

LaRouche Youth Movement, is really shaking up the Democratic Party and politics as usual.

Hertzberg: The younger generation in Israel is confused. But, it doesn't want to get killed. That's the important thing. Except for a minority of right-wing hotheads, the younger generation in Israel wants peace.

Book Review

A Zionist Fights For Mideast Peace

by Majorie Mazel Hecht

The Fate of Zionism: A Secular Future for Israel & Palestine

by Arthur Hertzberg

San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003
194 pp., Hardcover, \$19.95

In June 1967, Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg was in Israel, at a Labor Party gathering of participants who were euphoric at the outcome of the June 5-10 "Six-Day War." Hertzberg, an American, spoke as the "warm-up" for the expected appearance of the retired first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion. When Ben-Gurion, known as the "George Washington of Israel," arrived, he dropped a bombshell. Hertzberg writes: "Ben-Gurion, the brave statesman and undaunted military leader who had won Israel's war for its independence, asserted that if Israel did not now give back, immediately, all the territory that it had captured in recent days—with the exception of East Jerusalem—it would be heading for historic disaster."

"In that room, that day, no one believed him at all except me," Hertzberg says. "I could not simply write off what he had said as the anger of an old man who could not accept that he had become irrelevant. I knew that as a person he could be petty and angry, but not on issues of great historic importance. What I heard him say kept gnawing at me. What if he was right?"

The Anti-Messianic Prophet

More than 30 years later, Hertzberg says, he knows "beyond any shadow of a doubt" that Ben-Gurion was the true Zionist prophet in June 1967. Ben-Gurion saw that the origi-



Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg was vice president of the World Jewish Congress, led for many years by his friend Nahum Goldman; he remains a tireless fighter for a secular, not messianic, vision of Israel.

nal secular aim of founding a Jewish national state in Palestine was now being infused with messianic religious ideas, and thus doomed to failure.

Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg's decades-long thrust within Zionism has been to fight for its secularization. "Modern Zionism can succeed today only if it emphasizes its largely secular origins. It dare not walk down the path of religious certainty or the arrogance of power," he writes. He argues, rightly, that the entire Jewish/Palestinian conflict must be removed from the religious arena, pointing out the obvious—that it becomes impossible to discuss the issue, on the level of the incompatible religious beliefs of Jewish Biblical literalists, Islamic Koran literalists, and Christian Zionist Biblical literalists.

After the Six-Day 1967 war, there was a change in Zionism, Hertzberg says; the victory infused Zionism with a messianic enthusiasm, which Hertzberg found dangerous. The idea took hold that the 1967 victory was a sign that another miracle—that of the Messiah coming—was on its way. "[I]f the Jewish messiah had chosen the 20th Century as the time to appear, he would have come to Auschwitz," he writes. "I cannot believe that Jews can defy logic in Israel, and presume that the messiah will come to save them from the political and military debts they are running up in order to expand the settlements of the West Bank."

(It is not generally known today how secular the Zionist founding fathers of Israel were. Golda Meir, in her autobiography, describes the scene on May 14, 1948, when David Ben-Gurion was preparing to announce to the world the declaration of Israel's independence. Meir said that when Ben-Gurion read the prepared statement to his associates in the People's Council, "there was a last-minute argument about the inclusion of a reference to God." A subcommittee of the group that produced the draft had inserted in the first sentence the ambiguous phrase, "With trust in the Rock of Israel, we set our hands in witness to this Proclamation. . . ." But the repre-



Hertzberg says that then-former Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was the true Zionist prophet in June 1967, when after the Six-Day War, he heard Ben-Gurion publicly insist that Israel must immediately give back all the territory it had just conquered, except for East Jerusalem. Otherwise, Ben-Gurion warned, Israel was eventually headed for “a historic disaster.”

sentative of the religious parties wanted something unequivocal, and a left-wing Labor Party member was adamant that there be no reference to God. Meir describes how it took Ben-Gurion most of the morning to bring about a compromise, noting the twofold nature of the phrase: It could signify God for many Jews, but for most it could be considered a “symbolic and secular reference to the ‘strength of the Jewish people.’ ”)

In Defense of Human Rights

Hertzberg is a passionate defender of Israel’s right to exist. He sees Israel as the only place, after World War II, where hundreds of thousands of Jews were able to come and live in relative safety. Their families, homes, and livelihoods had been taken from them in Nazi-occupied Europe, and most had nothing to go back to. Some who did go back, found that they were persecuted by their former countrymen (a pogrom in 1946 in Poland, for example, killed 44 returning Jewish survivors). Other countries around the world would not take them; there were tight refugee quotas in the United States and elsewhere.

