

# THE TRUTH ABOUT THE IRGUN: II

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Translated from the Yiddish by Joseph King

**T**HE Irgun attempts to claim a monopoly of the anti-British struggle in the Jewish *Yishuv*. What are the facts?

The Irgun adopted its *political* anti-British position only on the eve of, and particularly during, the Second World War, after a section of the revisionist movement had been frustrated in their love for England. The theoretical basis for their pro-British orientation was fortified by Jabotinsky's ideology and policy that the Jewish community should constitute itself a dominion within the British empire, and that the Jewish military should constitute a part of the British imperialist army. Only in the years just prior to World War II did revisionists suddenly see that they had to be anti-British.

Thus, their anti-British political point of view was quite tardy. The first party to call for struggle against British imperialism *from the very beginning of British domination*, was the Communist Party. From the first years of the British mandate, the party had revealed the hateful anti-Jewish and anti-Arab character of the colonial regime in Palestine. The party was therefore terribly persecuted by the British oppressor. Its leading members were continually deported and many of its best actives rotted in prisons.

The current pro-American position of the Irgun has its deep pro-imperialist roots in the past. Turning away from Britain, the revisionists found a second imperialist power to whom they were prepared to make concessions in exchange for active support. This new-found imperialism was—fascist Italy. The revisionists oriented on Mussolini's regime, adapted themselves to it with body and soul, spiritually, politically and militarily. One of the editors of *Hamashkif*, Zvei Kultz, even wrote a book entitled *The Teachings of Mussolini*, with paens of love and devotion for Italian fascism.

Revisionist and Irgun circles claimed that Mussolini personified a "strong" regime, an iron fist and even—good relations with Jews. In those days they also supported warmly (in the revisionist *Hayardan*) Franco's fascist gangs in the Spanish civil war. The general line was, therefore, not towards complete liberation from the foreign yoke, but readiness to give concessions to future Italian rulers rather than the old British rulers.

Fortunately for the Jewish people, and contrary to the calculations of Irgun circles, the international situation changed in the course of the Second World War in favor of the anti-fascist camp. Mussolini's "strong" regime crumbled under the mighty and united blows of the anti-nazi

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allied armies and the Italian partisans. Fascist Italy, poor wretch, never again entered into Irgun considerations as a serious factor in the inter-imperialist struggle in the Middle East. Then the American leviathan hove into sight, the rich, able competitor, which had profited tremendously from the war and proved itself a stronger power within the borders of the capitalist world.

In this new situation, the Irgun, without giving up its previous sympathies toward fascist regimes, began to orient itself on the new imperialist power which had begun to assert itself in the Middle East—on American imperialism.

## Why Ease in Fund-Raising?

It would be well at this point to take note of the movement in the United States which is responsible for the continuous flow of funds and legal propaganda for the Irgun.

The Irgun considers itself a "revolutionary" movement and an anti-imperialist fighting organization. Often it is wont to compare itself with the liberation fighters of Greece, Indonesia and other countries. Let us see, however, which of these truly anti-imperialist movements have the privilege of openly collecting funds in Truman's and Dewey's America.

Is it easy to collect funds for the liberation fighters in Greece? No! The collection agencies are often branded non-*kosher*. Why? Because the fighters are democratic and anti-imperialist. They first opposed *British* intervention in Greece, and now are struggling against *American* intervention in their country.

Is it easy to collect funds for the liberation fighters in China? No! Why? Because the Chinese people's army, which is democratic and honestly anti-imperialist, is fighting against American intervention in its country.

These are two examples of countries where rising American imperialism has won the upper hand over the British and is attempting, with the help of local reaction, ruthlessly to choke the independence of these nations. The Truman government correctly considers these movements unfriendly toward its imperialist appetite.

The fact that the Irgun, though it was in the recent past an underground organization, has won open, legal permission to collect funds while the collection of funds for fighters against American imperialism is hindered—this fact speaks for itself.

