

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE IRGUN

By Esther Vilenska

Translated from the Yiddish by Joseph King

IN June of this year, the young Jewish state was greatly disturbed by a serious attempt on the part of the Irgun to incite civil war. It began with a dispute over the ship laden with arms. The Irgun demanded that it be permitted to make hay for itself by utilizing the weapons to arm its followers only. The conditions which the Irgun had put were as follows: 20 per cent of the arms for Jerusalem and the rest for the Irgun, and the Irgun alone.

The fact that a Jewish army had been created which was fighting against the enemy, was a matter of little concern to the Irgun. The fact that a Jewish government had been established which was leading the fight against the aggressors, did not interest the Irgun. The fact that Israel was surrounded with enemies, lying in wait on all sides, did not concern the Irgunists. They deserted from the army and called upon all their followers to forsake their positions in order to begin an internal struggle to get the arms for themselves.

Thus the Irgun elements tried to disarm the Jewish soldiers and strove to capture positions from the command of the Israeli army. They had no compunctions in igniting a fire while the Arab aggressors were poised on all fronts. Their commander, Menachem Beigin, was not ashamed to justify the struggle with the spurious reason that if he did not distribute the arms among his followers, they would revolt against him. This is indeed a highly "patriotic" reason to justify a civil war!

The Irgun seeks to create the false impression that the struggle was conducted because it wanted only to unload the arms while the Jewish army did not want the arms at all. This is pure demagoguery. The fact is that the Irgun had begun the bloody struggle because it demanded the arms for itself and had rejected turning them over to the leadership of the Israeli army.

Up till now, the Irgun has not answered the main questions: why did it refuse to deliver the arms to the Israeli

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army? For what political purposes does the Irgun require separate arms?

One of the Irgun commanders had declared at a press conference in Tel Aviv, on the same day its "*putsch*" was begun, that the Irgun wished to give its followers arms in order that its soldiers would be better armed and would "feel better." It is clear that this was but a thinly disguised pretext to cover up the anti-democratic goals for which the Irgun required the arms. For if it is true that the Irgun had no hidden, suspicious goal, why should the entire Israeli army be worse equipped and why should only the Irgun forces be better armed? Why should not the arms be distributed by the general Jewish command to the whole Jewish army? Why does the Irgun require its own stores of arms while the entire state is at war, and all citizens are driving back the enemies on all fronts?

The Irgunists persist in arguing that they brought the arms to Israel and that therefore the arms belonged to them. But what is involved is not a commercial deal in the market, but a general struggle to defend the fatherland. Is it not clear that in such a situation the present demand for the separate arming of a separate military organization by the Irgun has quite definite political aims?

The Irgunists say: a *putsch*? Heaven forbid, we would not think of it. But if they are actually as innocent as they make themselves out to be, then one must ask: why then do they need arms after they had officially declared and ardently pledged themselves to enter the Israeli army and dissolve as a separate military organization?

If they had no intention of starting a civil war, then why did they tell all their followers to desert from the army and come to the ship? Why did they concentrate on the ship their entire leadership, including their commander-in-chief?

Against whom are they preparing to turn their arms? The foreign enemy, the Arab aggressors and their British officers, are being heroically fought by the Israeli army. All the fronts are being self-sacrificingly defended by the courageous soldiers of the general Jewish army. As regards the external

situation, therefore, the Irgun can have no special mission. There remains for them only the internal front, the struggle to attain positions of power.

Before we go into greater detail on the concrete meaning of attaining positions of power, it is necessary to inquire into the social class which incites the Irgun, and what class interests the Irgun defends. What social strata stand behind the Irgun? Which class supports it? Whose political aims does the Irgun express?

Industrialists Back Irgun

We begin with one episode. A short while ago, before the beginning of the "Altalena" civil war, a meeting took place in Ramat-Gan, in which the commander of the Irgun and rich Jewish industrialists participated. Present were such men as Sachs—owner of a big factory, Furmantzenko—a big industrialist, and Krinitzi—the mayor of Ramat-Gan, who also has some business interests and is far from being a pauper. At this "substantial" gathering 20,000 pounds (\$30,000) was raised immediately. This example is not an isolated one. Nor is it an accident. It is very characteristic and points to the bourgeois source upon which the Irgun rests in Israel and—in the United States of America.

