

# Behind the Fighting Front in Israel

Below we present extensive excerpts from the May-June and July-August issues of the highly interesting Bulletin of the Council on Jewish-Arab Cooperation which present a picture of the everyday life of the Israeli people while the fighting is going on. We have taken the liberty of making minor editorial changes in the interests of continuity so that continuity and clarity will not be lost in the excerpting.

## THE CAPITALISTS

Employers refuse to raise wages or meet workers' demands as before. Clothing manufacturers disregarded an arbitration order for a cost-of-living raise issued by the Jewish Department of Labor (April 5). Textile manufacturers reduced salaried personnel to wage workers in order to be able to fire veteran clerks (April 6). The electric company refused to pay cost-of-living bonuses in spite of an earlier agreement, and counted on the Histadrut (Federation of Labor) to keep workers from striking in this essential industry (April 8).

**Speculation and a black market, chiefly in food, create big fortunes for a few businessmen, making many**

**staples hardly available to the public; prices skyrocket beyond the reach of wages. The daily news items show an extreme situation, with the already high cost of living rising 9 per cent in two months. Bread is frequently unobtainable, because the bakery owners detour the flour into the black market. The wheat content in bread is illegally cut (April 2). Stores of meat and flour are hidden and dispersed in small warehouses scattered through the city, to avoid city inspection (April 1).**

Municipal authorities, belonging to business-class parties, operated against the workers and for the speculators. Not only cost of living (enhanced by speculation) but also taxation has vastly increased, and in such a way as to place the burden on the poor. Tel-Aviv municipality instituted a sales tax, as against the workers' demand of a luxury tax (April 1). Taxes on people who occupy apartments are far above those imposed on house owners (who rent them out); the tax on the latter has been increased from 8½ per cent to 10 per cent in the last ten years, whereas the tax on people who rent an apartment has increased during

that period from 10 per cent to 50 per cent. Tel-Aviv and other municipalities do practically nothing against speculation. Speculators are rarely fined, and of 8,500 Palestine pounds in fines imposed on speculators by April 5, only 2,950 were paid; there are very few cases of jailing for non-payment of fines. Jail sentences are not imposed for speculation, although demands have been made that such sentences be instituted (April 18). Mayor Bokach of Tel-Aviv even attempted to save the good name of the speculators by asking that the court on speculation be given a different name, so as not to hurt the reputation of the people brought before it (April 5).

## THE CLERICALS

The clerical party (Mizrachi) and its labor section have jockeyed to impose their religion on others in the new Jewish state. Like the Catholics who receive in America a large share of founding children to be brought up in their church, so the Jewish clerical groups have imposed an arrangement whereby they are handed over, to be brought up under

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their control, all European orphans coming from religious homes. The investigation as to whether the orphan comes from a religious family is made cursorily under the watchful eye of the clericals.

The clerical party supports the fascist groups. In various public bodies, the clerical party defends the fascists (Revisionist Party and its associated terrorist IZL), and in effect acts for them in their absence.

## THE TERRORISTS

Despite their claims, the terrorist groups contributed nothing to the defense of the population. Here is the sum total of their activities against the Arabs during the month: On April 4 Irgun Zvei Leumi stole 1,000 head of cattle from Arab villages in the coastal plain; Hagana pursued them and succeeded in returning part of the loot to the Arabs. On April 5 terrorists hi-jacked an Arab truck laden with citrus fruit. On April 6 the Stern group blew up the deserted Arab village of Bir Adas, when the Arabs began to return by day to work their fields.

On April 11 IZL and the Stern group combined to issue a communiqué claiming the massacre of 240 inhabitants of Deir Yassin, a singularly peaceful village which had recently fought off Arab bands; some of the women and children were taken as captives and paraded through Jewish Jerusalem until the Jewish police stopped it. (Since then, Deir Yassin has become the central propaganda item of the Arabs against the Jews.) On April 25 and for the next few days, IZL put on a show of attacking Jaffa, with little military result, except that of endangering the population of Tel-Aviv and its suburbs. Claims of IZL to have contributed to the taking of Haifa by the Hagana (April 22) were given the lie by Davar April 25.

Terrorist actions are aimed primarily at strengthening their standing among the Jews. The more spectacular actions of the terrorists are accompanied by loud publicity and are timed for effect. Thus the Deir Yassin massacre was timed to coincide with the Zionist executive deliberations (April 12) on the proposed pact between Hagana and IZL.

## ECONOMIC ACTION

Strikes continue, though the war is a deterrent. Among the many strikes were those of men's clothing workers throughout the first week of April, the workers and clerks of the electric company in Haifa (April 8), and

in Tel-Aviv (April 13), the workers in a Tel-Aviv flour mill (April 14), the workers in the Ford garages (April 19). But the needle workers did not strike because of the importance of their work for the emergency situation (April 23).