The mystery can be explained by the fact that the American State Department is convinced that the power of the Irgun will not be turned against American penetration in Israel, *but against the internal democratic forces in the Jewish state*. The Irgun staged a dress rehearsal when it de-

manded the arms of the "Altalena" for itself and decided on civil war in order to capture the arms for its members.

The Irgun's anti-British terror was supported politically and materially by influential American circles. The support was organized by Peter Bergson, a notorious revisionist, through the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and a whole group of front organizations, among them the American League for a Free Palestine, the Sons of Liberty, Brith Trumpeldor, etc. In addition to outright revisionists and innocent people whose emotional response to the struggle of the Jews of Palestine left them open to all sorts of confusions, the leadership of these organizations included such individuals as ex-Senator Guy Gillette, who was on Pres. Roosevelt's purge list as a spokesman for the economic royalists, Ben Hecht, among whose dubious contributions was an anti-Semitic novel, *A Jew in Love*, and assorted questionable characters among American politicians. Seduced by a huge outlay for advertising, paid for out of the still undetermined fortune milked from American sources, even some liberal newspapers lent a sympathetic ear to these agencies of the Irgun and the revisionists, continuing to do so to this day, even after the "Altalena" affair.

But the orientation of these groups can be judged from the fact that in the 1946 elections, the revisionist organization called upon the Jews of America to vote for the most reactionary section of American imperialism, the Dewey-Taft-Hoover gang in the Republican Party. The American circles covered up by these organizations utilized the terrorist activities of the Irgun to make the situation for the British more difficult in order to replace them. It is no accident that at the same time when the Irgun came out sharply against the British occupation, it openly turned to its "American friends," to American government circles, with declarations of loyalty toward America.

Such a characteristic affirmation was made by the Irgun during the last Zionist congress in Basle at the end of 1946. In its appeal to the congress the Irgun often declared that it agreed that America should receive economic concessions in the Jewish state. The last open statement of von Weisl in *Hamashkif* is only an improved ideological expression of readiness to submit to the American imperialist aggressor.

### **Transfer of Imperialist Loyalty**

In view of the development of the Irgun, it follows logically that, since American imperialism has taken the place of the British, the Irgun has exchanged its anti-British terror for pro-American loyalty.

The Irgun seeks to claim a monopoly over the anti-British *military* struggle. It keeps quiet about the waves of anti-British military struggle of other groups in the country, of the democratic elements, like the struggle conducted by the youth of Palmach. This youth has destroyed railroad lines, bridges, radio stations, smashed imperialist prestige and disrupted British power in Palestine. This surging struggle of Palmach youth was one of the expressions of hatred for the British oppressor, in spite of the fact that the official

leadership wanted to utilize the struggle only as a means of convincing Bevin that it was worth his while to count on Jewish power and to reach an "understanding."

In the period between the war's end and the historic UN decision the progressive forces and the Palestine Communist Party called for an *anti-imperialist mass movement* and mass struggle, for full evacuation of the British army, for the termination of the British mandate, for Jewish-Arab anti-imperialist understanding and for the establishment of an independent and democratic Jewish-Arab state on a federated basis of two independent states.

It is no accident that the civil war rehearsal of the "Altalena" was staged by the Irgun precisely in the period of American imperialist penetration into Israel. As is well known, the American government is trying to bring about internal anti-democratic changes within its spheres of influence all over the world and to encourage local rightist and reactionary movements. It is no accident that in France and Italy, which have recently been firmly gripped in the tentacles of the Marshall Plan, the rightist parties have raised their heads. Through the efforts of foreign agents, the unity of the trade union movement has been broken and the most reactionary forces have risen to the surface.

The Truman government is objectively interested in the political strengthening of the bourgeoisie in Israel. It desires that the tone of the new state shall be set by the most reactionary forces. Sensing this favorable external "atmosphere," the Irgun is struggling for positions of power.