During the entire course of its existence, the Irgun has been supported financially by the Jewish bourgeoisie, and its leaders are recruited primarily from among this element. No wonder, then, that the Irgun elements, fed with money by industrialists, had more than once placed themselves in the service of the most brutal anti-labor interests of these factory owners. It is enough to recall one of the recent occasions when Jewish industrialists used the Irgun as strike-breakers.

The general strike of the workers in the mills in Petach-Tikvar at the end of 1946 was supported by the Histadruth. The strike was called to improve very bad working conditions. All the workers in the weaving mills, irrespective of party affiliation, formed a common front. The owners set the Irgunists against the striking workers. The "brown heroes," as they are called, came with knives and arms against the workers, and did not hesitate to shed Jewish blood. The Irgun then revealed itself cynically and brutally as the mailed fist of Jewish Big Business, as the organized military storm troops who menaced the elementary democratic rights of the working class.

The entire labor movement in Palestine was aroused by the attack on the strikers. It was clear that a military power of a definite anti-democratic character was emerging. Strike-breaking is no accident or "misunderstanding." Every worker knows and feels that organized strike-breaking is one of the sharpest expressions of mercenary service to the bourgeoisie.

There is another interesting political aspect of the question. The Irgun sharply attacks the leadership of the Histadruth, calls it "totalitarian," etc. True, one may criticize the present leadership of the Histadruth, particularly on the point that it serves the interests of the Jewish bourgeoisie.

Thus, for instance, the Mapai (right wing labor party)

leadership of the Histadruth agreed during the current war that the wages of the workers be reduced. Ben Gurion, the leader of the Mapai, as security minister (he is also premier) decided that it was necessary to concentrate the workers in camps and take back a significant part of their wages. But thus far, he has not yet imposed war taxes on the industrialists and bankers.

This shows that the Mapai leadership is not an independent factor but an executor of bourgeois policy. Criticism of the Mapai leadership of the Histadruth must therefore be necessarily linked with the main struggle against the policy of the Jewish bourgeoisie. However, he who attacks only the leaders of the Histadruth and handles with silk gloves the policy of the entrepreneurs, industrialists, importers and speculators, discloses his own very intimate relations with precisely the latter circles.

In view of the fact that the Irgun is highly pleased with the policy of the Jewish bourgeoisie and is delighted with its attack on the elementary rights of the workers, the Irgun criticism of the Histadruth leaders must be considered nothing less than a camouflaged means of fighting against the labor organization and the labor movement as such.

The pro-bourgeois class character of the Irgun is also established to a certain extent by the fact that the bourgeois Hebrew press—*Haboker* and others—serves as a defender of the Irgun, despite its anti-British propaganda, while these newspapers often recognized "British interests" in Palestine.

At first glance it may appear contradictory that pro-British newspapers should undertake to defend the Irgun, which conducts anti-British propaganda! One answer to this question is that the complacent circles of *Haboker* know very well that they have taken devoted lackeys under their wing. Another answer to this question lies in the "tolerant" Irgun attitude toward American imperialism.

Revisionism—Public Face of Irgun

The anti-labor character of the Irgun, carefully masked in its publicity, is, however, regularly and openly revealed in the revisionist newspaper *Hamashkif*. *Hamashkif* is jointly edited by revisionists and Irgunists. *Hamashkif* quite openly attacks strikes, remaining true to the strike-breaking ideology of the *Fuehrer*, Vladimir Jabotinsky. *Hamashkif* even committed the absurdity of opposing the strike of the workers in the potash company, owned by predominantly British and some American capital. The potash company is under the management of the British ICI (Imperial Chemical Industry) trust. Hence revisionist circles, together with the Irgunists, oppose the struggle to improve the wages of Jewish workers at the expense of the profits of British owners. How do you like this interesting "patriotism" of the Irgunists? How do you like such remarkable "anti-imperialism" on the part of these gentlemen?

