

**Dan  
Leon**

*We present yet another report, and viewpoint, on the alignment between Mapam and the Israel Labor Party, and welcome back to these pages Dan Leon whose "Dateline Israel" was so popular, and which is welcomed back in this issue. Much will be said and written of the alignment, and Dan Leon brings considerable light to the subject.*

## What it Took to Make the Alignment

SOMETIMES even the expected can be surprising. In April, 1968, the national convention of Mapam authorized the party leadership to enter into negotiations with the Israel Labor Party on an alignment between the two parties. On November 23, the second session of the Mapam convention resolved by a majority of 64.4% to confirm the alignment which will be almost immediately effective in the Knesset, the Histadrut (General Confederation of Labor) and in local elections.

The decision did not come as a sudden surprise. After all, much had depended on the Labor Party itself and when, after bitter discussions and with a similar majority in favor (about two-thirds), the Labor Party came out for the alignment, half the battle was won.

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### Major Victory

The Labor decision was a major victory for the veteran leadership—Prime Minister Eshkol, Golda Meir and her successor as secretary of the party, Pinchas Sapir, and for the former Achdut Avoda faction led by Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Alon and Yisrael Galili.

Against the alignment were ranged the former Rafi faction (Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres), along with a section of former Mapai people from various sections of the party. It is noteworthy that this was the second important defeat of Rafi within the united Labor Party, the first setback having been the decision not to hold internal party elections before November's Knesset elections, a decision which parried Rafi's plans to push changes in the leadership, including the replacement of Eshkol with Dayan.

Yet in longer perspective, the Labor-Mapam alignment is not without a great element of surprise. Historically speaking, Hashomer Hatzair and Mapam have always represented

a left wing alternative to the traditional Mapai (social democratic) leadership of the Israel labor movement. More often than not, Mapam has joined coalition governments under Mapai leadership, not only in the days of Levi Eshkol but in the times of David Ben Gurion, a Prime Minister far less prone to go towards the demands of the left than Eshkol, a master of compromise with stronger inclinations to further labor unity and moderate policies abroad and at home, as for example his efforts on entering office to improve relations with the Soviet Union and his abrogation of the military rule over the Arab areas in Israel.

But whereas a government coalition is one thing, and an alignment, which means a joint Knesset faction and election list in the parliament, the Histadrut and in local elections is another kettle of fish. This is what we mean when we call it a "historic surprise." And looking back at the political history of Israel, there can be no doubt that five years ago, or even two years ago, the prospect of labor unity looked remote in the extreme. Many in Mapam had doubts even about joining a government coalition not to speak of more binding cooperation with the then Mapai Party.

The great question is, *What has it taken to bring about such far-reaching changes in the political climate?* What has been happening in the country, in the Labor Party and in Mapam? A quick look at the picture can throw some light on the trends, although we are still too close to the events to pretend to understand more than the general direction, and it will take time to fill in the details of these important and fast-moving processes.

The Six-Day War has been compared to a political earthquake, but in his speech at the recent convention, Mapam leader Yaakov Hazan noted that it would be more correct to compare Israel's situation to islanders living under the threat of an active volcano. For

whereas the former is unlikely to strike the same place twice, the latter is by nature prone to erupt time and again, unless and until it becomes dormant.

Unlike, for example, Israel's Sinai campaign of 1956, which was a highly controversial military campaign (some have more correctly called it an adventure) in league with imperialist powers, the June, 1967, war was a continuation of the 1948 War of Independence. Israel fought for her actual existence against a clear threat to destroy her on the field of battle.

This struggle of a small country for her right to sovereignty and freedom can be ranked with the most outstanding military campaign conducted by people fighting in our time for their liberty. Further, Israel fought alone—with the sympathy of progressive people the world over, yet without their active support which could have been expected were it true that good causes are always backed by good people.

Leaving aside other considerations, two things stand out if one looks at the broad picture of Israel's enemies in June, 1967: Arab unity was once again activated in order to join forces for the destruction of Israel, and the whole venture was politically supported and militarily backed by the Soviet Union and her allies.

The first fact may not have been surprising, even if it was disappointing and highly discouraging for all those in Israel who have devoted themselves to seeking a way out of the Israel-Arab impasse without war. But the second aspect, the outright Soviet support for the Arab war of destruction, introduced something new in the picture. Soviet tanks and guns and planes, the arms of the "world's leading socialist power," were now directed in all their might against the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

That they ended up burning or destroyed, or captured intact by the Israel Defense Forces, was not part of Soviet calculations. The hundreds of Israel boys who fell facing this armory included many who had been brought up in a tradition which linked Soviet arms with the defense of Madrid against the first fascist invasion, the heroic Battle of Stalingrad and the fall of Berlin, the capital of Hitler's Germany.

These, too, were the arms with which the

young Israel army had won the War of Independence two decades before. Now, more deadly than ever before, the same weapons were turned against Jewish workers and pioneering socialist communes from the Syrian positions on the Golan Heights and directed against Israel's soldiers in the streets of Gaza and in the Sinai desert. This was a turning point the significance of which cannot be exaggerated.