After the unsuccessful attempt of the Irgun to achieve its goal with arms and bloody struggle, it changed its tune. Its advocate, *Hamashkif*, began to demand "justice," that representatives of the Irgun be given a place in the government.

### **Rightist Program**

What is the political platform of the Irgun? It fights for a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan. It does not occur to the Irgun to respect the *equal rights* of both peoples, Jews and Arabs. The "iron" principle upon which it is planning to build its Jewish-American state is "Only thus—only with the sword!" This is indeed a freedom-loving principle!

The Irgun denies absolutely the elementary principle of national equality. It propagandizes the superiority of the Jews in relation to the "dirty" Arabs. The program of conquest of the Arab people by the Irgun and the struggle to transform the whole of Palestine, including Transjordan, into a Jewish state, is the political expression of the Jewish bourgeoisie's drive for markets. This chauvinist program preached by revisionist and Irgun circles helped to sow no little hatred between Jews and Arabs.

We Jews recall that imperialist rule in Palestine did not rely only on tanks and bayonets. The power of Britain in Palestine was derived primarily from the *deep abyss which the mandatory power had dug between the two peoples*. With the aid of the long-practiced policy of "divide and rule," the British high commissioner in Palestine felt

quite secure even before he began to concentrate large military forces in our country. The introduction of large bodies of British soldiery into Palestine was connected with the policy of building anti-Soviet war bases, no less than with the aim of oppressing the nations of the country.

The chauvinist aim of conquest preached by Jewish and Arab reactionary circles was the source of weakness of the two oppressed nations and at the same time of strength for British imperialism. The *chauvinist political struggle* of the Irgun to transform both sides of the Jordan into a Jewish state and to establish national oppression over the Arab people *objectively served the interest of the foreign power* in deepening the chasm between both peoples in Palestine.

And note this remarkable thing! A movement which develops within an oppressed people against the foreign British power, does not demand freedom for both oppressed colonial nations, but strives itself to become the oppressor of a neighboring people. *It is clear, however, that a truly anti-imperialist movement must be a democratic movement, which relies on the principles of full equality of both oppressed nations and on the full independence of both.*

### **Anti-Labor Provocation**

Even in the present struggle conducted by the young Jewish state, the Irgunists have managed to cause no little harm. The majority of Palestinian Arabs did not participate actively in the struggle against the Jews. The Arab attackers were recruited by the British primarily in the neighboring countries. This is a well known fact, and even Ben Gurion has stated it more than once in his political statements. The security of the Jewish community demanded that there be no call for attacks against quiet Arab settlements in order to avoid driving the peaceful Arab population into the arms of the Mufti gangs.

But the Irgun had a different strategy and tactic. In consonance with its political goal to conquer both sides of the Jordan, the Irgun carried on a policy of attacking peaceful Arab villages, awakening an Arab desire for vengeance and spreading the fire lighted by the British. It is important to recall two serious provocations which were organized by the "brown heroes" of the Irgun.

First, the provocation in the oil refineries at Haifa. This happened during the first period of the Arab attack. In spite of the war situation, Jews and Arabs worked together peacefully in several places. One of these was the oil refineries in Haifa. Hundreds of Jews and Arabs there maintained the labor tradition of solidarity in trade union struggles and strikes. Jewish-Arab collaboration in peace time was continued during the war.

This, of course, did not please the Jewish fascists. One bright morning they threw a bomb at the Arab workers standing in line to receive their weekly wages. Panic ensued. Some of the Arab workers reacted with a terrible pogrom on the Jewish workers. It is important to note that even in this charged atmosphere many Jewish work-

ers were rescued from the fire of the pogrom by their Arab friends. The whole of Jewish public opinion, the Jewish Agency, all workers' parties and even some bourgeois circles stamped this provocation as a disgraceful crime.