In view of the role of the Irgun in the service of the Jewish bourgeoisie, it is clear that its demand for arms for its separate military organization was aimed at a strengthening of the bourgeois representation in the government by force of arms. It is clear that Irgun objectives of political

power are not isolated from its class character. The crucial fact that the Irgun decided to conduct a bloody struggle against the Israeli army, shows that the official pledge of the Irgun to dissolve is not worth a dime. It rather shows that the Irgun is determined to provoke a civil war when it has sufficient strength and open support.

The bloody events around the "Altalena" are a danger signal of intensive political activity by the reactionary forces—even in the hard times of the general and united military struggle of Israel against foreign aggressors.

A complete picture of the Irgun cannot be given without a perspective on the historic political changes taking place in Israel and on the attitude of the Irgun toward the new foreign rulers who are appearing on our horizon.

In Israel, a national liberation struggle is successfully going forward. That is one side of the coin. At the same time, a new foreign occupation is beginning—occupation by American imperialism: that is the other side of the coin.

American Penetration in Israel

The young Jewish state is fighting heroically against Arab armies and their British commanders. But even before the military victories are consolidated, and before full political independence is secured, a systematic penetration of American military in different parts of the country, and particularly in Haifa, is taking place. The excuse is that the occupants wear United Nations arm-bands, and officially consider themselves "truce observers." In fact, however, they are nothing but foreign occupationists.

American imperialism is using all sorts of maneuvers to get into our country. At one time they send in American ships, a second time airplanes (not for the Jewish army, heaven forbid!), a third time several hundred sailors were pushed in and later American soldiers stream into our ports without end. Excuses are not lacking, and in the course of two months of truce negotiations there have already come to us, bless them, 4000 American armed "guests"!

The serious menace of American imperialism is not limited to military penetration. Americans are also attempting to "embrace" our country economically and politically. The American government is demanding larger concessions; it demands immediate political control in Israel in connection with the promised loan; it maneuvered through its appointed agent, Count Folke Bernadotte, to take away Jewish territory and even Jewish sovereignty.

In this new situation several principled questions arise about the position of the Irgun toward American imperialism. Why does not the Irgun now raise its voice against American occupation? Why has not the Irgun even protested against the penetration by American military? Why has not the Irgun opposed Truman's demands for concessions and bases in Israel? Why has not the Irgun said one word until now about the serious menace of American imperialism to Jewish freedom? The Irgun has closed its lips and remained silent. Hush-hush, quiet.

Every sincere person knows how harmful are the attempts

of Americans to rule in parts of Europe and Asia, as well as in the Mediterranean countries. It is an instructive fact that the 16 European, so-called western, countries (including England, France and Italy) have openly protested against the enslaving conditions of American "relief." It is easy to imagine what kind of magnanimous "conditions" the Truman government will be pleased to set for the Jewish state when Weitzmann selects the Washington address at which to ask for a "loan." Well, has the Irgun exposed the danger of American Big Business for the Jewish economy? Has the Irgun declared that it is opposed to the Marshall Plan for Israel?

Support of American Imperialism

Not on your life! The Irgun itself has remained silent about such "small" matters, and in some circumstances, as is well known, silence speaks louder than words. But this is not all. The Irgun was not satisfied with silence. Through its newspaper, *Hamashkif*, it spoke openly for American imperialism. *Hamashkif* printed an outrageous article by Wolfgang von Weisl, who wrote literally that the Jewish ministers should be obedient to the "advice" of the American counsellors in Israel, just as the governments of Turkey and Greece are. He called openly for the participation of the Jewish state in a war against the Soviet Union and demanded the exclusion of the Communist Party of Israel from all influence in the Jewish government and government council.

This is what *Hamashkif* printed on April 2, 1948: "On November 29, the Americans gave us this opportunity: est-

ablish your state and prove that it will defend American interests, just as many European governments, in which America is interested, are doing." (Italics mine — E.V.)

