
In Memoriam

Maxim Ghilan: A Fighter for Peace

by Dean Andromidas

Maxim Ghilan, a political collaborator and dear friend of the LaRouche movement for more than two decades, died on April 2 in Tel Aviv. Peace activist, author, strategic thinker, and poet, Maxim dedicated his life to bringing peace between Israel and Palestine.

My telephone calls to Maxim were always at half past ten at night. A review of the facts of the day was transformed into an assessment of future developments in the region. When briefed on a strategic assessment by Lyndon LaRouche, a dialogue on its implications would begin, often lasting an hour, rendering severe damage to the phone bill, but enriching our understanding of the issues at hand. At first it was a once-a-week discussion with our “important source,” but it soon began to be twice a week, and often every day of any given week. The important source soon became a valued collaborator, and then a dear friend. For those first five or six years, Maxim was a voice on the telephone; we had never met in person.

“I brought you a small gift. Its very good coffee. As you can see, it’s from Maxim’s in Paris,” Maxim said with a smile, looking through his thick, black horn-rimmed eyeglasses. So after several years, and what might have been thousands of telephone discussions, Maxim came to Wiesbaden, Germany. Not only did we meet, but Maxim spent two long evenings deep in discussions with Mr. and Mrs. LaRouche, on topics ranging from developments in the Middle East, to broad strategic and cultural questions, out of which Maxim, as was his way, would develop ideas and proposals for new initiatives.

“Well Maxim, tell me about yourself,” I asked during our dinner.

Born in Lille, France, in 1931, his father was a French banker and his mother was German, a Berliner who had been secretary to the German Foreign Minister at the Versailles peace conference. “When Hitler took power, my father was determined to get as far away from Germany as possible. So we moved to Spain,” Maxim said.

The Ghilans soon found themselves in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, where his father served as an official banker for the Republican government. Among his efforts for the Republic’s cause, Maxim’s father organized emergency grain shipments from Romania. After the Fascist Gen. Fran-



Maxim Ghilan (1931-2005): “It has been a very adventurous, and very frustrating life, but a very satisfying one, because I did precisely what I thought I had to do. There are very few people in the world who can say that.”

cisco Franco, with the aid of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, defeated the Republican government, Maxim’s father suffered the same fate as many other Republicans. He was kidnapped by one of Franco’s death squads and “disappeared.”

In 1944, with his widowed mother and older sister, Maxim arrived in Haifa, Palestine. Under the British Mandate, Jewish immigration was highly restricted, so, still a youngster, Maxim arrived unceremoniously concealed in a potato sack.

Raised in the slums of Tel Aviv, Maxim joined the Hagannah, the pre-state defense organization, at age 16, and fought in the war of independence from Britain. After David Ben Gurion signed the armistice agreement, ending the 1948 war, he ordered the sinking of the ship *SS Altalena*, which was carrying arms for the Irgun (also known as the Stern Gang), which had refused to recognize the armistice. The killing of Jews by Jews sent Maxim into the arms of the Stern Gang, after which he was soon arrested and imprisoned by the new Israeli government. It was after witnessing the brutal treatment of Arab prisoners, including a prison massacre, that he began moving towards the peace camp when he was released. This was in the 1950s, well before “Peace Now,” and at a time when being for peace was often considered being a traitor.

By 1961, Maxim became an advocate for the two-state solution. Always the organizer, he created the first non-com-

munist Arab-Jewish organization in Israel, called Koah Yozem, the start-up force which was affiliated with the International Jewish Peace Union, of which he became director.

Exile and Work for Peace

In 1969, Maxim went into what would become two and a half decades of exile, but an exile in the service of bringing peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

With secret support from Nahum Goldmann, who then was the head of the World Jewish Congress, and was himself a fighter for peace, Maxim became among the first Israelis to seek contact with the leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization, at a time when such contacts were illegal and considered treasonous. He was soon told that if he ever returned to Israel he would be arrested, and he was also threatened by the Mossad. This was a time when Palestinian organizations were hijacking airliners, and talking hostages.

For Maxim, the task was not only to make contact, but to convince the Palestinians that the way to their liberation could not be through terrorism, but through dialogue, hard negotiations, and a two-state solution. "It's not enough to reach out to the moderates," Maxim often said. "You have to reach out to the most extreme of your opponents if you want peace."