### **The Crime of Dir Yassin**

The second Irgun provocation was the barbaric slaughter in the Arab village of Dir Yassin, on the road from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. Although this village did not fight against the Jews and also did not permit Arab bands to cross its threshold, it was attacked by Irgunists and Sternists, who *shot all inhabitants—men, women, the aged and children.* Since then, the name of the village, Dir Yassin, has become a synonym and symbol among the Arabs for pogrom and banditry. In this instance, too, the whole of Jewish public opinion, and particularly the working class, condemned the pogrom as a provocative step which in the last analysis menaced the security of the Jewish community itself.

After the bestial slaughter in Dir Yassin, Arabs fled *en masse* to the Mufti gangs in fear of a similar fate if they fell into Jewish hands. The anti-Jewish propaganda of the British agents had received new fuel for anti-Jewish incitement. The imperialist agents called upon the Arab population to avenge Dir Yassin. They exploited the pogromist activity of the Irgun as proof that Arabs could not live under Jewish rule.

In short, the chauvinist provocations of the Irgun poured oil on the fire and aggravated the unfriendly attitude of Arabs toward Jews.

The Irgun spreads claims that it is accomplishing great miracles in the present war. *In fact, it has not captured a single important position.* It attacked in different places, but it did not have sufficient power to *conquer* them. For instance, it attacked Jaffa, but could not take the city. The forces of the Haganah finally captured the city. It attacked Ramleh, but could not hold the town. It attacked several Arab quarters in Jerusalem, but the defense of the city remained the work of Palmach.

No, the Irgun cannot brag of significant military victories. But it can boast of efforts to give the struggle in Israel a politically chauvinist tendency. These efforts could not change the general progressive character of the Jewish defensive struggle. They did, however, complicate our situation and strengthen the enemy armies.

It is also important to recall that the Irgunists began their political career as professional strike-breakers and were trained in attacking the peaceful Arab population in 1936. The attacks on Jewish workers' clubs and the throwing of bombs into Arab market places were companion activities for the Irgunists.

Against the individual terror of the Irgun, which was colored with anti-Arab chauvinism and pro-American tendencies, the progressive forces in Palestine organized the *democratic Jewish-Arab anti-imperialist mass struggle.*

It is worth noting that in the anti-imperialist movement, which was socially progressive in character and was led by

a *general Jewish-Arab front*, the Irgun not only took no part, but assumed a definitely "neutral" position.

### **Strike-Breaking in 1946**

In March, 1946, a historic Jewish-Arab strike occurred in Palestine. This was the greatest Jewish-Arab strike in the history of the Palestinian working class. Close to 50,000 workers participated, workers in government posts, railroads, ports, post and telegraph. While British agents and British press agencies incited to mutual pogroms and prophesied the immediate outbreak of war between Jews and Arabs, tens of thousands of Jewish and Arab workers were conducting a common struggle against the government. For two weeks, the entire British government apparatus was completely paralyzed. No Irgun bomb caused British imperialism so much material harm, and particularly political harm, as this solid strike. No explosion caused by the Irgun could raise so high the anti-imperialist understanding and conscious mass struggle of tens of thousands of Jewish and Arab workers.

The strike, which began as an economic struggle for higher wages and social security, quickly grew into a mighty political anti-imperialist mass demonstration. Sensing the development of the strike in a significant political direction, the government sought with the aid of its Jewish and Arab agents to smash and demoralize the struggle. The British high commissioner goaded King Abdullah into appearing in person before the Arab strikers to convince them to break their solidarity with their Jewish friends. Jewish revisionist circles also made their propaganda contribution to breaking the strike.

Mighty Jewish-Arab demonstrations took place in the streets of Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The strikers carried large placards and banners calling for Jewish-Arab unity against the common enemy. Anti-British slogans were displayed in Hebrew and Arabic and shouted in two languages, but they expressed a single fraternal, democratic and anti-imperialist spirit. It was no accident that at the head of the strikers stood progressive and communist labor leaders! The foreign ruler knew that what was involved

### **JEWISH AND ARAB WORKERS PLEDGE UNITY**



was, no bomb of a *small handful*, but the growth of a *fighting mass*.

