

THE NEW LEFT IN ISRAEL

by

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An extensive analysis of the new left phenomenon in its Israeli context might seem to demand special justification. Admittedly, such a discussion centers on the direct political activity of only several hundred activists. Many of the relevant groups and organizations number only tens of members, and sometimes less than that. Moreover, the new left has had nowhere as significant an impact in Israel as it has had in most of the modern capitalist countries. Even so, anyone seriously interested in radical and critical thought will find some significance in the fact that a set of revolutionary and radical ideals have taken root and found new advocates in a completely new social setting. After all, the content of the new left phenomenon in Israel, as elsewhere is a renewal in the effort to apply revolutionary thinking to social realities. Of course, there have been a myriad of groups and groupings which have remained politically sterile despite the loftiest of revolutionary aspirations. Even so, the many authentic left forces which have had a tremendous influence in politics very often have an early history barely distinguishable from the other tiny groups. Therefore, any cluster of small revolutionary groups, however unlikely the chances of their success may seem, deserves attention. It seems prudent to add another consideration. All the groups, despite constant internal bickering between them, reflect a general tendency. It is a generation (or some fraction, thereof) in movement, which affords the common base for the various individual groups. At times, political conditions may unite these different groups and enable them to express a certain unity, thus creating a serious force capable of detonating a mass political movement. This decade has witnessed such things.

The Traditional Left and the Six-Day War

Historically, Mapam (United Workers Party) was the strongest force of the traditional left in Israel. The rather serious doubts as to the earnestness of Mapam's opposition role even when that party was formally an opposition party (and discounting the periods it functioned as the left-wing of the government coalition) are irrelevant. The point is that Mapam, to whatever degree that it was a factor of the Israeli left before 1967, lost all semblances of its radical character in the wake of the June '67 war. Mapam, in an earlier era, had seriously presented itself as an alternative to the ruling Mapai (Israel Workers Party, largest party in Israel since its foundation) party. Later, even in its capacity as member of government coalitions, Mapam still maintained pretensions of seriously influencing adopted policies, of serving as some sort of corrective. The concrete expression of the final retreat to the right was the decision taken by the March, 1968 party congress to approve the initiative taken by the party's 'historical leadership', M. Yaari and Y. Chazan for negotiations with the Labor Party (earlier created by a merger between Mapai and Ahdut Ha'avodah) towards the establishment of the Alignment of Israeli Workers. This step gained the approval of a two-thirds majority over the opposition, best designated by the term, Mapam-Left. Mapam-Left was more a tendency than an ideological formation. It had constituted itself over the years by expressing opposition to Mapam's entrance into the various Mapai dominated government coalitions. However, when Mapam crossed its revisionist Rubicon, the minority, lacking

effective leadership or any clear perspective, remained on the whole loyal to the collective decision. There is no data available but a good guess would be that no more than a tenth of those who opposed the Alignment actually left the party.

Among those who actually cancelled their party affiliation there were tens of activists who met to examine the possibilities of creating a new organization. These activists were beset, however, from the outset, by sharp ideological and political clashes touched off by a major political issue, the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. The small part of the Mapam-Left which was consistent enough to brave the political wilderness split into two groups. These difficulties made it easier for many a left-leaning kibbutz member to swallow his bitter disappointment, to remain in Mapam or to opt for a quiet resignation from all political activity. We will return later to the political evolution of several scores of young kibbutz members who refused either to stay in Mapam or to stay out of politics.

The Communist Party of Israel (Maki), surprisingly enough, went through an analogous kind of development. In August, 1965 the CPI split right down the middle.* Approximately fifty per cent of the membership, overwhelmingly Jewish constituted Maki, headed by Sh. Mikunis and M. Sneh. The other fifty per cent of the party, mostly Arab constituted the New Communist List (Rakah), headed by M. Wilner and Tewfik Toubi.

Maki, basing itself on the summaries of the Soviet party's twentieth congress demanded a more autonomous position towards the Soviet Union and aspired to more elastic strategy and tactics. After the 1965 split, Maki did make serious efforts to ensure the neutrality of the CPSU towards the two rival groups. Later, in the wake of the June, 1967 war, Maki came out in open confrontation against Soviet policies. Under the momentum of the final split with the Soviets, Maki adopted what was tantamount to the official government line on the causes of the war and the solution of the conflict. Sneh glorified the Six-Day War as a direct continuation of the 1948 War of Independence and Maki expressly declared itself an integral part of the 'national defence front'. This sharp swing to the center resulted in three members of the Central Committee leaving the party in August 1967 after accusing the leadership of blocking all possible avenues of rapprochement with the CPSU. Almost immediately, another opposition group formed in the Central Committee. This group accused the leadership of deserting principled Maki positions in regards to the Israeli-Arab conflict under the guise of anti-dogmatic freedom of criticism. The few minority voices were of little avail and the overwhelmingly majority of the party quietly made its way back into the 'national' fold.

