

On the political situation in Syria: A spectre is haunting the blogger Gurvitz...

By Uri Weltmann

Reading Yossi Gurvitz's article, which aims to “expose” the position of the Communist Party of Israel (CPI) on the developments in Syria, one is attacked by a feeling of déjà vu. Suddenly, we are thrown back to the old days of the Cold War era, where facts need not stand in the way of finger pointing, and a truthful account of events is just a distraction from the fanning of anti-Communist hysteria.

The title of Gurvitz's article - "Israeli Communist Party supports Bashar Assad (but only in Arabic)" - is doubly false: First, because the position of the CPI is not one of support for Assad, nor of support towards the criminal ways in which the Syrian army is treating the protesters, many of which are peaceful; Second, because the sinister allegation that the views expressed in the Arabic press of the Party, are somehow different from the views expressed in the Hebrew press of the Party, is an old re-hash of an old lie.

Indeed, Gurvitz's article is full of inconsistencies and mistakes, which expose not only the limits of his knowledge of the Arabic language, but also the limits of his knowledge of politics. One example would be that the CPI's daily Arabic newspaper “Al-Ittihad” is incorrectly referred to as “Al-Ithihad”. Further, it is referred to not as the organ of the CPI, but as the paper of Hadash (That is, the paper of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality – the Leftwing coalition that the CPI has helped form in the late 1970s, and is part of today).

From small fallacies – bigger ones grow

Gurvitz bases all of its claims on one blog post, by the former-Communist Joseph Algazy, which contains numerous slanders, half-truths and plain falsehoods. Gurvitz – who doesn't read Arabic – took these claims to be true, without ever bothering to check them against facts. He is not the only Israeli Left blogger who has re-posted the slanderous piece by Algazy, but he has done so with the most enthusiasm, adding his own attacks on the principle of Jewish-Arab partnership inside the CPI (which he refers to as “a facade”).

Normally, one would not bother to write a response to such a blatant case of bad journalism. But the fact that more than one reader was fooled by the fallacies which Gurvitz, Algazy and co. peddle, demands that the record be set straight.

What exactly is the position of the CPI towards the protests in Syria?

On March 24th, shortly after the Syrian protests became a widespread mass phenomena, the Political Bureau of the CPI met, and published the following statement:

The Political Bureau of the CPI denounces the Imperialist intervention in Lybia, which is organized under the auspices of the United States, France, Britain, Germany, and other countries. Security Council resolution 1973 is used as an excuse for these bombings, supposedly “in order to defend the Libyan people”. In fact, the aim of this intervention is to seize control of Libyan oil.

As it denounces this latest NATO aggression, the Political Bureau denounces, at the same time, the crimes of the dictator Muammar Gaddafi, which are used as an excuse for this aggressive imperialist intervention (which is generally orchestrated along the same lines as in Iraq). The bombings and the political intervention is meant to deny the Libyan people of their past achievements, and to prevent them from achieving their just demands in the struggle for freedom and democracy...

The Political Bureau emphasizes its complete rejection of the way in which the Syrian regime had chosen to act, and denounces its crimes towards the protesters, especially in Daraa, which has caused the injury and deaths of many protesters. The Syrian regime, which is threatened by US Imperialism and Israel, must meet the just demands of the protesters for freedom, democracy, a dignified life, and against corruption and emergency laws.

Contrary to the outrageous claims made by Gurvitz against the CPI, this statement – indeed, like all Party statements – was published in Hebrew (http://maki.org.il/he/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10753&Itemid=153), as well as in Arabic (<http://aljabha.org/?i=58619>).

The views expressed in this statement were repeated time and again in the Party press, both in the weekly “Zo Haderech” in Hebrew, as well as the daily “Al-Ittihad” in Arabic.

