

THE ALTERNATIVE WAY AND THE ALTERNATIVE FORCE

In the previous chapters I have criticised the policy of the ruling party, Mapai, and its partners. I reviewed the problems of immigration; the upbuilding of the country; the relations between the two peoples in this country and between various communities within the Jewish people. I described our struggle for peace and for the brotherhood of nations. In all these fields, I presented the choice between the pioneering-workers way, which we represent, and the growing tendency in Israel of accomodation to capitalist-style liberalism; hindering the ingathering of the exiles; an increase in wage differentiation, and of social, economic, ethnic and national polarization; increasing tension between us and the neighporing peoples; ever greater dependence upon the Western bloc, and the deepening of our international isolation.

After having stated our alternative solutions to these problems — chapter by chapter — I am forced to ask a disquieting question: Are these alternative solutions backed by a potential alternative political force which could carry them out? I imagine that the same uneasy query has crossed other minds as well.

We live in a glass house, where the whole world can see our actions. We cannot afford to hide the truth for fear of what others will say. We have no better defense against demagogic attacks than a firm, proud stand on our principles. There is also a moral advantage in revealing the truth to the general public and letting it know of the controversies which take place within a movement such as ours. On all accounts, we know from our experience that self-criticism and in-

ternal debates have strengthened us. In the heat of these controversies, valuable metal was separated from the dross.

I will, therefore, ask that question which many of our members have asked, and which every fair political rival poses us too: Supposing we are right, and that we represent a potentially successful political line, which can be very favorably contrasted with the inept policy of Mapai and its partners. Can we really be satisfied with that, without being certain that we not only represent an alternative solution, but also a strong alternative political and public force, capable of replacing the ruling political group in Israel in the foreseeable future? Shall we remain satisfied indefinitely with a state of affairs where we are able to put forward alternative solutions, and yet lack the feeling that we represent a force, which can put these solutions into practice?

There was a time when we represented both solutions and strong political force. When Mapam was established in 1948 we had twenty members in the Knesset; that is, we were half the size of Mapai. At that time we had every right to present ourselves as an alternative political force. Even after the split in Mapam we were confident in ourselves, since we maintained a far-reaching co-operation with Achdut Avoda on matters of working class and national policy.

In the meantime, Achdut Avoda has turned its back on us. After entering the government it maintained a kind of two-sided partnership — partly with us and partly with Mapai. Lately it has been moving step by step towards a partnership with Mapai alone, while (often demonstratively) moving away from us.

When we decided to leave the coalition, many of our members who were close to the stand taken by Achdut Avoda demanded that we lay down only such conditions as would enable us to participate in the coalition. The majority of our Central Committee did

not agree, and decided to stand firm on the conditions which had been formulated together with Achdut Avoda, as the minimum possible for our continued participation in the government coalition. Achdut Avoda submitted, preferring position to principles. Since then concession followed concession; Achdut Avoda acquiesced even to the sale of arms to West Germany and to the manufacture of uniforms for its army. Furthermore, it has even begun to give up the independence of expression, which had been guaranteed when it entered the government, and just lately has even refrained from supporting Knesset motions directly concerned with the abolition of military administration in the Arab community. Specific struggles in the Knesset are carried on sometimes in cooperation with different parties — but in the final analysis we stand alone. No party fronts in the Knesset have so far stood the test: neither the principled common-front with Achdut Avoda, nor the temporary one known as the "Club of the Four" (Mapam, Achdut Avoda, Liberals, and National Religious — trans. In this field the sum total which we bring to the Party Congress is not especially encouraging.

Mapai, seeing that no solid front seems to be able to crystallize against it, does not fear to reveal its inner weaknesses. There is a growing feeling among the Israeli public that even if alternative solutions are at hand, there is no alternative political force in the country capable of competing for power against Mapai.

In general when an alternative is referred to, a clear thinking person understands that some political force is in mind which is desirous and capable of taking the place of the prevailing regime. After the last elections, the "Club of the Four" was designed to give a partial answer to this problem. I say "partial answer" because, after all, the "Club of the Four" was not intended to take the place of Mapai, but rather to maintain a partnership with it on a basis of parity.