It is certainly worth noting that both Mapam and Maki were, historically-speaking, ultra-orthodox pro-Soviet in orientation. The focus of their radical perspectives was directly bound up with this orientation. In the wake of the June, 1967 war, the

*For purposes of clarity the two groups which emerged from the 1965 split will be described as follows: (1) Rakah (New Communist List) headed by Meir Wilner and Tewfik Toubi; (2) Maki, headed after the split by Sh. Mikunis and M. Sneh, who passed away in March 1972, and presently led by Y. Tsaban and R. Teitlebaum. Since the split included a protracted battle over the right to use the name Maki

last traces of this Soviet orientation was transformed, in Mapam's case, to a virtual anti-Soviet backlash. In Maki's case, there occurred a practical dissolution of any meaningful links to the international communist movement.

The second half of the CPI, Rakah (Wilner-Toubi) maintained a clear pro-Soviet orientation up to and including the Six-Day War. This position was rewarded by the eventual removal of all doubts as to which of the two parties deserved exclusive recognition by the CPSU. The 1965 split had seriously impaired the already hitherto narrow public base of the communists in the Jewish sector. Rakah which included all of the Arab activists (but less than a third of the former Jewish membership) found itself, on the eve of the Six-Day War, even more than usually isolated. At any rate, no clearly discernible political changes occurred in this party and its organizational stability (or stagnation) matched its political orthodoxy. There is some interest in the fact that the June War is described in official Rakah documents as an outright Israeli failure, since, according to this interpretation, the unfulfilled aim of the conspiracy was to overthrow the 'progressive Arab regimes' in the U.A.R. and Syria. This kind of explanation, which must have somehow paled a bit during six years of Israeli occupation of vast stretches of Arab land, does illustrate the gap between Rakah and the prevailing mentality of ordinary Israeli political dynamics. Even so, continued Soviet support for the Arab cause and the lack of any other viable alternative, has ensured the absolute supremacy of Rakah as the left force in the Arab sector.

The only factor on the left which evaded the fate of outright liquidationism (Mapam and Maki) or 'structural immobility' in the Jewish sector of Israeli politics (Rakah) was a small, comparatively new group founded in 1962, the Israeli Socialist Organization - Matzpen.

Matzpen is the only group on the Israeli left which emerged from the Six-Day War more than simply intact. After making the reservation that we have entered that area where all numerical evaluations deal in small numbers, it can be said that Matzpen grew in terms of membership and periphery. It also became increasingly better known as a political group. Matzpen was completely free of the onus of explaining or justifying Soviet policies before, during and after the fighting. It was able to represent the new situation as an expression of U.S.-U.S.S.R. collusion. In addition to this, Matzpen could claim to have understood the dynamic behind the war since it had earlier devoted much propaganda against the expansionist nature of Zionism and the expropriation of the Palestinians and it was not impossible to portray these sources as the force behind new realities.

Before reviewing the origins and the development of the Matzpen group, it is in order to describe some more general features of the immediate post-war period. Israel was in a constant state of euphoria. Having become convinced of a veritable clear and present danger to its existence on the eve of the war, Israeli society basked in the double glory of victory and salvation. This secular miracle redounded, with the return to the Wailing Wall and the Temple Mount in mystical and religious directions. It was all Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel) and it was all in the hands of Israel. More discerning Israelis were perturbed about the occupation but hopefully saw the Israeli as an unwilling, short-termed and most liberal of conquerers. When, in December, 1967 a large group of Israeli intellectuals and public figures, hoping to remind the Government and the public, of official government policy, i.e., declared readiness to retreat from the occupied territories in exchange for peace and Arab recognition of Israel, published a call

entitled "For Security and Peace", the modest criticism contained therein seemed almost radical. Israel, of course, became progressively less interested in such an exchange. As the years passed the new reality of a 'Greater Israel' restructured Israeli politics. Ironically, the 'new left' that developed was to become a part of that new structure.