On April 7 the same newspaper wrote: "We must give guarantees that the future minister of interior, police minister, immigration minister and foreign minister—that these be no less sensitive to the advice of the American counsellors and ministers than the finisters of Greece, Egypt, Hol-



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land and Turkey...." The meaning is unmistakably clear!

We know quite well the meaning of the American government's "advice" to which the unashamed von Weisl urges us to listen. We can still remember the order of General George C. Marshall early this year not to admit the

two Jewish ships with immigrants from Rumania into Palestine. We have not yet forgotten the strenuous efforts of the American representative in the Security Council of the UN in April 1948 to annul the decision for the Jewish state and to establish instead a trusteeship regime in Palestine. Still fresh in our minds is the strong financial pressure by the American government on the Jewish Agency in May 1948 not to proclaim the Jewish state. We feel in our bones the American embargo on Israel. The beginnings of American military occupation and the political pressure to transform Haifa into an American base are well known to us in Israel.

We give details about American intervention in our internal affairs in order to emphasize that the newspaper *Hamashkif*, which has leading Irgunists on its staff, at one and the same time sang praises to the Irgun, printed the programmatic speech of its leader and ended with the agitation of von Weisl for slavish loyalty to American imperialist overlordship in Israel.

The Irgun quite correctly considered British imperialism the enemy of the Jewish *Yishuv*. Now that we are faced with the danger of American imperialism, the Irgun utters gentle words, appears to be "naive," seemingly unaware of American imperialism. When the Irgun refers to America, it does so with genteel expressions, like "American nation," or "the great American nation." It creates the impression that a people's government sits in Washington. The propaganda of the Irgun creates the impression that American ruling circles have noble aims with respect to our country.

It is well known that the British rulers in Palestine and in neighboring Mediterranean countries have intimate connections with British oil interests in this part of the world. It is however less well known that during the Second World War and in the post-war years, America has come into serious competition with Britain, has penetrated the Middle East with much capital and controls important sources of raw materials and oil companies.

Americans Buying Up Oil

The American government, for instance, did what Britain did not have sufficient financial resources to do. It bought up Ibn Saud, "presenting" the ruler of Saudi Arabia with a hundred million dollars, thereby securing for itself (that is for American magnates) the rich oil resources to be found there. The Middle East ceased to be a monopoly of British imperialism. American oil outfits are pressing their British colleagues very hard. According to the report of an American Senate Commission, American investments in Saudi Arabia are \$111 million, and profits reach \$117 million—clear profit of over 100 per cent! These are the fabulous profits of the American oil magnates. No wonder their political struggle around these spheres is so stubborn.

America invested over \$22 million in Egypt before the outbreak of World War II. More than 15 American firms are engaged there in commerce, industry, finance and transport. At the beginning of World War II, Socony-Vacuum together with the Standard Oil company of New Jersey, re-

ceived a concession to prospect for oil in Egypt. The American government offered Egypt a loan of \$100 million for "defense purposes."

For some time the American imperialists in Iraq have held more than 23 per cent of the shares of the oil companies. A short time ago, the government of Iraq gave American firms huge concessions to tap the entire oil reserves in the northern part of the country.

On Bahrein Island all the oil fields belong to the Americans. Ethiopia gave the Sinclair Oil Company a 50 year concession in 1945. American firms in Yemen received in 1946 the right to prospect for oil. Turkey is getting a large American loan of several hundred million dollars. American military experts are in the process of modernizing the Turkish army.

In Palestine, American investments were \$39 million in 1937. By 1945 they had risen to \$150 million. The drive for American economic penetration has gone further in the recent period with the plan to build a pipe line to Haifa and to build oil refineries in this region.

The most important American outfit in the country is the Palestinian Economic Company, which is controlled by the big American bankers, Kuhn, Loeb and Co. Also under American control are the Central Loan and Savings Bank, the Central Bank for Cooperative Institutions, the Home Construction Company, the Water Supply Company. The American Palestinian Economic Company is the owner of the above mentioned corporations. This company is also involved in other corporations, for instance, the potash company and hotels, especially the famous King David Hotel. The pro-American Jewish politicians promise American capitalist circles great profits and monopoly control for their investments.