But the hesitance of Achdut Avoda and the National Religious Party caused the failure of this attempt.

As is well-known, the National Religious Party deserted this common front. With the aid of Achdut Avoda and the National Religious Party, Mapai succeeded in establishing a coalition in which it holds the reins more strongly than in any previous government.

No less well-known is the fact that there was a theoretical possibility to find a majority which could have overthrown Mapai and force it into the opposition. This possibility depended on Herut joining the "Club of the Four". The bourgeois parties of the Four ostensibly agreed to this, and the workers parties were against it. What does this prove? It emphasizes our view that so long as there is the faintest possibility of a programmatic coalition with the three workers parties as its foundation, we will give it preference over every other possible coalition.

Ours is an unceasing struggle against Mapai. We accuse it of turning its back on pioneer labor principles and favoring the idea of a capitalist welfare state. In the Knesset and in public campaigns, we cooperate with every party prepared to help defend democracy. Why then, do we prefer Mapai as a partner in a programmatic coalition? Why are we pessimistic about the possibilities of renewing the experiment of the "Club of the Four", and why do we refuse to participate in a wall-to-wall coalition without Mapai? In order to answer these questions we must first describe the parties with whom we co-operated in the coalition, and those with whom we are in contact in the opposition.

We value one partnership more than any other. That is the partnership in the establishment and building of the Histadrut — the Israel Labor Federation. Despite the misdemeanors of Mapai leadership, that party still possesses a large concentration of pioneer forces — in kibbutzim, moshavim, industry and in the

cooperative movement. I have used the metaphor of a tree whose root and trunk are endangered by a disease in the foliage. I think, in this case, first and foremost of the tens of thousands of hard-working Mapai settlers and workers, in town and country who, together with us, and insofar as they are influenced by us, still zealously watch over what remains of workers autonomy. We cannot forget that Mapai is together with us in the kibbutz movement, nor can we ignore the economic, cultural, and educational interests which our parties have in common with the masses of working people. We should note that at one time forty percent of that party voted against Pinhas Lavon's removal from office. Mapai has certainly strayed from its working-class, pioneering path — but it is still carrying out large projects of absorption, settlement and development on behalf of the State and the Zionist Movement.

We are prepared to play our part in these projects at every opportunity. Therefore, no matter how justified our criticism may be, and no matter how fierce our struggle may become against the general direction which this country is taking, we must do everything to leave some way open. We should be prepared for bitter experiences. In fact I can see much more serious tests on the horizon. There may come a time when we will be able to establish a pioneering regime in this country, once more to understand each other. We shall not burn bridges in the path of such a chance.

In order to compare attitudes let us now turn our attention to one of the bourgeois parties, the Liberal Party. It may be said that, of all the bourgeois parties which pride themselves on the working class elements which they contain, the Liberal Party is most outspoken in support of bourgeois economic and social policy. How does this party's "liberalism" express itself? It aims for unfettered profit-making, removal of controls on currency transactions, and the abolition of

the system of tax-assessment based on the ability to pay. It fights for the removal of price controls, and for the right of the capitalist to thrive at the expense of the workers' conditions, wages and living standards. In all truth these are not the only expressions of that party's liberalism. In some matters, the Liberal Party makes sincere efforts to free itself of chauvinism. As far as the military administration over Arabs is concerned, the Liberal Party's policy is more progressive than that of Mapai. The Liberal Party participates in publishing "New Outlook", which illustrates its attitude to the Arab problem in general. Yet only a minority in that party had the courage to demand Israel-Arab nuclear disarmament and to oppose "unconventional" armament.

As I remarked, an attempt was made to co-operate with the Liberal Party within the framework of the "Club of the Four" in order to produce a coalition based on equality with Mapai. In fact, it was the National Religious Party which deserted and destroyed the "Club of the Four". Within the "club", the Liberal Party sat on the fence; and, when the "club" fell apart, that party outdid all the others in its readiness for a coalition with Mapai. Nevertheless, the attempt failed. Achdut Avoda, now claims that it saved the coalition from the Liberals. This is doubtful. The fact is that the present coalition was established at the price of a split in the Left and submission to a liberal-capitalist policy, though without the Liberal Party. The Liberals, for their part, announce their availability for coalition at a moment's call. Our party is in opposition together with them, — but we have no obligations to them apart from sporadic instances of co-operation in defence of democracy and other common causes. Contrarily we are prepared to vote against them whenever we think it necessary.