The Matzpen Origins

Matzpen was established towards the end of 1962 by a small group which split out of the Communist Party of Israel. The background of the Matzpen split was complex. While still in the CP, the members of the Matzpen trend pressed for implementation of the de-Stalinization heralded by the CPSU Twentieth Congress, firstly and foremostly, in inner-party life. The group called on the party to assimilate the lessons of the Cuban revolution, stressing that the Cuban CP had quite obviously failed to fulfill its role of revolutionary vanguard. All their apprehensions over widespread bureaucratic conservatism in the communist movement seemed more than verified with the incoming information about the split between the CPSU and the Chinese Communist Party. The sad efforts of the party leadership to suppress facts known to it concerning the first stages of the Chinese-Soviet split fired the criticism against distortions in inner-party democracy.

The Matzpen tendency, therefore, mounted much of its initial criticism of the Maki line from the left. This critique on the party's conservatism avoided any revision of the basic party tenet that both Jews and Arabs have the right to national self-determination in the area previously designated as Palestine. The trend's initial adherence to the CP's policies on this issue may be illustrated by the fact that two of its leading members, A. Orr and M. Machover had themselves authored a popular exposition of the CP's position on the subject, published under the title, "Peace, Peace and There Is No Peace". After the group left Maki and constituted itself as the Israeli Socialist Organization, the first issues of its weekly, Matzpen, did not question the legitimacy of Israel as an expression of that right. However, it was only logical that the group seek out the concrete local political expression of Maki's revisionism and conservatism. This search led on to an analysis that Maki, in its attempt to make itself more acceptable in the Jewish sector, had in fact abandoned all serious struggle against the ruling ideology, Zionism. It is significant that the first political contacts of the Matzpen people, after leaving Maki were with a small set of intellectuals calling themselves the Semitic Action group. The Semitic Action people, many of whom had backgrounds in the Stern underground, tried to elaborate a non-Zionist approach to the area's problems, but were adamant in denying any affinity to the left. It was through these links that the Matzpen people came to associate with Uri Avneri. That association, though it ended with mutual recriminations after the elections of 1965, proved profitable for both sides. Sometime before the 1965 elections, the Israeli Parliament passed a particularly draconic revision of the country's libel law with many of the new law's teeth clearly directed against maverick Avneri's popular weekly, "Ha'olam Ha'zeh". Avneri decided to run for a parliamentary seat and its contingent immunity. Matzpen joined his election race and were a very important, if not decisive, factor in staffing his grass-root election campaign apparatus. Ways parted in the first post-election congress of Avneri's new movement. Matzpen had strengthened its overall connections, and, no less important, had drawn into its ranks a number of young fresh activists.

the first reactions against the violent swing to the right sought a wide berth, which the Matzpen ideology readily afforded. Without pretending to have given an exhaustive account of its development, it is clear that we have sufficient basis to see Matzpen as the first new left group in Israeli politics. All of its original members were comparatively young. Undoubtedly, Matzpen was assisted in what must have been a very hard struggle for survival during its first years by the first echoes of the struggle in France against the Algerian war, itself in many senses one of the first battles of the new left. The group also began to evolve more original contributions in the political and ideological spheres. As a conclusion to its criticism of Maki for 'soft-peddling' its anti-Zionism, a new reevaluation of Zionism was undertaken. This analysis was centered on the Jewish settler-indigenous Arab interrelation and dynamic which was, surprisingly enough, a rather novel approach and stood in fresh contrast to most Zionist 'histories' which dealt either with the degree of Jewish support for colonization efforts or the relative success in convincing the colonial owners of Palestine of the advantages of receiving a new tenant. This analysis sensitized Matzpen to the Palestinian problematic and enabled it to anticipate certain phases of the conflict in its post-1967 stage. Those who would negate the significance of Matzpen because of its limited number of members cannot properly disregard the fact that there were any number of now defunct groups which had at first split out of the CPI only to later phase out of political existence. It was a split to the left, built around a number of young intellectuals whose first impulse was drawn from the cracking communist monolith. It stayed in business. It is therefore the unchallenged precursor of the Israeli new left.

The Rise of Siah

Siah (New Israeli Left) today, is unquestionably the largest of the present new left groups in Israel. Numbering tens of activists and hundreds of affiliates (there is no formal membership) Siah is of course minute in comparison to the size of the traditional left formations. However, it is almost a giant in relation to the other new left groups. Therefore, our discussion of the new left in Israel will center on Siah, on the various components active in the formation of the movement, on the political background which was essential to its emergence as a nationally known political entity and finally, the serious problems that beset this movement and the challenges it is still to meet if it wishes to play any real role in the reconstitution of a serious left movement in Israel.