Now leftists abroad find it hard to grasp the extent to which political parties of the working class all over the world were for decades associated with a particular approach to the Soviet Union. This was also one of the decisive criteria in the Israel labor movement.

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#### What Soviet Did

Mapam was never connected organizationally with the Communist parties in the world and Hashomer Hatzair had gone through several stages in its relations with the Soviet Union. Firstly, Mapam always retained complete independence over the Jewish question and Zionism, remaining faithful to the Zionist creed regardless of the Soviet attitude. Along with this, it is true that during and after World War II and until the Prague trials, there were years during which Mapam's pro-Soviet orientation was pronounced and with the exception of Jewish and Israel affairs, Mapam was broadly considered to be a pro-Soviet party.

With the Oren affair and the Twentieth Congress, this changed steadily and the Mapam attitude to the Soviet Union became more critical again, as it had also been during the Moscow trials of the late 1930's. With all the criticism, however, Mapam retained a good deal of its pro-Soviet sympathies. It was hoped that Russia would at least restrain the Arabs from active use of Soviet arms against Israel. The Six-Day War dashed the hopes of a generation, unmasking the Soviet Union as a great power no less ruthless and opportunistic than any in the world. It was left for the invasion of Czechoslovakia to put the finishing touch to this story of cynical disregard for the elementary rights of small peoples. The period of disenchantment had begun in earnest.

Now these developments cannot, in themselves, explain the Mapam orientation towards the alignment but without them, the process of Mapam's moving towards such a conception would have been unthinkable. To put it

bluntly, one of the foundations of Mapam's independence was destroyed not by Mapam but by the Soviet Union. There was no longer any purpose in dividing different streams within the labor movement according to the approach to the Soviet Union. Now the question was whether according to different criteria there was room for an independent left socialist stream.

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### Not Whole Story

Those who fail to understand the importance of the removal of the Soviet question do not grasp the simple fact that for years this was one of the watersheds dividing the labor movement and that its removal represented something of a revolution on the political map of Israel (it is not our task to go into the implications in other countries and labor movements).

The development we have described plunged Mapam into a period of deep re-appraisal. Those favoring the alignment pointed to the fact that the war was not an isolated incident. Averting, through armed victory, the immediate threat to our survival did not remove the permanent threat posed by Arab hostility and intransigence. The existence of the State of Israel was at stake—and if labor unity could play a role in fostering national unity for the sake of this struggle for actual existence, then everything else must be subordinated. *Since the existence of the labor movement, first things must come first* and differences of opinion on other questions must be subordinated to the only decisive question—that of survival, security and peace.

In other words, Israel is still at war. The casualties announced day by day on the borders are a grim reminder of this. The Arab threat remains as menacing as ever. Soviet backing to the Arab cause remains constant and the Arab armories have been replaced and even improved by the Soviet Union. In such times, differences of opinion on social affairs, for example, between two labor parties takes second place to a feeling of unity and solidarity against the threat to push all Israelis, regardless of party tags, into the sea. (Readers are advised to look at a recent pamphlet put out by the Israel Foreign Office called *War by Terror* which is quite simply a reprint of recent Arab threats to wipe out Israel. It is grim and foreboding reading but without it there can, unfortunately, be no understanding of

Israel's external situation and of the results in her internal political life.)

Yet this is not the whole story. In such a situation, Israel has to determine what to do apart from looking to her own security: that the army has to be built up whatever the cost, the border settlements fortified and the nation mobilized is a matter of life or death, agreed upon by all. The great question is: what to do apart from this?

Up to now, since the Six-Day War, the Government of National Unity, representing the whole political spectrum in Israel, has worked according to a formula agreed by all: no retreat without a peace treaty agreed upon in direct talks and guaranteeing an end to the Arab non-recognition of Israel and war against her, agreed and secure borders, free passage of the Suez Canal and Straits of Tiran, etc. This formula has enabled people and parties of different outlooks to work together.

But the time is rapidly approaching—perhaps it is already here and the government is unable to act accordingly because of the formula—when something more is needed. And on the basic issues of what to do, the Labor Party is divided.

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### Where Mapam Stands

It would take too long to detail here who stands for what, and the picture is not a simple black and white affair. There are variations and different shades of color. But in broad outline, there are those who believes that we must do more for peace, we must be prepared to give up much of the occupied territories as the price of peace, and there are those who do not believe that peace is on the agenda and since this is so, we should annex the occupied areas once and for all. (Perhaps the difference is expressed in the two phrases—"occupied areas" and "liberated areas.") The outstanding exponent of the peace-oriented group is the Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, while the other camp is led by Moshe Dayan.

Mapam is consistently and uncompromisingly in the former camp. And the realization has been growing that as the day of decision on these vital matters draws nearer, Mapam's influence could be far more effective and perhaps, in the view of some observers, could be decisive, in weighing the scales—if Mapam were to take part in the internal counsels of

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the Labor Party. If this were so, then it would mean that Mapam could be a decisive element in determining policies which could mean peace or war.