Mapai and Achdut Avoda are making a great to-do about our coalition with Herut in the Beersheba muni-

ciality — the one which was overthrown just recently. But in Rishon-Le-Zion, Mapai had planned a coalition with Herut against the Liberals. It bars no holds in municipal affairs. As for Achdut Avoda, it was one of her honorable Members of Knesset, Nachum Nir, who suggested the coalition of the five parties in the Knesset (including Herut) against Mapai. It is well known that there are contacts between Mapai and Herut. One of Mapai's M.K.'s recently made an open demand for a re-examination of Mapai's attitude toward Herut. According to him, not only is Herut no worse than the Liberal Party, but is even preferable in some respects, such as its activist attitude to defence, and its extreme pro-Western attitude in international affairs. Within Herut, too, there are voice demanding a turn towards Mapai, and suggesting an arrangement with it, based on discussion of security and foreign-policy matters. For the present, these remain lone voices.

I doubt whether we should trust the contemptuous remarks which Ben-Gurion makes about Herut. Since Mapai is capable of replacing the coalition with Achdut Avoda by a coalition with the Liberal Party, or a coalition with both parties — it is also quite possible that, one of these days, the activist elements in Mapai who want to dictate peace to the Arabs by means of unconventional weapons will accept Herut as their natural partner. The Deputy Minister of Defence said something to that effect in one of his latest statements.

Meanwhile various demagogues in Mapai and Achdut Avoda have decided to engage in provocation by spreading the slander that we are going to set up an opposition coalition with the Liberals and Herut. The Foreign Minister even assured the Knesset that there was no contradiction in accusing us of growing ties with both Herut and the Communist Party at one and the same time. I think that the public no longer pays attention to this kind of labelling and name-calling. In any case, we need to clarify to ourselves more

basically our long and short range attitudes towards these public groups, within the Knesset and outside it. We should examine openly our attitudes towards the other parties — both labor and bourgeois.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN EVALUATING PUBLIC BODIES

We would be the last to suggest a coalition with the Liberals and Herut as a substitute for a coalition based on the three workers parties. But should we automatically disqualify these parties just because they are bourgeois? Have our relations with these parties in the Knesset and outside it not changed since the Lavon affair? Did not Achdut Avoda go a long way together with us in re-examining our relationships with the bourgeois parties in the Knesset? Did Achdut Avoda stay outside the "Club of the Four" because the Liberal Party was there?

Let us return to an examination of Herut: It is an adventurist, militarily activist party which tends to make ties with reactionary forces in the international sphere; for example, it supported Jacques Soustelle and his group in France. It seems to me that from the point of view of military activism and its orientation on reactionary forces in the international sphere — nothing has changed. Herut engaged in social demogogy in the past, in the style of the various totalitarian parties, and I am not sure that it will not one day return to that style. The announcements which accompanied Herut's decision to establish a faction in the Histadrut are certainly not encouraging. Herut's leaders stated that they intended to remove the red flags from the Histadrut headquarters, and to oppose the workers' industries and the "Workers' Society" (the Histadrut economic parent-organization). They, together with the Liberal Party's faction in the Histadrut, have dreams of serving the bourgeoisie by being an anti-

socialist, anti-labor Trojan horse within the working class. The pioneering and Socialist-Zionist workers parties in the Histadrut must be on guard against intentions of this sort.

In the meantime we should remember that many workers remain loyal to Herut, even after having left the immigrant transit-camps, having attained permanent homes and having begun to live more or less normal lives. They apparently find Herut an attractive synthesis of: a) concern for the interest of the underprivileged from a material point of view; b) chauvinism in politics; and c) a petty bourgeois social outlook.

