

Israel: Looking Back On Sixty Years

In this issue we are featuring articles assessing the situation in Israel/Palestine in light of the sixty years since the events of 1948. The 60th anniversary of the creation of the State of Israel has been rather uncritically celebrated among the mainstream Jewish community (and its nominal leadership) in Canada. However, the occasion has produced more ambivalent sentiments among Jews on the Left (including *Outlook* readers and contributors). This is understandable given the diversity of views among us regarding the very nature of the State of Israel. Many identify with Israel as a Jewish homeland—a place where Jews constitute a self-governing majority, and which has produced many undoubted scientific, artistic and cultural achievements, perhaps the most noteworthy being the creation of a secular Hebrew language and culture. Others oppose a state which is essentially an ethnic state, i.e. one which does not belong to all its inhabitants of all ethnic or religious affiliations, but is defined as “the state of the Jewish people” (those recognized as Jews by Israeli state and religious authorities), with the resulting discrimination against inhabitants not belonging to this category.

Whatever our basic attitudes, all must recognize the human cost which the state’s creation has entailed for both Jews and Arabs, in particular the Palestinian *nakba* (catastrophe): the expulsion and dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the period surrounding the 1948 war

(1947-49). Further, many feel increasingly that there is little to celebrate in the present circumstances, in which the post-1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza (even with the supposed “disengagement” from Gaza) has lasted longer than Israel’s history within its previous borders. The bleak situation, already aggravated by violence and religious-nationalist chauvinism on both sides, is all the more dire given the Israeli government’s continuing policies of settlement expansion in the West Bank and punitive blockade of Palestinians in Gaza. These actions threaten to render impossible a viable, independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

We sympathize with eloquent statements by Israeli photographer David Rubinger, quoted in *Macleans* (April 23, 2008). Rubinger recalls the exhilaration that accompanied the creation of Israel, which to him meant “A home for the Jews, where what happened to my mother could not happen to another woman.” But sixty years later he says, “I’m not in the mood [to celebrate]. If my friends’ sons have to chase Arab kids, that’s not what I want. True independence will be when peace comes.”

An even more eloquent view was expressed at the conclusion of a statement issued by a group of Jews in the UK (including expatriate Israelis), and published in the *Guardian* (April 30). The statement, titled “We’re not celebrating Israel’s anniversary,” concluded: “We will celebrate when Arab and Jew live as equals in a peaceful Middle East.”♦

Harper Chutzpah

Guest Editorial by Marty Dolin, Winnipeg, MB

Desperate to force the Liberals into an election, the Harper government tabled its budget (Bill C-50) with an unusual rider—amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act—as part of the bill. This is an uncommon practice, as legislative amendments are usually submitted as a separate bill to be debated and amended on their own merits, and not as part of the budget. The obvious intent of this cynical ploy was to try to force the Liberals to defeat Bill C-50 if they opposed the significant changes in immigration policy and direction. Since the immigration changes were part of a budget bill, the latter’s defeat would be considered a vote of non-confidence and force an election. The debate rages on, as the NDP tries to separate the immigration changes from the budget so they can be debated on their own merits. Not bloody likely, but time will tell.

The proposed changes to the Immigration Act would give the Minister of Citizenship and Immigra-

tion discretion to put limits on the numbers and types of immigrants who would be allowed to come to Canada. For example, the minister might allow more temporary workers and fewer family sponsorships (reunifying families by bringing minor children, husbands and wives left overseas). The purported rationale for these changes is to clear the “backlog” of applications which is said to have reached 800,000 (some have been in process for over five years) and to expedite the processing of skilled and temporary workers. Immigration Minister Diane Finley originally said that this would not affect other classes of applications (refugees, family class, students, visitors), but has since admitted that there will be limits on the total number of applications, obviously increasing the worker categories at the expense of others. There is no mention of streamlining the system to expedite processing. Furthermore, ministerial discretion to refuse or reject will not affect applications already in the queue, so the only way the “backlog” will be dealt with is by limiting the number of new applications categories not designed to provide labour for Canadian corporations.

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