

MIDDLE EAST— WAR OR PEACE?

Sid Douglas

IN January 1967, an article appeared in this journal entitled *Israeli Aggression in the Middle East*, which drew attention to the imminent danger of war in that region. That war occurred six months later—the so-called ‘Six Days War’. Once again there are signs indicative of attempts to mount a new major military escalation by the Zionist Israeli Government with the connivance of US imperialism.

The attack on the Arab resistance fighters by the Lebanese army on the orders of the Lebanese President, without the knowledge of his own Prime Minister, who as a consequence resigned, is one such indication. Previous interventions in the Lebanon by the US make the action of the Lebanese President highly suspect.

The further arming of Israel by the US with Phantom planes, and the pressure in Britain to supply Israel with Chieftain tanks (*Evening Standard* editorial, October 30) are still further indications, and Washington’s decision to permit American citizens to join Israel’s armed forces and still retain their US citizenship is highly ominous. Moreover, the political escalation of the Israeli Government to the right, with Dayan blackmailing the Mapai (Labour Party) leadership into an annexationist policy adds greatly to the danger of a new major military adventure and a third world war.

However, 1969 is not 1967 and opposition to the Zionists’ plans and aspirations now exist where none existed in 1967. This is true even amongst many of the erstwhile supporters of Zionism, who reject tears without end and a future without perspective.

Lavon, the former Israeli Security Minister, a previous Mapai leader, as well as a former General Secretary of the Histadrut (Trade Union), on December 20, 1968, demanded ‘a one sided Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories before it is too late.’ He wrote in the paper *Davar*: ‘A peace settlement cannot be achieved by direct negotiations; this formula of “direct negotiations” is a curtain behind which the annexationists take cover to shut the mouths of all who do not accept their will.’

The Communist Party has breached its previous isolation. Their meetings are now attended by non-Party people who work with the Party. This swelling opposition to the Government’s policies has found concrete expression in the September Histadrut elections

where the Communists received 13,000 votes, an increase of 5,000 over the previous elections in 1965. For the first time Communists will have representation on the local workers' councils in Tel-Aviv, Haifa and Acre. In Nazareth the Communists won a majority of Council seats.

Despite the fact that Gahal—the extreme right-wing party gained an increase of five seats in the recent elections to the Israeli parliament, it is not the great victory of the right wing it is represented to be, although of course it is nothing to be pleased about. In the 1965 elections Gahal had 26 seats, but the party split, the splitters taking over four seats and calling itself the 'Free Centre', thus leaving Gahal with 22 seats. At the last election the splitters won only one seat, the other three going back to Gahal. Thus in fact Gahal has won an increase of only two seats and not five.

All parties in Israel are Zionist except the Communist Party, led by Meir Vilner. Amongst these Zionist parties there has been a small redistribution of seats orientating Zionist policies still further to the right. Against this Zionist block the increased influence of the Communist Party, despite a very real terror directed against them and their supporters, stands out.

The Communist Party increased its total vote by 30 per cent to 30,051 and retains its three MPs. At the time of writing not all votes have come in (army, etc.) and it is very possible that the Communists will receive a fourth seat. Of the 30 per cent increased vote received by the Communists, it is estimated that 10 per cent are Jewish votes. It is therefore clear that opposition to Zionist policies is growing in Israel, and the overwhelming support which Zionism enjoyed in 1967 no longer exists.

Simultaneously, Arab understanding, resistance and organisation outside Israel has grown greatly. That historical reality does not favour imperialist designs is shown by Libya's demand that the Americans close their Tripoli air base, and the cancelling of armament orders from Britain that do not serve Libyan needs, while Turkey—a Nato member—refuses to allow the US to use their air base in Turkey to transport troops and supplies to the Lebanon!

The June war of 1967 was mounted *mainly* to destroy the Arab liberation movement for the benefit of imperialism, out of which of course the Israeli Zionists hope to gain permanently increased territory. The main aim was, however, frustrated. Instead there is a turn to the left in many Arab states, and a vast increase in the popularity of the USSR, side by side with a great decrease in the popularity of the US. This situation is not to the liking of the

imperialists, who as a consequence, are finding greater difficulty in pressing Arab reaction into service to protect imperialist interests in the Middle East. In an effort to stop this falling away of US influence amongst the Arab states, Scranton, Nixon's special envoy in the Middle East, in February 1969 called for a more balanced US policy, while Charles Yost, US ambassador to the UN called for big power talks to find an agreed settlement. These discussions have been held but to date without finality, mainly due to the intransigence of the Zionist Israeli ruling clique.

There is no clear-cut behaviour on the part of the US imperialists; for while the big power meetings were going on, they also agreed to supply Israel with 50 Phantom fighter bombers. This reflects the conflict amongst the US ruling clique. The conflict between what such elements desire and what they can actually achieve is being decided by the historical needs of the populations inhabiting the area itself. While on the one hand US policy is under great pressure to make an accommodation with the Arab states, or lose more and more influence with them, and plot a course *away* from backing Israel 100 per cent, it nevertheless still manoeuvres to exploit Israel's occupation of Arab territory to use as a bargaining counter in dealing with the Arab liberation movement so as to protect their interests in the Middle East. Thus, the US imperialists vacillate between accepting the course of a political settlement, or using the mailed fist of the Israeli Zionist ruling clique. *This is a situation of the greatest danger in the immediate future.* It explains Nasser's pronouncement of November 6, in which he warns American imperialism that the UAR is not willing to accept Israeli dictats, and is prepared for any new military escalations, if this is the road, as all the signs indicate, which Israel is hell bent on following.

The Lebanese affair, the Phantom planes, the British tanks, the pronouncement that American citizens may join the Israeli army, the increase in right wing influence on the Israeli Government, and Dayan's annexationist statements, all very strongly point the need for great vigilance in the months that lie immediately ahead. Above all, they underline the urgent need to build a front of solidarity with all in Britain who wish to prevent a new major military escalation in the Middle East, and who wish to see justice done to the inhabitants of Palestine, both Arabs and Jews, on the minimum basis of the *implementation* of the UN November 22, 1967, Security Council resolution. Stan Newens, Labour MP for Epping, made an appeal for such a front in the *Morning Star* of October 22. We should hasten to support it.