Herut is the sworn enemy of the workers and socialist economy and its economic spokesmen in the Knesset are fanatical defenders of private-enterprise. And yet, that same party, Herut, has, until now, opposed freezing the workers' wages. But we are not at all sure how it will act if its strength should increase. We are often faced by a paradoxical situation; where Herut defends democracy against the attacks of Mapai. Herut today opposes a change in the democratic system of proportional elections, and demands the abolition of the military administration. These facts do not lessen our serious objections to a programmatic coalition with Herut. Yet at the same time, we shall continue to judge Herut by its actions and not prejudge and automatically negate everything it does, because of its past, or because of our doubt as to its future or its general policy — all of which we thoroughly deplore.

Herut was my second example of bourgeois parties in the Knesset. I brought it in order to show what practical considerations could influence our approach to the various public and political forces in the country. In our everyday activity in defence of democracy and in the face of topical decisions in the Knesset, it would be foolish not to judge every political force by its actions at a given time. In my opinion, we should differentiate between sporadic cooperation on par-

ticular issues, and pacts and agreements which obligate us to lengthier co-operation.

Everything leads us to conclude that Mapai is capable of surprising us on this front. We, on the other hand, have continually preferred an agreement between the three workers parties as the basis for a broader pact. That is how we have behaved both in the Knesset and in the World Zionist Organization. Of course, we do not identify a common unified front in the Tel-Aviv City Council with the systematic acceptance of dictates from the bosses of Mapai's branch in Beersheba. Over a period of years, Mapai in Beersheba — with the aid of Achdut Avoda's representative — kept us out of the city council, even though we have four council members to Mapai's five. This time we proved to Mapai and to the whole population that, if we could be done without in Beersheba for years, Mapai could be done without as well.

And now to the other extreme "Maki" — the Israel Communist Party. I have very little to say about the Israeli Communist Party in this connection. Now and again that party may have a stroke of luck and get another member of Knesset from disgruntled new arrivals who have not yet adjusted or at the price of the increasing antagonism between Arabs and Jews which is the result of the government's policy of military administration and racial discrimination. One way or another the Israeli Communist Party will remain detached from our people's struggle for territorial concentration and for social emancipation in its homeland.

Representatives of socialist countries who recognize the Israeli Communist Party as the legitimate communist party in Israel, often express their displeasure that we do not co-operate with that party in the class struggle where there should ostensibly be common ground. In their own countries and in every country engaged in national liberation it was difficult for them to differentiate between national and social aspects, but

not here. Apparently they have the attitude (in common with the Israel Communist Party) connecting acceptance of the existence of Israel with a forecast of national assimilation, of the sort forced upon our people in some socialist countries, that the class struggle is integrally connected with the upbuilding and development of the country; that class struggle is directly bound up with efforts to absorb workers, and with the problems of the establishment and growth of the working class.

The Integration of the Exiles, as an aspect of the road to socialism in our country, has always been denied by the Israeli Communist Party. It believes in "integration", i.e. the assimilation of our national minority groups (the Jewish communities) in the countries of their dispersion and separating the class struggle in Israel from its colonizatory context.

If to this we add the support for the Arab separatist tendencies, the right of the Arab minority to "secede" and the Communists' unconcern for the defence of the country, that should be enough to make clear to all interested parties the abyss that lies between us.

One of the Maki M.K.s gave an enchanting speech on his love for the homeland, and its beauties; even the Prime Minister was brought to a state of rapt entrancement. We were not all entranced because we knew that the speaker, while demonstrating his love for the natural beauties of our country, was hiding his estrangement from the vision of that people which had brought life to those natural beauties, and which is populating the land with its repatriated exiles. We shall be entranced too if one day, a miracle should occur and a Maki spokesman will be as enchanted by the sight of a living people, gathering exiles, as he is by our scenery. But that, of course, is the rub: if the Israeli Communist Party ever comes to favor the combination of the class struggle with the upbuilding of

the country, with the Ingathering of the Exiles and their absorption — then it will cease being the Israeli Communist Party.

We may understand from this that we can co-operate with Maki and with Achdut Avoda in defence of peace in the international sphere, and we can have agreement on specific subjects in Knesset, as we do with other parties. But for the above reasons we shall have no pact with Maki on a wider basis.