According to the statement of Secretary of State Marshall, an Anglo-American understanding has clearly been reached under which both competing imperialist wolves have agreed to divide the loot between themselves, and to recognize separate spheres of influence. According to the agreement, Transjordan is considered a British sphere, and Israel an American sphere. Of course, even within the limits of this agreement inter-imperialist contradictions persist. Clearly, however, the Truman government considers itself the future master of Israel.

The Main Enemy

The danger of American imperialism is at the present moment the main danger for the freedom of Israel. England, though it is conducting the war through the Arab states, is a shrinking factor in our arena. Although Britain is still an enemy, it is not the decisive one. As a result of a change in the relationship of forces on a world scale, a new and stronger imperialist influence has appeared in the Middle East. The new fact in the current situation is America's expulsion of Britain from her former positions. Following in the footsteps of the earlier economic penetration of American oil companies comes now the political pressure

of the government and the military pressure of the so-called "observers" and "experts."

A similar pattern was followed in Greece. There, too, American imperialism inherited British control and slowly, bit by bit, replaced it. In short, an imperialist drive against the independence struggle of Israel is going on. The Truman government is trying to rule our country as a market for Wall Street's investments and merchandise, to transform our ports into military, anti-Soviet bases, to transform the Jewish state into an American colony.

Since American imperialism is a real menace to Israel, any movement in Israel that claims to be anti-imperialist cannot limit itself to an unfriendly position toward Britain alone, and adopt a neutral and, in fact, friendly attitude toward American imperialism.

The attitude toward American imperialism is, in the present epoch, the most important test of every political party in Israel. The mobilization of public opinion, the rousing of the masses to political opposition to every tendency to capitulate to *England and America* are of primary importance in the present situation.

There are historic examples of movements in other colonial and oppressed countries which began with terroristic activity against the foreign ruler, but quickly exposed themselves as agents of another competing imperialism. Thus, for instance, *a certain anti-British movement in India* exists under the leadership of Bose. He organized a military organization which posed as highly patriotic and called itself the "Independence Army." His movement was on the right wing of the bourgeois parties. At a certain period, this organization even conducted anti-British terror and was also, because of this, persecuted by the British ruler. At first glance, this movement could very well pass as anti-imperialist. But very quickly this organization revealed itself as distinctly *pro-Japanese*. Thus, in spite of its open anti-British appearance, it revealed itself as a movement which actually agreed to exchange one foreign ruler for another.

It is therefore of greatest importance to emphasize that *the anti-imperialist character of a movement is established by its full political opposition to every menacing imperialism, and not to the British alone.*

In Israel's concrete situation, where American imperialist wolves lurk in readiness to swallow our country, the loyalty of the Irgun to Wall Street imperialism is an expression of treason to the independence of Israel. The open *Hamashkif* propaganda, through its spokesman, Dr. Wolfgang von Weisl, to adopt American sovereignty, is only a brutal expression of the unashamed, anti-patriotic and pro-American imperialist role which the revisionist and Irgun circles now fulfill in Israel.

The Irgunists try to present the anti-British terror as the most important expression of anti-imperialist struggle. *But military struggle is only a characteristic symbol of a progressive movement only as it is inseparably bound up with a political anti-imperialist struggle.* *The anti-imperialist character of struggle* is not established by the number of bombs thrown by a certain individual, but by the *political anti-imperialist aims* that are tied up with the military struggle.

A similar development can be seen in Anders' army in Poland. For a certain period, it fought militarily against the nazis. But it quickly displayed its "weakness" toward "western" imperialism, and its treason to the progressive democratic liberation struggle of the Polish people's army.

The conclusion to be drawn from these instructive historic lessons is that it is wrong to characterize the Irgun on the basis of its military actions, without also taking into account its political objectives. *Not every bomb is a symptom of revolutionary struggle, and not every explosion is a sign of progress.* The progressive forces in Israel took a negative attitude toward the Irgun primarily because of the Irgun's chauvinist political platform and because of its pro-American character.

(Continued in next issue)