The most important constituent factor in the formation of Siah were young members of Mapam, mainly from Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim, who decided to leave that party after its decision to join the Alignment. Many of these activists were previously associated with the loosely constituted Mapam-Left, many had been prominent in the Israeli section of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement. While there were also a smattering of young people who had left the urban branches of Mapam in the quest for a new political movement, it was the kibbutz people who supplied numerical strength and political experience. The ex-Mapam component was in many senses traditionalist, in that its members could feel that they were continuing along the historical path of Mapam, abandoned by the mother-party. On the other hand, the nasty split with Riftin and his group Brit Ha'Smol (the official name of the Riftin group is Alliance of the Independent Zionist-Socialist Left) certainly increased what was already a serious ideological dilemma. After rejecting the liquidationism of the 'historic leadership' of Mapam, they were in no mood to accept what seemed to them Riftin's

pro-Soviet apologetics. They were certainly emphatic about knowing what they did not want and willing to bide their time in trying to determine what they did want. It was this group which contributed the kibbutz constituency to Siah, and in the eyes of many it is this constituency which gives the Siah image a certain dimension of deep-rootedness and seriousness. Although this group recognized the necessity for a total reexamination of their ideological foundations - little, if any, of their iconoclasm was directed against Zionism. It is a reasonable assumption that kibbutz membership, in many senses the epitome of Zionist commitment, explains this. The central role of the Kibbutz Artzi people in establishing Siah and in lending it its character as an indigenous movement is beyond question.

The second major component in the Siah 'mix' was drawn from the wave of crisis immigration that touched Israeli shores during or close on the heels of the Six-Day War. Many of these immigrants joined the Israeli university scene upon their release from military or volunteer service. The prominence of many activists of this type among the developing campus left was, of course, exploited by opponents to prove that all the leftist slogans were some sort of contraband. Such a characterization of the student-immigrants is to say the least, unfair. Coming from the same campuses where people like Cohen-Bendit, Rudi Dutschke and Mark Rudd were operating, the immigrants were no doubt influenced by the ferment of European and American campus life. However, it is certainly no less significant that the overwhelming majority of these student immigrants had consciously rejected and opposed their university colleagues over the Israeli issue and Zionist ideology. Many of these student-immigrants who transformed themselves into Israeli campus leftists had occupied central positions in the Zionist pioneering youth movements in Europe, South America and the U.S. They had travelled a short road with many a sharp turn. Though identifying with the broad aims of the student left in their countries of origin, they had felt themselves subject to a different destiny. They answered the moral call to arms of an Israeli society under the threat of extinction implied by the events that led to the outbreak of the Six-Day War. Moving into Israeli politics, they were confronted with a government of national-unity, in which Menahem Begin, an undisputed fascist, was occupying an honorable ministerial post. The Israel for which they had been willing to sacrifice so much had weathered the dangers just fine and was now moving on to digest additional tracts of Arab land. The political realities as they understood them contained many stark features calling for the clear reply of a new left opposition. And so, this grouping of student immigrants supplied much of the broad university base of the emerging Siah groups on campus.

A third component, numerically much smaller than the aforementioned ones, but worth citing is comprised of a small group of activists who left the CPI (Mikunis-Sneh) in 1969, after having previously linked-up with the emerging Siah groups. Without rejecting the new tendency in their party to sever all allegiances to the leadership of the CPSU, this small group began to actively criticize an emerging 'backlash' which threatened to push the party into the Israeli establishment. After mounting an unsuccessful attack on Sneh's line of 'participation in the front of national defense' at the party's XVth Congress in October 1968, the group eventually left the CPI in November, 1969 and joined the emerging Siah groups.

The foregoing description of the main components which contributed to Siah's emergence is certainly not exhaustive. Many other categories joined

analyse Siah's sources must of necessity recognize the decisive importance of the groups outlined.

The first organizational steps toward the formation of Siah were rather 'classic' and consisted simply in the establishment of two discussion groups which met more or less regularly, both in Tel-Aviv and in Jerusalem. Significantly, the initial developments in the two different 'centers' occurred quite independently of one another. While, at an early stage the two groups came to know of each others existence, and there was some 'commuting', there was in no sense any 'grand design' or any central coordination guiding the groups. Likewise significant is the representation of the same three components amongst original participants (in different proportions, of course), in both circles. The point is that, in their origins, both groups were organized in order to clarify and discuss problems. It was clear to all concerned that the path which might lead to concrete political action was long and complicated, and while this goal was mooted, it was in no sense assumed. The first and somewhat sporadic meetings were held in the spring and summer of 1968; the meetings became more regular during the 1968/69 academic year.