He forged ties with many of the key Palestinian leaders, including Yasser Arafat, with whom he became friends, as a true Israeli partner for peace. He also saw the assassination of some of these same Palestinians, leaders, who, like himself, made the journey from extremist to peace advocate. There was Issam Sartawi, who was gunned down in 1983, in Portugal, at whose funeral Maxim bitterly said that his murder was "an expression of the struggle of the Israeli-Palestinian peace camp on the one side, and the hawks of the war camp on the other."

Almost ten years later, Abu Iyad (Salah Khalaf), another close comrade in the struggle for peace, and who was considered a potential successor to Yasser Arafat, was gunned down in 1991 in Kuwait. Both were murdered by assassins linked to Abu Nidal's so-called breakaway Palestinian faction. It was an open secret that Abu Nidal ran a murder gang for hire. In 1992, the highly respected author Patrick Seale published a book on the subject, *Abu Nidal: A Gun for Hire*, documenting how Abu Nidal was in the pay of the Israeli Mossad.

Maxim was a powerful intellect, and his strategic thinking went beyond the Middle East. In 1971, he founded the journal *Israeli and Palestine Political Report*, which he continued to publish until his death. It was a journal where both Israeli and Palestinian political authors could publish works oriented to peace.

One fine day in Paris, in 1981, a young man, the late Mark Burdman, who was editor of the *Washington Insider*, an *EIR* publication in Europe, "barged" into Maxim's office and demanded that he work with LaRouche. Thus began a fruitful collaboration with the LaRouche movement that lasted for more than two decades. Over those years, a personal and

Two Small Tigers

by Maxim Ghilan

Two small tigers, sleek with living joy
Walk along King George Street
Sharpen their claws on an African ficus tree
Transplanted to a Tel Aviv alley

Traditional black stripes
Twin green glances
One daring, one less forward
Softly cruel, gliding on—
Not quite yet women, soft and fresh
Tiptoeing high-heeled into our hearts
Along a street in Tel Aviv

Adapted from the Hebrew by the author

fruitful friendship developed between Maxim and the LaRouches.

Seeing the significance of LaRouche's conception that a true Middle East peace can be secured only through cooperation in a regional economic development policy, Maxim published an interview on the subject with LaRouche in his journal in August 1977.

Although deeply committed to a two-state solution, he was extremely critical of the Oslo peace accords of 1993, and made his assessment known to Arafat himself. Although he acknowledged the potential of the so-called "economic annexes" of the accord, a point on which he agreed with LaRouche, he clearly saw the pitfalls in the so-called gradual approach.

Return of a Israeli Patriot

After an absence from Israel of more than two decades, Maxim returned in 1993, welcomed by old friends and collaborators—but not welcomed by the so-called "mainstream" left, and certainly hated by the right. Nonetheless, he loved being back in Israel, and his lively mind initiated a dozen new projects. He soon gathered around him a circle of old friends and collaborators, as well as new ones, especially young people.

He saw Zionism as a deeply flawed ideology, and knew that if Israel were to survive as a nation—and Maxim deeply loved Israel—it had to become a nation of *all* its citizens, whether Jew, Arab, Muslim, or Christian. Deeply disappointed with much of the Israeli left wing and peace movement, Maxim launched the Hebrew-language political and cultural journal *Mitan*, as an organizing tool aimed at breaking

down the ideological blocks that are preventing his fellow Israelis from making peace with their neighbors.

Maxim loved the poetical qualities of the Hebrew language, and he was an accomplished poet and short story writer, considered as a leading figure among the “State Generation” of poets, those of the first decade after the founding of the Israeli state. In December 2004, he received the Prime Minister Levi Eshkol Prize for Literary Excellence. Although he would accept the prize, he did not avail himself of the opportunity to receive it personally from Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Maxim’s most recent works, both poems and short stories, will soon be published in Hebrew.