We distinguish between three kinds of co-operation in our public activity:

- a) Tactical and sporadic agreements in the Knesset and in non-parliamentary activity in defence of democracy and on topical subjects. For this kind of co-operation all the parties in the Knesset come into consideration.
- b) A programmatic agreement, which in our opinion should serve as the nucleus of an alliance between all the Zionist-Workers' parties.
- c) Ideological-political consolidation which can develop into political union. Mapam, before the split, could be taken as an example of this kind of co-operation.

OUR RELATIONS WITH ACHDUT AVODA

At the moment there are considerable differences of opinion on the matter of political-ideological accord between the potential partners. In our opinion, this kind of consolidation provides a chance for the establishment of an alternative political force which could face up to Mapai from an ideological-political point of view, and, at the final stage, even take its place. In contrast, Achdut Avoda denied in principle our conception of the alternative force. It constantly states that it is interested in a corrective, e.g. correcting the faults in Mapai. It regarded union with Mapam as only a step towards an inclusive union of all three workers'

parties — while leaving each one the right to make some kind of independent appearance within the framework of that union.

Even when we united with Achdut Avoda in 1948, its leaders did not disguise the fact, that they were interested in a corrective within a general union and not in the establishment of an alternative political force. The basic difference in our two approaches served as an excuse for the constant wranglings within the united Mapam. Those wranglings ended in a split. I have been unable to understand to this very day how they can in one breath, mention the split in the Kibbutz Hameuhad* — which was on ideological grounds (between revolutionary socialists — Achdut Avoda — and reformists — Mapai) and, at the same time, say to us that were Mapam prepared, it would be possible to establish a union between the three Zionist-Workers' parties. How can there be union between a party which believes in identification with the West and is working towards a capitalist welfare-state, and a party which believes in a pioneering-workers' regime, in a foreign-policy of non-alignment and has a positive attitude to the socialist regimes? Neither can I understand, how they can negate the idea of the establishment of an alternative force together with us and yet find it possible to achieve all these things in an inclusive union — where Mapai calls the tune.

Every so often Achdut Avoda or one of its representatives renews the suggestion for an inclusive union on the basis of a plan for the establishment of a pioneering-workers regime in order to bring social equality to the country; ideological autonomy to every group within that union being guaranteed. I shall not deal here with Ben-Aharon's past activities in this direction. In all events we have noted that he is prepared to negotiate, and even unite, with Mapai, and

* Kibbutz Hameuhad: the Achdut Avoda kibbutz federation.

without Mapam. It should be clear to every school-child, and certainly to such an experienced politician as Ben-Aharon that Mapai now, after the Lavon affair, would not return to the situation before the split at Kfar Vitkin, and would not agree to the existence of an ideologically independent faction within the united party. Mapai will not even abandon its anti-progressive capitalist economic policy. From all this it becomes quite clear that Mapai would be interested only in one part of Ben-Aharon's suggestion — his attempt to start negotiations with Mapai, without Mapam and by isolating Mapam. Apparently, at this stage, even his own party is not prepared to go that far, which explains the cool reaction which his plan met.

At one time we thought that Achdut Avoda would be satisfied with the thought of some future union, and would co-operate with those forces which are close to it in spirit and action. Of course we understood that after the split it would not be easy to turn the clock back. Therefore, we treated Achdut Avoda very delicately and considerately. On the surface, we had not erred. The appearance of the Lavon group was enough for Achdut Avoda to discover the golden opportunity to set up a front. It was prepared to consider it as a stage toward a new political union, even at the expense of a split in Mapai. Though in theory such a new formation was possible, it could not come into being for a very simple reason: The Lavon faction never at any time even dreamt of a struggle outside the framework of its own party. It never hid its intentions at any time, nor deceived itself or anyone else in this respect.

Lavon himself said this at Achdut Avoda's last congress. As for us we never deluded ourselves as to the nature, possibilities or direction of the Lavon group. If there had been any real possibility of a union which could have produced an alternative, we would have played our

part in it. Pinchas Lavon is to be praised for having taken on the thankless task of standing up to Ben-Gurion, and yet not deluding anyone as to his intentions or the limits he had set upon himself.

