Peace Now) in defence of democratic rights for the Palestinians, the better to break them from Zionism completely.

Broadly, there have been three major parties or blocs since 1948. The least significant has been the New Religious Party which existed in fragmented form before 1956. The small support for it (about 10% at its peak and declining

thereafter) is a reflection of the overall weakness of religious parties in Israel.

This, at first surprising, fact in a state that is obliged to embody religion in the self-definition of its citizenship is due to the orthodox religious parties being firmly opposed to the Zionist project in establishing the state of Israel. While they were the first to organise politically within the diaspora they were adamant that the diaspora was a punishment on the Jews that could not be righted by the work of man. Hence the generally secular nature of the main Zionist parties.

Only the Holocaust forced them to reconsider and adopt a pragmatic attitude to Israel. The NRP formally advocates a policy of establishing Israel in the whole of Greater Israel, but its pragmatism has led several smaller rightist, orthodox parties to split or form independently since 1973 and especially since the treaty with Egypt was signed at Camp David in 1979.

For the first thirty years of its existence Israel was governed by Mapai (Israeli Labour Party?ILP?after 1967). This was founded in 1930 and was (and remains) the main party of the Ashkanazi Jews and hence the state bureaucracy, Histadrut and the kibbutzim. It has commanded the vote of a third or more of the population since 1949, up until 1961 standing alone and afterwards in various blocs.

Today it is mainly a party of the privileged Ashkanazi labour aristocracy; the allegiance of the bulk of the (majority) oriental industrial proletariat do not see it as their party and in the main do not vote for it. This is also the case for the Arab workers.

It cannot be considered a bourgeois workers? party of the Israeli working class because as a party tied to the Histadrut (and its corporate capital) and the main national institutions of the state the ILP does not rest on the organisations of the working class. Revolutionaries cannot call for a vote for it.

The smaller Mapam Party was the party of the kibbutzim ?pioneers? whose ideology was a mix of petit bourgeois socialism and Zionism. It used to be able to command some 14% of the vote. But as the kibbutzim have declined in importance and changed their nature, their allegiance has shifted towards the ILP and Mapam has been forced to shelter under its wing.

The third political bloc is that of the open parties of the nationalist bourgeoisie. One side has its roots in the Revisionists who split into differing factions in the 1920s and 1930s over their attitude to the man-date and the future state?s boundaries. But by 1951 they had found their home in the Herut Party.

The Liberal Party was a more respectable party (i.e. free of the stigma of terrorism) at the service of the growing private bourgeoisie of the new state. The formation of Likud in 1973 as a coalition of both Herud and the Liberals was a result of the growing weight of the private sector bourgeoisie and the rise of the hawks after ?winning? the 1967 and 1973 wars.

This coalition made a successful challenge to the hegemony of Labour possible. The growth of the oriental Jewish population, with its alienation from Labour and the Ashkanazim, made possible the successful demagogic manipulation of their hopes for a better deal. Election success followed in 1977 and 1981, which returned the two Likud governments of Begin/Shamir.

In essence very little divides the Labour and Likud blocs in the field of domestic economic policy. Rhetoric, demagoguery and naked buying of votes are routinely directed at their respective ?constituencies? in election time. This flows from the need of all Zionist parties to keep together the Jewish bloc and retard class differentiation. It is evidenced by the record of the National Coalition 198~88.

The main differences are to be found in perspectives for dealing with the Arab states and the Palestinian?s fight for self-determination. On the one hand both Labour and Likud are united in their resistance to the desire of the extreme right (Kach, Shass, Tami, Tehya?products of the disgust at Camp David) for more restrictive measures against the Arabs, and against those like Peace Now who would give the Palestinians their own state. This is because both proposals

would undermine the Arabs essential function in the Zionist economy.

On the other hand they are divided over whether this function should be preserved by continuing the occupation of the West Bank (with all the consequent political instability, and especially the deepening polarising effect it has within Zionism since the failure of the Lebanon war of 1982), which is Likud's strategy. Likud also favours increased settlements in the West Bank because in recent years this has consolidated its base amongst the orientals who are now the bulk of the new "settlers".

Labour, on the other hand, would prefer to seek a negotiated settlement with US imperialism and the conservative Arab regimes (especially Egypt and Jordan) who could then police a Bantustan "Palestinian" state on the West Bank while preserving its function as supplier of cheap labour and captive market for Israeli agriculture.

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