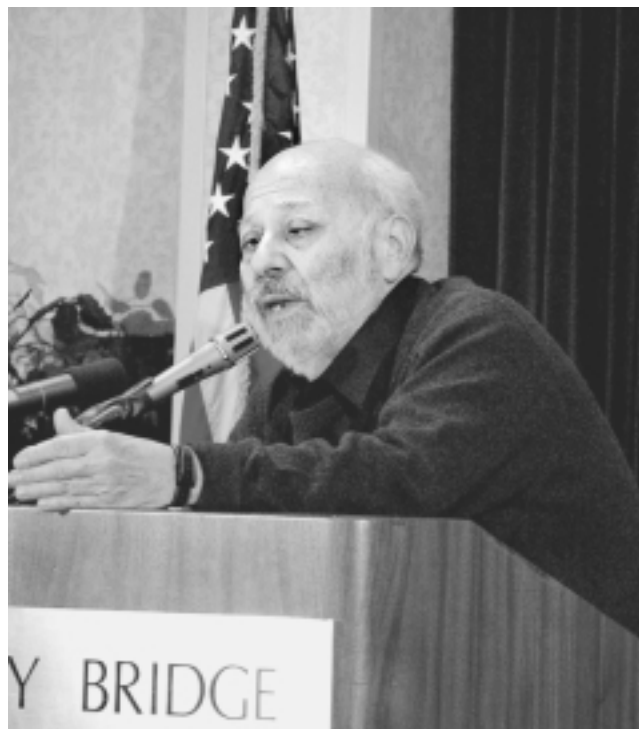
In the last year of his life, Maxim made two trips to the United States where, through meetings with dozens of people, ranging from peace activists to members of the U.S. retired military-security establishment, his insights into the region made a considerable impact. He collaborated closely with the LaRouche movement, addressing several forums, including several memorable briefings to the LaRouche Youth Movement. (See *EIR*, Nov. 26, 2004, for his briefing to *EIR* staff in Leesburg, Virginia.)

His two last trips to America, in November 2004 and February 2005, were also a revelation to Maxim. Through LaRouche and associates, he was introduced to a whole stratum, of current and former diplomats, politicians and intellectuals, who were not part of the American “peace movement,” but whose aspirations for a just peace in the region, particularly between Israel and Palestine, coincided profoundly with his own. In a private discussion with LaRouche in early December 2004, as he prepared to return to Israel, Maxim acknowledged, “I should have done this long ago. I have met the real America for the first time.”

The Americans with whom Maxim met were even more profoundly impacted by his sharp intellect and moral courage. Maxim delivered the most blunt and historically insightful picture of the situation on the ground in Israel, inside the Palestine National Authority, and in broader Southwest Asia, that these leading Americans had ever heard, and it resonated with, and deepened their own experiences and insights. It was as the result of one of those discussions, that Maxim was invited to return to Washington in February 2005, to participate in a closed-door dialogue among a number of leading Israeli figures from all sides of the political spectrum. Maxim stood out from the others, and left a deep and lasting impression on the hundred-or-so Southwest Asia “experts” assembled. Maxim returned to Israel from this second trip to America, profoundly conflicted. He knew that he was on the verge of making some new, great contributions to world history, yet he also knew that his health was rapidly failing.

‘I Did Precisely What I Thought I Had to Do’

Maxim died in the early morning hours of Saturday, April 2, and was buried at Kibbutz Einat, outside of Tel



Poet, philosopher, and warrior for peace and justice, here Maxim Ghilan addresses a meeting of the LaRouche Youth Movement in November 2004.

Aviv, on April 5. His funeral was attended by friends and collaborators from all eras of his life. There were the writers and poets, many of them among the cultural pillars of Israel. From the era of the 1950s and 1960s, were the writers, poets, and activists, including the well-known Israeli poet Natan Zach, who helped secure Maxim’s return to Israel in 1993, at a time when the government still intended to arrest him and put him on trial. There was the writer Adam Baruch, who devoted a chapter in his last best-seller to Maxim. For Baruch, Maxim served as a metaphor for the Israeli experience; he wrote that Maxim was a “poet, revolutionary, and freedom fighter.”

Also attending were Knesset members Azmi Bishara and Jamal Zahalka. From another era, there were the young people, including Yousef Asfour, a young Israeli Arab. When he would tell Maxim that he felt more Palestinian than Israeli, Maxim would protest, “But you are Israeli!” For Maxim, being Israeli did not mean being Jewish or a Zionist.

There were many other intellectuals, poets, and political activists, many of whom participated in readings of several of Maxim’s poems and short stories. Abu Mazen, the President of the Palestine National Authority, and Dr. Ramzi Khouri, who had been a close confidant and former director of the Presidential office of Yasser Arafat, both sent letters of condolence, which were read both in Arabic and Hebrew at the ceremony (see *Documentation*).