Put this way, one can readily understand that the majority in Mapam chose to support the alignment—a guarantee that the party would remain independent and yet would from

now on be on the spot when life and death decisions were made. For there is no disagreement about the fact that the Labor Party is the place where the decisions will be made, and only afterwards will they come to the Cabinet and the Knesset. This is the essence of a mass Labor Party which now, with Mapam, has a clear majority in the Knesset and has every chance to win such a majority in November's elections.

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### Working from Inside

There is, however, another possibility. What would happen if the "revisionist" forces within labor, whose natural leader is Moshe Dayan, decided that they would have more chance outside the Labor Party? The type of "revisionism" to which we refer here is not restricted to any particular area. It would not only preach a more "activist," tough, possibly annexationist policy in foreign affairs. It would also once and for all put an end to the traditional path of labor and of the Histadrut at home, with all that this implies for the future image and direction of Israel society.

Such a trend would remove from the ranks of labor all those hostile to the "historical" ideologies and policies of the Israel labor movement and would naturally find its allies on the right—among those same non-labor and anti-labor forces which up to now have never seriously contended for power in Israel. Under a charismatic leader and with the backing of all those (including much of the so-called non-party press) who dream of a *non-labor alternative government*, such a political force could conceivably be swept into power either within the context of Israel's parliamentary democracy or even outside this context. (There used to be talk of an Israel deGaulle but with the recent "devaluation" of the General, the comparison is less popular—yet no less relevant.)

In such circumstances, once again it can be understood without difficulty how vital it might be for Mapam to work from inside to thwart such plans, whatever their source, without too many calculations of Mapam's own "self-interest" when the whole future of the labor movement might be at stake.

Very few people in Mapam believe that the independent mission of the party as the only representative of a genuine synthesis between pioneering Zionism and radical socialism is

now over. Even the few voices raised for complete unity instead of alignment believe in the mission of Mapam but are of the opinion that it can better be expressed within a united Labor Party. Neither do most of the opponents of the alignment disagree with the argumentation outlined above and the need to strengthen the peace and labor forces—but they maintain that in order to do this there is no necessity to poign an alignment which waters down Mapam's independence to such an extent that it is bound to lead Mapam, as it led Achdut Avoda, from alignment to complete union. They are of the view that an independent Mapam can more effectively mobilize public opinion for peace initiatives, without doing anything to weaken labor and national solidarity on the security front.

In their view, an independent Mapam is an essential part of the Israel political scene at all times, and particularly now when peace and brotherhood, two of Mapam's basic planks for decades, are so vital in the struggle against that chauvinism which is so manifest among some sections of Israel public opinion today.

In order to understand both the protagonists and the opponents of the alignment, it might be instructive to look at the arguments at the convention of one of the opponents, Rafi Shalev of Kibbutz Ein Dor. He spoke of "five illusions":

1. The alignment agreement does not forward our purposes, but rather pushes Mapam towards the Labor Party.

2. It is an illusion to think that we shall be in the main decision-making forum. Golda Meir, he said, had promised the opponents of the alignment within the Labor Party that vital decisions would be made in the Labor Party and not in the alignment.

3. We will not be permitted to do political work except where the Labor Party line and ours correspond. For instance, he said, the Histadrut general secretary had said that from now on Mapam could not organize workers' committees "against the Histadrut." (These committees had often initiated strike action.)

4. The arithmetical calculation that we would be able to maintain our representation in the Knesset and elsewhere would turn out to be illusory.

5. We are deluding ourselves if we think we can maintain our independence within the alignment.

We have quoted the arguments against in order to illustrate where the differences lie. The majority see the alignment agreement as a framework within which Mapam can continue her struggle in new conditions, where Mapam can draw nearer to those close to her and be more effective in fighting against those whose policies she rejects. If, in the past, we in Mapam had often been right in our evaluations, we had been like spectators watching the game and shouting words of encouragement to the players we supported; now the time had come to take an active part in the game itself, to put our people into the team, to make sure that our ability and energy was used to the full both in defense and in attack.

Mapam is a party proud of its record in every field of pioneering endeavor and political struggle in Israel. No other force can perform the political mission which it has undertaken over the years. Yet this is a period of re-evaluation, of re-thinking. Mapam, like many left socialist forces elsewhere in the world, has suffered from the betrayal by the Soviet Union of many of hopes and dreams associated with Soviet power. Yet as a political force Mapam is not entering the alignment in order to retreat from the ideological tenets and political orientation which motivate her brand of socialist Zionism.

Indeed, one of the protagonists of the alignment, Knesset Member Victor Shemtov, wrote that today *we would have to create Mapam if such a political force did not exist on the Israel scene*. Entering the alignment is the start of a new era in which Mapam would be tested in new circumstances. *Can Mapam retain her image, her vitality, her independence, her ability to inspire the new generation in these new circumstances?*

This is a question which only time can answer and on it depends not only the future of Mapam as a party, but the future of the Israel left and, indeed, the future of the State of Israel in the years ahead.

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