It may seem strange to use the academic year for a measurement. The reason is quite simple. The groups were concentrated in and around the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the Tel-Aviv University. Many of the kibbutz members who were instrumental in the success of the Tel-Aviv group were studying at the Tel-Aviv University, with the permission and support of their kibbutzim. Indeed, many of the founders of Siah were kibbutz-member students who felt the intellectual and moral pressure to articulate their deep disagreement with the current evolution of Mapam.

It can be observed that from their very beginnings there were several salient distinctions between the Tel-Aviv group and its Jerusalem counterpart. The kibbutz-member element in Tel-Aviv was dominant, many of the central activists were loyal members of their kibbutz and movement framework. They had exercised their right to resign from Mapam, a right scarcely recognized by the Kibbutz Federation, Kibbutz Artzi, or by the individual kibbutz to which they belonged. They were moving very slowly and carefully. They maintained their right to free and independent political expression, but were wary of any uncalculated move which would endanger their standing vis-a-vis their very homes. To this very day, the Tel-Aviv branch is home-base for almost all Siah kibbutz members. Conditions permitting they make the trek all the way to Tel-Aviv, sometimes no easy thing in terms of travelling time. The Jerusalem group started up and continued mainly as a student group. The student-immigrants had a greater impact on the composition and theoretical development of the Jerusalem group. Both groups adopted the name Siah, the initials for New Israel Left, and a diminutive in Hebrew for dialogue, sometimes during the late spring or summer of 1969. The first move in the direction of a more formal kind of organization found expression in the first national conference which took place in November 1969, and in the two issues of a movement publication, the first of which appeared in August 1969. It is noteworthy that the first public action of Siah was a protest rally marking the first anniversary of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia.

The relative organizational amorphousness of Siah in its early stages found profound expression in the way the movement related to the 1969 elections. Siah was totally inactive in the national elections to the Histadruth (the General Federation of Israeli Laborers) which took place over the summer of that year. Later on that fall, many Siah activists were 'embroiled' in the intensive discussions around the establishment of the "Peace List" and the complicated but unsuccessful negotiations for a united slate between that List and Uri Avneri's ha'olam Ha'Zeh and Maki.

However, Siah never did get around to taking a movement position on the Knesset elections. It was well known that many members were voting or working for one of the above three lists. Strangely enough, what might have occasioned a rather thorny intra-movement conflict hardly created a ripple and had little if any effect on Siah as an emerging political force.

The early months of 1970 were extremely rich in dramatic political issues and in active social response. It was a season for much soul-searching in Israeli society and Siah moved in this period from the stage of an almost unknown left discussion forum to a nationally recognized political action group. The chain of events is worth recalling. In February, the Jerusalem Siah people held their first action, an attempt to picket the Jewish settlement in Hebron which had started out as an unauthorized partisan adventure but later gained forced governmental approval. At the beginning of April, the Goldman affair "broke". It was revealed that the government had squashed an opportunity to send Nahum Goldman, President of the World Jewish Congress, to Cairo for high-level, if non-committal discussions with Nasser and the Egyptian government. Since the government's explanation for its refusal was based on essentially formalistic grounds, many Israelis began to doubt what had seemed to them a sacred truth, viz., that the Israeli government was willing to do everything humanly possible for peace. Public reaction brought forth a mass rally in Jerusalem and a subsequent violent battle in the streets with the local police. A few days later, Siah launched a mass protest march to Hebron which, after having been blocked along the way by the army, ended up as a stormy demonstration outside Golda Meir's residence in Jerusalem. The Israeli establishment went almost frantic when a few tens of 12th grade high school youth on the verge of induction spontaneously wrote to G. Meir that, in the light of recent disclosures, they were not certain that they would be able to serve in the army without doubts and hesitations. Goldman decided to launch a public campaign explaining his position and attacking governmental inelasticity. Underground magazines began circulating in the "better" Israeli high schools. The playwright, Chanoch Levin, mirrored some of the more ugly chauvinistic and militaristic features of post-1967 Israeli society in a stormily received theatrical satire called "Queen of the Bath". Under pressure of U.S. diplomatic maneuvering, the Israeli government began a debate about whether or not it would consent to use the word "withdrawal" in any official proposals. And all during this time Israeli casualties in the war of attrition along the Suez Canal were mounting. Siah was one of the forces that both reflected and demonstrated a very sad fact to Israeli society: despite the overwhelming military success of 1967, despite Israeli success in digesting the territories - the conflict was far from over.