At the same time, Hertzberg, a founder of the Peace Now movement, writes compassionately about the 300,000 Palestinians who were dispossessed in the 1948 war, and who subsequently were forced to live in refugee camps and endure continuing injustice. He notes: “It was not just that the Zionists had either indirectly or directly pushed them out; it was equally painful that their Arab brethren would not take them in. In all the neighboring Arab states they were kept in refugee camps or left to their own devices or to the mercies of alms from the U.N. Only Jordan granted them citizenship.”

Hertzberg briefly reviews the history of the Jewish-Arab conflict, looking at some of the main events and personalities, and how the extremists on both sides have been allowed to define the situation—and prevent a solution. He notes that most accounts of the history of the conflict do not convey “the

profoundly angry effect” of the 1948-1949 war on both sides. Hertzberg is critical of the Israeli treatment of its Arab citizens, saying that, “Not even the most committed partisan of Israel can take much pride in this record. I do not know whether total equality for the Arab citizens of Israel would have fundamentally helped reduce the acrimony of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but one of the tragedies of this history is that it was never tried.”

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon comes under Hertzberg’s fire for his previous, as well as current, misdeeds. For example, in the Begin government, Sharon, as Minister of Defense, “misled” the government on the situation in Lebanon, allowing the Falange of “his favorite Christian ally,” Bashir Gemayel, then President of Lebanon, to massacre Palestinian men, women, and children at Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps near Beirut. In a demonstration in Tel Aviv, 400,000 Israelis protested Sharon’s complicity in this massacre, and the independent commission set up to investigate, stated that General Sharon should leave the government. (He left the Defense Ministry, but he went on to another ministry in the government of Menachem Begin, to spread new settlements in the West Bank.)

This “creeping annexation,” as Hertzberg calls it, is now an “unabating drive for increasing settlements,” with 250,000 Jews settled across the border. “The most enraging element” of this, Hertzberg says, is “the increasing dominance of a religious motif among the Jews—that the ‘will of God’ is on their side.”

Rabbi Hertzberg takes on the still current arguments that Israel has “no right to exist,” and expresses particular anger against the “intellectual” critics of Israel, both Arab—such as Rashid Khalidi and Edward Said—and non-Arab, most especially the U.S.-hating Noam Chomsky, who was formerly a socialist Zionist who tried to settle in Israel on a kibbutz in 1952, but found that he wasn’t cut out for agricultural labor. In Hertzberg’s view, the European intellectuals attack Israel because they are resentful of being told that they were passive collaborators of Hitler during World War II.

Can There Be Peace?

Given the devolution of the current situation, can there be peace, in Rabbi Hertzberg’s view? His answer is yes; but he is pessimistic about whether any of the peace plans—Oslo, Geneva, Road Map, etc.—can be successfully carried out and enforced at this point. Peace is possible, he says, if the United States sits on the extremists in Israel, and if other nations ensure that the money for terrorism— Hamas in particular—dries up. He advocates, as part of “sitting” on the Israelis, that the United States deduct any money that Israel spends for new settlements from the aid it gives Israel. This money would have been better spent on Arab Israelis, he says, who get a smaller proportion of state services per capita than do Jewish citizens.

Hertzberg notes sadly that peace won’t come from having

Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg: A Jew in America

Born in Poland in 1921, Rabbi Hertzberg came to the United States with his family in 1926. Morality, justice, and “defending the defenseless,” as he puts it, were part of his early training. In his memoir, *A Jew in America: My Life and a People’s Struggle for Identity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), he tells the story of his father, a Hasidic rabbi and scholar, who, in 1931, walked out on his Baltimore congregation with his arm around a visiting black Jewish rabbi, because the congregants objected to a black man leading the service.