Today Lavon and his colleagues are against the existence of the Military Administration. They are struggling against the dangers threatening democracy, and they are prepared to defend the pioneer elements in the Histadrut and in its leadership. P. Lavon has not subjected his international attitude to any review, but he and his colleagues show admirable courage in the views they put forward in their magazine, "Min Haysod", ("From the Foundations" — tr.) if one considers that they are not a formally defined faction within their party. They have bravely, and more than once, withstood the threats of punitive action. They have been prepared to pay any price for their freedom of expression. It is still quite feasible that one day they may find themselves — unwillingly — outside their party. In such a situation I have no doubt that we would not stand on formality and would call on them to set up some kind of common front. Meanwhile, they are in a state of neither war nor peace with their own party, and their independent appearance and expression are tolerated. We are able to understand the Lavon group's attachment to its party even under the existing conditions. Unhappily they attempt to make a virtue out of this misfortune, and suggest in turn that others behave as they. They suggest to Achdut Avoda and to us that if in the present political conditions we find it politically difficult to join Mapai, we should at least agree to the unification of our respective kibbutz movements.

In the final analysis it appears that Achdut Avoda, like ourselves, disagree with the official Communist policy; they believe in independence and freedom of judgment in our relation to the revolutionary world. At our last congress we stated that we would praise what

was good there and denounce what was bad, and we carry out that decision to the letter. Also we co-operate with Achdut Avoda in international organizations such as the Peace Movement, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, and the Union of Democratic Women, all of which is designed to cultivate friendly relations with the socialist world. We participate in the Democratic Youth Festivals together with members of Achdut Avoda; and if anything untowards happens there, they react just as we do. But the strange thing is — they are so modest about their actions. Not a clear word can be gotten out of them about their sense of oneness with, and positive criticism of, the socialist world — even though they try to maintain that line in practice.

A question in its own right is whether this ostrich-like policy has a purpose. In our opinion, such behavior on matters of principle is purposeless and incorrect. After all, in the final analysis, Achdut Avoda's positive approach to the socialist world is enough, at least at the present time, to prevent the ideological rift from being healed; this separates Achdut Avoda from Mapai and has caused the splits at Kfar Vitkin and Ein Harod. We have every right to state with certainty, that Achdut Avoda's essential positive orientation towards us still exists — even though it is carefully hidden.

When Achdut Avoda undermined the Left Front, it gave in to opportunistic considerations. Now, it is trying hard to explain away its close partnership with Mapai and its estrangement from us. Were Achdut Avoda faithful to its own self, it would not have to be waiting endlessly for its hoped-for inclusive union, but would have tried to renew accord with us. Only such a drawing together which could produce some alternative might encourage ideological and organizational decisions by opposition groups within Mapai itself.

Lavon and his colleagues have not changed their pro-Western orientation. Yet it cannot be denied that they constitute the most conscientious, wide-awake and courageous part of Mapai. Even though they did not draw far-reaching conclusions, they had enough fortitude to draw reservations from the official policy of their party on the Military Administration and from the sabre-rattling of our "Security First" enthusiasts. It may therefore be assumed that any additional crystallization of opposition forces within Mapai is now dependent on the consolidation of alternative forces outside it.

The truth is that we could have easily attained the consolidation of an alternative with Achdut Avoda, which could have aided the additional crystallization of an opposition force within Mapai, if not for that schizophrenia from which Achdut Avoda suffers permanently. This dualism has a more basic reason — which is to be sought in the field of defence policy.

In order to summarize this evaluation of our potential alternatives — I wish to emphasize the following facts :

- a) Even today, in spite of Achdut Avoda's about-face, it should be considered as a political partner in every broad alliance in the Knesset, the Zionist Organization, the Histadrut, the municipalities, etc. We should continue to regard it as our political partner in ideological accord, for political union or combined political action.
- b) Such an accord with Achdut Avoda should be considered as a step towards a further, more inclusive, political-ideological consolidation of forces.
- c) Precisely because of adherence to principles, we are not interested in sectarian exclusiveness, but in partnership with other public forces with whom it will be possible to co-operate. We are interested

in such cooperation, be it a one-time tactical move, or a programmatic-coalitionary agreement, which could lead to the eventual unification of an alternative force within the class and nation.

- d) Mapam follows a long road. In order to respond effectively to events and to build an alternative force, it must first of all strengthen its own ranks.