Happily, the vagaries of international diplomacy favored a cease-fire along the canal in August, 1970. It is outside the scope of this article to analyse the background and the severe limitations of that cease-fire arrangement. One thing is clear: the conflict has been suspended without having been in any sense solved. This conflict is not of the type to "slink away" if only pushed into some temporary state of inanimateness. At any rate, Israeli society moved into another phase with the conclusion of the cease-fire. Siah, which had constituted itself mainly as an anti-militarist and anti-chauvinist protest movement had, of necessity, to remould itself for a longer and more diversified political battle. This was and is no simple matter.

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was the recognized differences of opinion which were known to exist among the members of Siah regarding Zionism. In this sense, Siah was a conscious attempt to forge a working coalition of Zionists and non-Zionists. A number of factors facilitated this attempt, rather novel in Israeli politics. All concerned felt that along with a reexamination of socialist principles, Zionism was also in for a re-evaluation. The people from Maki were moving away from the anti-Zionist orthodoxy of the communist movement and were sensitive to the dangers of ignoring basic elements in the national psychology. However, the most salient element in this opening was the trauma stemming from the sight of Mapam's liquidationism. Even the most fervent of Zionists felt the need for a broad reexamination of their ideological basis, sensing at least the possibility that the demise of Mapam might not be due so much to abandoning principles as to their all too consistent realization. Add to these factors, an overall general willingness to check-out old truths and to make a common effort to forge new ones. The Matzpen experiment was and is an attempt to build the revolutionary left around the flag of anti-Zionism and to draw a revolutionary perspective around the fight for the de-Zionization of Israel. Much of the Siah experiment depends whether the attempt to recast and sublimate the Zionist ideological issue has an objective chance for success. To the outsider it often seems that the Zionist approach dictates, ipso facto, a whole set of corresponding political attitudes, necessarily subservient to the official national consensus. There is much practical evidence to the contrary. On the other hand, many Zionists assume that the anti-Zionist approach must of necessity lead to the rejection in principle of the Israeli nation-state. Once more, things are not quite that simple. The ability to forge a new integrated theoretical approach to the subject and the chances and the desirability to bridge these mutual doubts and apprehensions will determine, in no small measure, the future of Siah.

The heterogeneous political and sociological background of Siah found its most acute expression in the political differences that emerged between Siah-Jerusalem and the rest of the movement. Of course, it is necessary to preface any analysis of these differences with the observation that none of the Siah groups is or pretends to be monolithic. Cataloging these differences is no easy task. Many of the Jerusalem tendencies may have been either subdued or exaggerated as a result of the interaction with Siah as a whole. A number of issues are indicative. From the beginning, Tel-Aviv Siah rejected any cooperation with Matzpen as a point of principle, stressing the absolute lack of anything in common between the two organizations, etc. While unwilling to join any permanent alliance with Matzpen, Jerusalem Siah justified the possibility of sporadic joint action and actually joined hands with Matzpen on different occasions. Even these sporadic joint activities were a source of deep anguish for many of the non-Jerusalem activists. On the issue of Zionism, a greater proportion of non-Zionists concentrated in Jerusalem. In questions of tactics, the Jerusalemites favored more militant 'direct action' methods and openly favored confrontation with the police and other authorities as the main form of political opposition, while many of the other members of Siah often considered such tendencies as either childish or adventurous. In Siah, outside of Jerusalem, the party principle and electoral politics figured strongly in broad political perspectives. One could express these differences of outlook in another way. Both groups adopted the name, Israeli New Left, but the concept new left had different implication for each group. The Tel-Aviv people (and of course, the kibbutz members) related to the new left in a very general and ephemeral manner. The link was mainly spiritual. The freshness of approach, the militancy and the youth syndrome, were all acceptable up to a point. From then on the accent was Israeli 'new left'. Therefore, the link was a qualified one and, according to this interpretation, the Israeli adjective is more than a geographic element and serves to disassociate the movement from the anti-Israeli

tendencies operative in the new left as a whole. The Jerusalem members saw the new left as a more urgent and relevant problem. They felt a greater political affinity to the concrete problematics of the world movement and being in a university environs, of course, encouraged this disposition. The other Siah members were more sensitive to the acute differences between the Israeli situation and its highly specific dynamic on the one hand, and the conditions obtaining in the West, on the other hand. Quite a bit of the internal tensions and bickerings centered on the tension and the problems of coordinating the activity of the two groups. Their relations will in no small measure influence the chances of Siah.

Is An Israeli Left Necessary?