**Union organization continues. Unorganized workers are being unionized in such technologically undeveloped industries as cartons and writing implements (April 1). The Histadrut set up a country-wide union of industrial workers, regrouping many of its specialized unions (April 8).**

Workers took limited action against speculation. The bakery workers' union had decided to refuse to bake bread that was underweight or with illegal wheat contents (April 1); bakery workers suggested that each bakery be required to post its flour quota, so that the workers could check on the owner to see that he does not divert any part of the flour to the black market (April 8). The workers' committee in the flour mills announced its readiness to serve the authorities on assuring fair distribution (April 18). The workers' council in Tel-Aviv suggested a one-hour general strike against speculation and soaring prices (April 6). The leftist United Labor Party suggested that the Histadrut supervise baking and distribution directly (April 5).

## POLITICAL ACTION

Economic actions of the workers are sometimes held back by political considerations of their leaders. The strikes in the electric company were mere episodes in a long conflict between the workers and the company, and also between the workers and the Histadrut, which opposed the strikes (April 15). Both major labor parties have considered the workers to be "too extreme." The workers have complained that the Histadrut was letting the company get away with a bad labor policy, and that the company's behavior was based on its knowledge that the Histadrut would permit no strike in this essential industry. Workers therefore said that their strike would serve as a lesson to the Histadrut.

**The military and political organizations in which the working-class parties are powerful do not show the full effect of working-class character. The first army induction center was opened with a military-religious ceremony based on the custom of the armies of other countries rather than on the people's character of the Hagana (April 27). (In PM for May 21, I. F. Stone reports that**

**Hagana had decreed separate mess for officers.) In the provisional council and cabinet of the Israeli government, the non-labor parties were given a narrow majority, even though labor parties have a clear majority in Palestine voting (cf. the Palestine elections of September, 1944). In the Zionist executive vote on admitting the terrorists as a group into the Jewish army, the labor parties voted against admission and lost (April 12); but more serious opposition on their part might have given them the majority. And the labor parties did not prevent the inclusion of a minister of religion in the cabinet.**

The Hagana, composed largely of workers, hesitates in taking action against the terrorists. Although the terrorists shoot Hagana guards and others who stand in their way, Hagana has generally tried to avoid situations in which it would have to shoot it out with the terrorists. On several occasions this led to terrorist successes. (A few years ago, when the terrorists were weaker and Hagana had almost completed an operation of putting them under arrest, top leaders of the Jewish community, belonging chiefly to the Mapai Labor Party, ordered Hagana to release the terrorists.)

In the earlier terrorist attack, when IZL and the Stern group massacred the Deir Yassin villagers while Hagana was occupying the nearby Kastel stronghold, one can ask if it would indeed have been so unthinkable for Hagana to have defended the peaceful Arab villagers from the attackers. Instead of protesting the Deir Yassin massacre verbally, Hagana might have stopped it by fighting off the terrorists, thus showing the Arabs a different view of the war.

Only in few cases have workers solved their problems by actions which went beyond the limits of capitalism. The needle workers did not strike on April 23, much as they wished to, because their work was important for the emergency. But they did not attempt the alternative solution of doing their work in the form of a take-over strike, in which the workers would hold the workplace, produce whatever they thought necessary and deliver their products to whomever they wished. Such strikes were carried out by Japanese workers after World War II; and while problems of raw materials, delivery and so on would undoubtedly arise, the workers might have been able to manage, especially if they produced for public bodies or workers' organizations.

Similarly, in the case of the black market and speculation, the workers have failed to take effective action outside the usual framework. They have planned protest strikes (April 6), offered to supervise their workplaces for any illegalities (April 8); the more leftist among them have demanded that the Histadrut should supervise directly (April 5); in Naṭanya the Histadrut planned to build a co-operative bakery (April 4). More independent action than this was not taken; and in Herzlia, where the workers' parties have a majority in the municipal council, nothing more was done (April 8). Effective controls would require by-passing many of the usual relations of the market and business activities. This could be done by a government, but might in effect be also taken over by an organization as vast as the Histadrut if it set up its own control system over all places where its members worked (about 85 per cent of all workers in essential industries are members of the Histadrut). The one place where this was indeed done was in Jerusalem, under stress of the siege, where distribution of food was placed in the hands of people experienced in the Histadrut network of cooperatives. Business men complained that no "private initiative" was permitted, but there is no black market in Jerusalem, and the limited rations were evenly distributed.

**Workers have not yet gone beyond the limits of ordinary politics to meet the attack from the right. Although municipal taxes on workers are far heavier than on business men, workers have carried out no tax strikes or other means of rejecting the decisions of non-representative rightist municipalities. Although municipal elections have been put off for many years, the workers' organizations do not do any of the many possible things to make the position of the business men's municipalities untenable. In Petah-Tikva the workers finally left the municipality (April 20); in Tel-Aviv not even that.**

When during the last few years the Hagana was transformed, under centrist labor and middle-class officials, from a workers' force into a national army, the workers did not proceed seriously to recreate a workers' militia to meet the special danger facing them in the growing fascism. The formation of a workers' militia was, however, urged on the occasion of the IZL attack on Jaffa, which brought into evidence the ease with which the terrorists could take control of Tel-Aviv (April 27).