Hertzberg later broke with the Hasidic orthodoxy of

his childhood, although not with the principles of justice and morality that he grew up with. He was ordained as an Orthodox rabbi, and is now Rabbi Emeritus in a Conservative New Jersey synagogue. In his long career, he taught Judaism courses at Columbia and Dartmouth Universities, wrote several books, served in many ecumenical groups, and was an official of major Jewish organizations.

Most notably, Hertzberg was the right-hand man for Nahum Goldmann, who struggled against the extremist Zionists here and in Israel. When Goldmann retired as head of the World Jewish Congress, Hertzberg was his chosen successor. But political maneuvers intervened, and Hertzberg instead became the vice president of the Congress, where he continued the policies that he and Goldmann shared.

—Marjorie Mazel Hecht

both sides sit down at the negotiating table and setting up two states; there has to be outside intervention. The United States must play a “decisive, but limited role,” Hertzberg says, in defusing the Mideast situation, but should not remain on the scene as an imperial “policeman.” This kind of imperial policy, epitomized by the rhetoric of Donald Rumsfeld and William Kristol, among others, will be disastrous everywhere in the world, he says, Real peace will only come in a few generations, once the Palestinians have been able to develop an economy and negotiate across the table with the Israelis on a more equal basis.

Hertzberg stresses that the current situation is urgent. His friends (unnamed, but judging from the circles he has moved in, they are top-level policy makers) tell him that soon the Palestinian extremists will make use of “dirty bombs,” using material stolen from Russia. (This is, of course, the same type of propaganda used here, in the U.S., to scare people into accepting police-state measures.) There is also the question of demographics, and the fact that if there is no “two-state” solution, Israelis will have an growing Arab population within the state of Israel, because of the higher Palestinian birth rate.

The right wing in Israel, and in the United States, would object to a two-state solution, Hertzberg says, “[b]ut an American government that would have the courage to force the end of settlement activity would find far greater support in the Jewish community both in Israel and in America than many of the people in Washington imagine.”

Rabbi Hertzberg has spent decades in the thick of the battle for Mideast peace, often on the outs with the Israeli government, because his judgments were always moral, and not made for political advantage or to “go with the flow,” in Israel or in the U.S. Thus, his analysis is that of a thoughtful insider, who personally knows the decision makers, and who

speaks his mind.

There are points on which I would argue with Rabbi Hertzberg’s analysis and omissions—for example, he does not mention the bloody role the British played in the first half of the 20th Century in setting the Arabs and Jews at each others’ throats, and their continuing promotion of terrorism. And, he does not elaborate on the necessity for economic and infrastructure development for the region.

More important, after reading this book, I was intrigued enough to read his autobiographical work, *A Jew in America* (see box), and I would advise readers to read this first. This memoir is a real treasure, giving an inside view of how Rabbi Hertzberg’s fine mind works, the thinking that guided him as he was growing up, and as an adult, his sense of humor, and his courage to uphold unpopular stands. Plus, for younger readers, it is a vivid picture of what life was like for Jewish immigrants in the first half of the 20th Century.

Having gained this appreciation of the man and what he has accomplished, I think that *The Fate of Zionism*, by itself, does not present an adequate view of his outlook and his ideas. Nevertheless, his message in *The Fate of Zionism* is rational, moral, and human. He has worked for peace for many decades, and he wants to solve the problem of bringing economic development and peace to both the the Arabs and the Jews. And this sanity is exactly why you don’t see him called on by the Administration as part of a “peace team”; or why he isn’t featured on the nightly news to counter the extremism of Ariel Sharon and his U.S. supporters.

Rabbi Hertzberg concludes by reiterating his call for secularism in the ecumenical spirit: “Let neither side keep invoking its supposed right to attack the other in the delusion that each is doing God’s work. Let them hear the deepest teaching of the Biblical faith that we are all God’s children. We are a family that must find ways of making peace.”