The left is fighting for its "place under the sun" in Israeli society. Without need to resort to the standard forms of outright political persecution and repression, Israel's rulers have largely rid themselves of any effective social and political opposition on the left. The traditional left has been decimated. Can the new left move to fill this vacuum? Of course, there aren't any hardfast rules which say that a given society must have its 'working' left. Many in Israeli society are willing to forego this pleasure. Even so, there are deep roots in Israeli society to critical thinking in general and concrete criticism of the regime's historical path, in particular. Israel, with all its successes, is still a long way from the promised land. The conquest of Arab lands has only diminished the chances of conquering Arab enmity. True, Israel is no longer an "object of pity", but it is increasingly an object of contempt. The egalitarian ideals, or "myths" which dominated Israel's earlier years have longed dissolved in an uneasy technocracy which wheels and deals through the intricacies of power with an energy more devoted to action than to direction. The workers really do eak out only a bleak existence. The poor are Sephardic. The Arabs walk strangers in their own land. There is plenty of work for the left and strong social roots to which the new left can attach itself if it is wise enough to know that it is not the beginning of all wisdom. Israel with all its area problematics is quickly acquiring domestically many of the ugly features of advanced industrial society with only a few of its advantages.

One of these features is the widening gap between the rich and the poor and the ethnic delineation of the socially underprivileged. A proof of the vitality of the Israeli new left has been its links with the local Black Panther movement from its inception. In many senses the creation of the movement itself can best be explained by the operation of phenomena familiar from the Western urban setting wherein 'social deviants' meet and link-up with the proponents of 'marginal politics'. As a matter of fact, since the Panther's emergence they have been the constant object of threats and temptations aimed at scaring them away from the student left. The Panthers may be weak and still have far to go in order to become a genuine popular force. Carried, at first, on a mass wave of sympathy, but unable to build a stable organization, they have still made their way to the left, even, perhaps, at the price of some of their spontaneous appeal. However, they have escaped the trap of right-wing social demagogues who hoped to coopt the movement. Prospects in an alliance with the left are far from rosy, but this possibility proves that the new left does have the potential of moving from its narrow student-intellectual base and building strong mass links.

1,650 university students in the whole country. Today, the number is rapidly approaching 50,000, with the student population growing seven times faster than the overall population, and this in a country with a population which has almost quadrupled since 1948. One of the indicators of the potential political role that the students can play in the reestablishment of the Israeli left is the emergence and initial successes of the left in Haifa University. During the 1971-72 academic year a left coalition called "Yesh", formed of almost all the left forces at the Haifa University astounded public opinion (and also themselves) by receiving an absolute majority in the elections to the student union. Of course, this kind of strength was and is disproportionate and it is not intended here to describe the overall strength of the student left in exaggerated terms. The student left was and still remains a decided minority. The campuses are far from being radicalized. However, the campus left is considerably stronger than the left in other areas of Israeli society. This fact is in evidence on all campuses. Haifa, then, more than rounded off the fact of student left influence.

Much of the idealist energy of Israeli society was always channelled into the kibbutz movement. The chalutz youth movement, with their orientation on transferring city youth into agricultural kibbutz members has always attracted considerable segments of Israeli youth. Albeit not a mass movement, the chalutz youth has managed to attract many of the more idealistic and sensitive youth. It is possible that ramifications of the deep crisis in kibbutz living may feed back into the pioneering youth movements in Israel and weaken considerably, if not entirely erode their ability to attract thinking Israeli youth. Kibbutz, in addition to its intrinsic value as Zionist instrument for settlement and reclamation, was also to serve youth who wished to build a different kind of life. This crisis, which takes place on the background of flourishing economic achievements, is in the moral and ethical areas. The kibbutz has moved into the "consumer society" with great strides. While it would be foolish to underestimate the stability of kibbutz society as it has developed and taken root in Israeli society, it would be equally unwise to disregard the deep psychological change in attitudes towards the kibbutz and in the way the kibbutz sees itself. In its present form of flourishing consumption and ideological impoverishment, the kibbutz may serve less and less as a model for those who want to fight and work for a better society.

Finally, among the factors which favor the growth of the new left in Israel, it is necessary to count the repercussion here, in the country, of political developments abroad. Israelis travel and news travels. In this sense, a year or two abroad, can often remake the entire political outlook of many a typical Israeli student. The influence of the left in intellectual and student circles in the West, despite its ups and downs, still can serve as a very positive example for non-isolationist Israelis. The comparative strength of the world movement, despite reversals, can still inspire much progress on the Israeli front.

