

Strike Wave of Protest

The newly announced austerity regime sparked a wave of protest strikes and demonstrations by trade unions, led by Histadut. But it was clear from the very start that the Histadut would put up merely token opposition, aimed more at gaining political advantage against the Likud for the opposition Labour Alignment. The Histadut Secretary General Yeruham Meshel said that the strikes and protests must "be organized with the workers, to give them a feeling that they are doing this, and not carrying out orders from above." Meshel, a close friend of AFL-CIO Treasurer Lane Kirkland, called a one-hour strike, or in some cases a one-day strike, but in thoroughly uncoordinated fashion.

According to reports from Israel, many workers

refused to join in the strikes and demonstrations because they sensed a strictly "political" motivation by the Histadut, which is run by the Alignment.

Prime Minister Begin, who called on Israel to tighten its belt even further by appealing demagogically to the "common sense and national feeling" of Israelis, said that Israel must go through the crisis because of Israel's "big debts" to the West. Begin predicted that by 1980 Israel would have to pay over \$3 billion annually in debt service, by far the highest per capita in the world.

A cartoon in the *Jerusalem Post* summed up the outlook for Israelis: One man said to another that the measures will help the Israeli economy "in the long run." The second man asks, "And in the short run?" The answer: "We starve."

Syria & PLO Square Off Against Egypt

In the days leading up to the Nov. 12 Arab Foreign Minister's summit in Tunis, a fight has broken out in the Arab leadership over what the unified Arab position will be towards the proposed reconvening of the Geneva Mideast peace conference. The debate pivots on the thorny problem of Palestinian representation at the conference.

The battle is, in essence, between Egypt and Syria. According to European diplomatic sources, U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance recently informed Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz that both Egypt and Jordan favored the controversial U.S.-Israeli working paper, the terms of which deny the Palestinians a role at Geneva.

Informed sources indicate that both Sadat and Jordanian King Hussein are inclined to return to Kissinger's step-by-step diplomacy for the Middle East. Sadat this week told the *Manchester Guardian*, "I prefer not to go to Geneva if the conference is not adequately prepared for. I don't want it to last for 25 years like SALT." The *Guardian* furthermore notes that twice over the last week Sadat has openly stated his willingness to scrap his support for Geneva.

With full support from the Soviet Union, Syria, and the PLO, meanwhile, are trying to force an Arab consensus endorsing Geneva with a formula which will define the shape of Palestinian representation. In this context, Zuhair Mohsin, the Chief of a Syrian-controlled Palestinian commando group, indirectly slammed Sadat this week and was quoted in the London *Financial Times*: "Arabs must stop giving free-of-charge concessions, gambling only on U.S. intentions."

Also this week, the Arab League approved a PLO proposal for a Foreign Ministers' meeting of the Arab

confrontation states — Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and the PLO — to work out a formula to propose to the Tunis summit. PLO Foreign Minister Farouk Kaddoumi asked for an "Arab working paper" to clarify the Arab stance toward Geneva. But the equivocation on the part of Egypt and Jordan has seriously complicated the issue.

Though not a confrontation state, Saudi Arabia, with its powerful financial influence in the Arab world, will probably resolve the differences between Egypt and Syria. Following Saudi Foreign Minister Saud-al-Faisal's return from Washington last week, he acknowledged the Soviet Union's role in the Middle East peacemaking process, stating that the U.S. "does not hold 99 percent of the cards in the Middle East." This is a direct attack on Sadat, who so often has stated that 99 percent of the cards are held by Washington. Saud's statement is the first public recognition by the Saudis of the Soviet role in the region.

Shortly after Saud's return to Riyadh, Sadat suddenly made a trip to Romania to confer with president Nicholas Ceausescu on the Soviet influence in the Mideast as well as strained Soviet-Egyptian relations. As well, Ceausescu delivered a message from Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin (who had been in Romania two months before) to Sadat.

While in Washington, Prince Saud repeatedly made it clear that Riyadh's supports the PLO in its efforts to gain international recognition and eventual statehood. With such a commitment from the Saudis — who pay a sizable chunk of Egypt's bills — Sadat may have no choice but to heed his Arab brothers, Syria and the PLO.