Maxim is survived by his sister, Evit Ghilan, and many friends and collaborators who will miss him dearly.

As Maxim said in his last interview to *EIR* (June 18, 2004): “It has been a very adventurous, and very frustrating life, but a very satisfying one, because I did precisely what I thought I had to do. There are very few people in the world who can say that.”

Documentation

Remembering Maxim Ghilan

Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas), *President of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestine National Authority. This letter, dated April 4, 2005, was read at Ghilan’s funeral ceremony.*

Dear friends, the family of Maxim Ghilan:

With great pain and awe, we received the news of the passing away of the poet, journalist, and great intellectual, the dear friend Maxim Ghilan, who heeded the call of his Creator and ascended with his pure soul to the divine glories, after a rich life of constant fruitfulness and relentless work in the service of peace, truth, and justice. He was, may Allah’s mercy be upon him, a voice for peace, coexistence, reconciliation, and dialogue. We knew him as a loyal friend, who worked with seriousness, passion, and sincerity to enhance Palestinian-Israeli dialogue. And he was one of the most prominent advocates of the necessity of finding a peaceful solution in the region. He was, Allah’s mercy be upon him, a human being in all the sublime meanings of this word.

In sharing with you the sorrow of this occasion, we forward to you our heartfelt condolences and warmest sympathy, praying to Allah to overwhelm him with His mercy and let His peace join his soul. We also pray to Him to inspire you and all his friends and beloved with patience and endurance.

Please accept our heartfelt condolences and sympathy,

Dr. Ramzi Khouri, *Deputy Secretary-General of the Presidency and General Director of the Office of the President, Palestine National Authority. His letter, dated April 4, 2005, was read at Ghilan’s funeral ceremony.*

Dear friends and the family of Maxim Ghilan:

I received with great grief the news of the passing away of the dear friend, the journalist and great intellectual Maxim Ghilan, whose pure soul departed to the kingdom of its Creator. He spent a life full of sincere work which he dedicated to serving his people and to truth, justice, reconciliation, and dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. He was

dedicated to achieving a just, permanent, and comprehensive peace, under which all could live in safety, co-existence, and stability.

While I send to all of you my warmest condolences and most heartfelt sympathy on this painful occasion, I pray to Allah to overwhelm him with His broadest mercy, and to compensate you with his divine good for this great loss. May Allah bring peace and tranquility to his soul in its sublime abode, and endow you all and his friends with patience and endurance.

Please accept our sympathy and solidarity.

Dr. Yehuda Atai, *the publisher of The World of the Bible encyclopedia.*

I always knew him as Maxim Ghilan, a person, a poet, warrior, and philosopher where his words searching, longing for life-love, crying his personal life, his path. Maxim’s poetry has its fleshiness and reality of all the feelings and the lusts. His sonnets and civil-human endeavors were carved for us all through our time and history. He seems like Don Quixote, but Maxim did really help to change and influence reality; he took the stand of a messenger of human feelings and liberties, a present-future man. His eyes, always seeing through, and his spirit were always ready to walk his path.

A man with a mission, a world, and a vision. Last time that we met, he said in his determined—a bit high-pitched—voice, cleaning his eyes with Tel Aviv natural water: “If I would only have more time I would establish here a civil movement to free all political prisoners”—all this while Maxim eats with his luscious-type custom of radiating great pleasure from the taste of two sunny-side-up eggs with cheesy butter and a semi-hot bagel.

Maxim, a dynamic love-life man. Recently, he helped a young poetry publisher who came with a new, independent poetry paper: *Urbania*. Here Maxim published his last poem, naming it: “It is over but yet it is not complete.” In this poem Maxim gave his tribute to life, and he connects his love-life-rainbow from the Yarmuch River in Northern Israel, to the Seine in Paris, and back to Acre, and takes a long breath from this Mediterranean Sea, and tells us that he has no time to finish his report on all that is happening, and he says:

All of a sudden, I will leave
In an immediate minute,
It is not imaginary present
All of a sudden, I will disappear.¹

Thank you Maxim, for the light, love, and visionary path that you gave us all.

1. These are the last four lines of a longer Hebrew poem which Yehuda Atai translated into English.