One recent example, published this very week, would be the article in “Zo Haderech” by Tamar Gozansky (Member of the Political Bureau, and former member of Knesset), who not only condemned the killing of protesters, but also warned against the danger of imperialist intervention:

<http://maki.org.il/he/component/content/article/11488-2011-06-11-16-10-57>

This twofold position – of condemning the killings, while warning against the plans of imperialism – was repeated in the article “Al-Ittihad” by Faten Ghattas (Chairperson of the Party's Central Control Commission): <http://www.aljabha.org/index.asp?i=60478>

Following the slanderous post by Algazy in his blog, several people asked whether the claims made against Muhammad Naffa, Secretary General of the CPI, are truthful. Indeed, one would find it surprising that a veteran Communist leader would, as claimed by Algazy and repeated by Gurvitz, support Bashar Assad. Even more fantastic is the fact that Algazy, who was in the past a journalist, and Gurvitz, who still describes himself as being one, could have published such a libellous piece, which doesn't abide to basic journalistic norms and ethics.

Gurvitz – following Algazy - had no misgivings about journalistic norms, when he goes on to plainly state, without a shred of proof, that Naffa had “denounced the [Syrian] uprising”. But while Algazy quotes extensively from those who criticize an article published by Naffa in “Al-Ittihad”, he doesn't quote a single word from what Naffa had actually said. Why is that? And why hadn't he provided a link to that article, so that the readers could judge for themselves? Is it perhaps because no “denunciation of the Syrian uprising”, and no “support for Bashar Assad” could actually be found anywhere within that article?

In the above-mentioned article (<http://www.aljabha.org/index.asp?i=59576>) Naffa says: “We support that the brave Syrian people will receive all of its rights, and we oppose the corruption, the State Security courts, the arbitrary arrests, the emergency laws, and the attacks on the freedom of expression, and other freedoms”. Quite a “denunciation”, isn't it?

Naffa goes on to warn against the danger of imperialist intervention (like the Political Bureau did in its March statement, and like Gozansky and Ghattas did in their last week articles), but neither “support for Bashar Assad”, nor “denunciation of the Syrian uprising”, are anywhere to be found. Also, the outrageous claim that the position published in the Party's Hebrew press somehow differs from the one published in its Arabic press, is an obvious and blatant lie, as can be evident from reading the above sources.

The same views by Naffa one can find in an interview, published yesterday on the website of the CPI, which will also be printed in the coming issues of “Al-Ittihad” and “Zo Haderech”:
<http://maki.org.il/he/component/content/article/11546-2011-06-17-13-01-47>

Algazy continued to practice “creative journalism” when he quoted a sentence, taken from a statement by a meeting of Communist Parties in Europe, which calls on Communist Parties “to express their support for Syria in the face of the imperialist plots”. This part of the statement has received criticism from some Arab thinkers, whose objections to this wording are quoted in detail by Algazy. But never once did he mention that the CPI did not actually participate in that meeting of Parties, nor was it a signatory of that statement - although he knowingly lends his readers to believe that is the case.

Had he tried to pull such a trick in a respected newspaper, rather than in a post on his blog, they would have shown him the door out. It is a shame that a media outlet such as “972mag” had not done the same.

Why did the principled position taken by the CPI arouse so much anger among various “Left” bloggers in Israel?

Unlike some liberals on the Left, who gave unconditional support to the protesters, regardless of their demands, the CPI has refused to take imperialism out of the equation. It would be plain ignorance to claim that US imperialism is indifferent towards the developments in Syria, or that it doesn't have an interest in having a specific political line to become dominant among the protesters. Therefore, any analysis of the developments in Syria has to start by taking them in context. Not every demand by the protesters has to be automatically supported, but things have to be weighed objectively.

On the other side, contrary to some would-be “anti-imperialists”, who play the erroneous game of “my enemy's enemy is my friend”, the CPI had consistently pressed for the demands of the Syrian people for democracy, freedom and social justice to be met. The Party had been quite clear that arbitrary use of power, and killing of innocent and peaceful protesters, is something that we unequivocally condemn.

Is ours a complicated position? Indeed, and rightly so. One cannot provide a simple solution to a complicated situation. Those on the left who would try to do so, will necessarily find themselves either siding with a repressive and corrupt government, or with an occupying imperialist power.

The CPI's position might prove to be unpopular – both to the lackeys of imperialism, as well as to the apologists of the repressive Syrian government – but it is a principled stand. For more than 90 years, the Communists in this country, Jews and Arabs alike, held on to their principles, even at times when doing so was difficult, or even life-risking. We are greatly proud of that. And we will continue to do so.

Uri Weltmann is a member of the Communist Party of Israel (CPI), and member of the National Secretariat of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash)