
Interview: Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg

Sharon and Bush 'Will Fry in Hell'

Rabbi Hertzberg, former president of the American Jewish Congress, and former vice president of the World Jewish Congress, was interviewed by Marjorie Mazel Hecht on April 15. Her review of his newest book, The Fate of Zionism, is below.

EIR: After years of devolution and increasing tension, we're at a critical point in terms of Israel's survival and the danger of a full-blown worldwide clash of civilization.

Hertzberg: I think that what happened in Washington yesterday is a disaster. Sharon is licking his chops. He's going home to Israel to parade his achievement; he scored a famous victory. Bush is licking his chops. He thinks he's added about 10% or so to the Jewish vote that he will get in November. And so, Florida is more secure, and he thinks that he will himself be re-elected.

Both of them will *fry in hell* for what they did yesterday. And I want you to quote me on "fry in hell," because what they have done is that they have *permanently* put the United States at war with the Arab world. They have left no negotiating room. The only tactic that Arabs have left is to send in more suicide bombers.

EIR: It's certainly a worse situation than it was before the day before yesterday.

Hertzberg: And therefore, anybody who thinks that what happened in Washington yesterday is good for peace and good for people, is out of his head.

EIR: Unfortunately, in the Bush Administration and elsewhere, there are a lot of people who are out of their heads.

Hertzberg: Absolutely, absolutely.

EIR: As you know, we've been putting pressure on the Bush Administration for getting rid of Cheney and his entourage.

Hertzberg: I'm part of that pressure from a different side. These people are essentially mindless bullies. It's not merely that they're bad for Arabs, or bad for America. They are also bad for Jews. They are involving us in a permanent war with the Arab world. They are making it much worse.

EIR: Bush seems to think that he'll have support from the Jews for his policy. I don't think that's even true.

Hertzberg: I think he's going to have increased some support among the hardliners; but as the Jews think this one

through, he's going to lose support.

EIR: I think most Jews aren't hardliners.

Hertzberg: That's the point. The majority of the Jews want peace, and they will recognize that this isn't going to lead to peace.

EIR: What do you think has to be done at this point?

Hertzberg: What I am thinking overnight is that there has to be a very serious Jewish declaration by some very responsible people, which says that Bush and Sharon do not speak for us. I'm going to try to make that happen in the next day or two. I think some Jews have to step out and say, this does not represent me.

EIR: Can you talk some about a solution—the policy of economic development for the Mideast, which LaRouche has pushed as the only way to change the situation?

Hertzberg: It is the only way. Look, I'll give you a rather startling parallel. Twenty-five years ago, the blacks made riots in America. How come they haven't torn up a suburb in 20-25 years? The answer is that with all its faults, affirmative action and all the rest that we have done, have brought enough blacks into the middle class and into the American mainstream economy, so that they have a stake in not tearing the joint down. I rest my case.

We have got to create a situation or situations in which Jews and Arabs have a stake together; Israelis and Palestinians, in not tearing up Israel/Palestine. And the only way you're going to do this, is not quickly by declarations, but slowly, by economic development.

EIR: We certainly have to start. . .

Hertzberg: There have been some starts. There are a few places around where Jews and Palestinians are in joint endeavors, but nowhere nearly enough.

EIR: Can you talk a bit about Sharon, and how you see a post-Sharon Israel? What do you think will happen?

Hertzberg: Well, a post-Sharon Israel will have one of two choices: It can either be worse—that is, it can go to Netanyahu, who is worse than Sharon. Or it can go back to the liberals. I don't know which way it's going to go. It depends on how much the situation changes, and how much pressure we put on.

EIR: How do you see that pressure coming? Do you see your declaration as having that effect?

Hertzberg: I see anything that is done in the Jewish world, and in the world as a whole, to make the point that these two leaders of yesterday do not speak for us, as fundamentally important.

EIR: What about the younger generation in Israel? Here, the

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-