That strike was not the only one in that period. There were other, similar strikes. There was, for instance, the famous Jewish-Arab strike of the workers in the government camps near Tel Aviv. The significance of this movement was much deeper than appears from its economic demands. This was the beginning of an anti-imperialist, political fighting front.

### **Enemy of Israeli Workers**

Where was the Irgun in these historic days? It did a disappearing act. What was the attitude of the Irgun toward this struggle? "Neutrality." But what came into the Irgun's head, was uttered by its revisionist brothers. The revisionists participated, as always on such occasions, in the opposition to the Jewish-Arab anti-British workers' struggle.

The Irgun was weaned on support of bourgeois elements in Palestine and grew strong particularly with the financial help of American bourgeois circles. The propaganda apparatus of the Irgun appealed to various sections of the population, directing toward each that special propaganda to which it was susceptible. They appealed to the Jewish bourgeoisie in the name of ruling both sides of the Jordan. They approached religious Jews with spiritual words. They fawned upon influential American circles with "neutrality" toward the Marshall Plan. For the benefit of progressive circles, they maneuvered with pro-Soviet phrases. Blessed with hearts of stone, they could break strikes in Palestine on the one hand, and appeal to progressive Americans for help on the other.

The internal fascist danger from the Irgun and the other revisionist circles increased in Palestine to the degree that the external danger from American imperialism increased. Certain circles of the general Jewish public were misled by the Irgun demagogy, and did not notice the pro-bourgeois class character of this movement. Certain circles have not grasped at the same time that a common military front against the external aggressor exists, a regrouping of social forces is taking place in Israel itself, and an intensive political struggle is going on to determine the socio-political character of the Jewish state.

At the head of the most reactionary camp stands the Irgun as the mobilized class army of Jewish reaction. The Jewish bourgeoisie is keeping this military force in reserve for its purposes in the struggle for power.

In broad strokes, the concrete relation of forces in Israel is as follows. The first provisional Jewish government is a coalition of the bourgeoisie with the Mapai (Labor Party). There are also two ministers in the government from the United Workers Party. The foreign policy of most members of the government appears to be capitulatory toward American imperialism, in spite of the fact that Israel is carrying on a successful military defensive war against the Arab and British aggressors.

The Irgun, which is not represented in the government, forms the storm troop of the most reactionary circles in

Israel. It bows abjectly to American imperialism and carries the brown flag for the working masses.

On the other side of the barricades are to be found the Jewish working class and progressive circles of intellectuals and the middle class. The democratic reservoir is concentrated primarily in the United Workers Party and the Communist Party. Certain groups of Mapai members are also highly displeased with the policy of their leadership. The progressive workers' parties are the organized basis whose function is to build, cement and consolidate the democratic and anti-imperialist front in Israel.

When the Irgun attempted to provoke civil war, which was an anti-government attack by rightists and all the open and masked, religious and irreligious followers of the Irgun, the entire Israeli army and the progressive and democratic working class drove off the attack. The progressives did so despite their criticism of the present government's policy.

At the moment when the provisional Jewish government was attacked by the Irgun, the entire democratic camp felt

that its first duty was to beat back the attack, because a victory for the revisionist army, the political parties and circles which stand behind the Irgun, would mean a worse choice, the clearest pro-American foreign policy and the sharpest anti-democratic and anti-labor internal policy. It is more difficult for Ben Gurion and Moshe Shertok than it would be for the revisionist circles to adopt anti-democratic internal changes. The Mapai, though it is an opportunist party, must up to a point nevertheless reckon with its members, a majority of whom are workers.

The main task before Israel, however, is not only to beat back reactionary internal attacks, but *to consolidate the democratic camp, to secure Jewish sovereignty and the progressive character of the Jewish state.*

A broad united front of the United Workers Party, the Communist Party, the working intellectuals and various other progressive elements and circles will consolidate the democratic camp in Israel in the struggle for victory and full independence of the young Jewish state and a democratic internal regime.