Fragmentation Through Import

But, it is not only inspiration and encouragement that can come from abroad. Matzpen, which had developed serious international connections before 1967, deepened and widened these links after the Six-Day War. Now, various ideological trends and shadings had existed previously in the organization. But the need to maintain a militant avowedly anti-Zionist political formation seemed like a genuine common political denominator, and, in Israeli conditions, anti-Zionism seemed to afford, in itself, a considerable amount of political cohesiveness. The Matzpen people, when they closely followed the international politics of the fragmenting new left groupings, were faced with a different picture. There, abroad,

many groups with almost identically critical planks against Israel or Zionism, had some very dissimilar positions on cardinal ideological issues and were in fact, often enough, locked in sharp factional conflicts. Internal Matzpen deliberations began to be more and more influenced by full-blown conceptual positions "borrowed" from abroad and mechanically copied into the Israeli scene. When many of the activists started having their own private and divergent "International", the unity of the Israeli Socialist Organization - Matzpen, quickly eroded.

In the fall of 1970, there occurred a three-way split in the group. Three almost equally strong groups emerged after the split; 1) "Vanguard" - orthodox Trotskyists, orientated on the French Lambertists and the Committee for the Re-establishment of the Fourth International; 2) "Revolutionary Communist Alliance", which was composed of the supporters of Maoist tendencies; 3) the original Matzpen people who rejected the ideological ultimatums of the two split-off groups. However, even the remaining Matzpen group was far from homogenic. The more moderate Trotskyite element, orientated on the Secretariat of the Fourth International, left the reduced Matzpen group in the summer of 1971 accusing it of neo-anarchism. It is interesting that the members of the original Matzpen concentration despite their Marxist orientation rejected the demand issued it from all three opposed tendencies to recognize the urgency of establishing the democratic-centralist party of the revolutionary proletariat. One can discern certain additional practical implications to the ideological disputes. The orthodox Trotskyites quite naturally wish to stress work among the Israeli working class, the Maoists emphasize the special importance of work among the Arab population, while the Matzpen people center their action among youth and students. Of course, those who split in the name of crystallized ideological positions immediately claimed that the constitution of a separate group has put them on the "right path". At any rate, sociologically speaking the social composition of all groups remains middle class student-intellectual.

The Matzpen split seems to have proven that militant anti-Zionism in itself was not sufficient to create and sustain a unified political force. The practical dismemberment of Matzpen has, at least hitherto resulted, in the eyes of most observers, in a considerable weakening of the whole movement and of all of its parts. As elsewhere, here in Israel, the new left thrust, unable to present a new, cohesive and fully worked-out ideological alternative, loses ground to the various old left trends. The demand for such an alternative is in itself perfectly natural. Objectively, there are many reasons why the new left cannot meet such a demand. This, of course, doesn't always help such when young devoted and impatient activists demand that warm feeling of certainty seemingly supplied by the "veteran" schools of revolutionary thinking. The objective difficulties in elaborating an original analysis and corresponding strategy and tactics leads to ideological recidivism and an acute, even absurd and illogical fragmentation, when considering the clear absence of any existing mass base. These same pressures and tensions are also operative in Siah, where they find, of course, different forms of expression.

Siah Between The Old and New Left

Siah's attempt to maintain and develop an open-ended ideological framework has had only limited and indecisive success. While there is general agreement in the movement on the goal of building a radical opposition, almost all the practical implications of this

others, this very same synthesis has more than proven its inability to sustain a consistent revolutionary struggle and could, if given pride-of-place, redirect the movement back to establishment politics, first in form and then in content. Once more, the traditionalist approach favors the "party" perspective, even if this means, practically speaking, entering a permanent coalition with other more or less uninspiring remnants of the old left. The innovators would like to preserve, as much as possible, the spontaneity of the movement and build on the successes achieved in the 'protest movement' stage of Siah's development, but are hardpressed to show how Siah can avoid the "slump" that has hit the movement in the West. So far, Siah has succeeded in avoiding the illusion that these kind of problems have an easy solution through the simple process of splitting.

Of course, the wisdom, devotion and willingness to sacrifice of the new left activists will determine in no small measure if Israeli society is to have a critical and revolutionary dimension. But, these subjective qualities howsoever important, are of course secondary to the political impact of the objective role and fortunes of Israeli society. While it has been true that many aspects of the historical process have endowed Israel with the particular, and often strident qualities necessary to survive in a hostile environs, it may be that the capacity to sustain and nurture a strong left may be the supreme test of its ability to survive in a normal one.