

Socialist Theory and Jewish Territorial Concentration

(Unlike the Yiddish and general journals in the United States, Israel's press, with the exception of the Mapai publications, has tried to deal with the break in Soviet-Israel relations as something more deserving of serious thought than the one-sided opposition of a sulky bully on the international arena might arouse. The author of the following article is an outstanding socialist theoretician in Israel, a member of Kibbutz Bet Zera, and a writer on the staff of Al Hamishmar. His article is based on the premise that ideological debate and economic facts and not military force and threats is the road to Israel's security and world peace.

—The Editors)

THERE is a widespread misconception that revolutionary socialist support of nationalist movements is conditioned by the contribution which those movements are making to the cause of the revolutionary struggle in the world.

Such an interpretation imposes the onus of expediency on the socialist's acceptance of nationalism. The truth of the matter is that the classic socialist endorsement of the right of self-determination of peoples is far more fundamental and unequivocal. This support is based upon the major premise that unless the national question is solved, it is liable to hinder the normal development of the social class struggle within the several nationalities and establishment of fraternal relations and international solidarity between them. One of the basic theses of socialist thinking on this question states that "the proletariat will give active and absolute support to the revolutionary liberation movements of all dependent and oppressed peoples." However, the following reservation is added: "The worker is not obligated to support every national movement, at all times and

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places, and in all specific concrete instances." He should support only those national movements "which are not likely to contribute to the preservation and strengthening of imperialism."

Thus it appears that approval and support of national movements is the dominant principle, while withdrawal of support and negation are the exception to the general rule. When a particular national liberation movement has allowed itself to become ensnared in the trap of world reaction (feudalism in the 18th and 19th centuries and capitalism in more recent times), and thus become a counter-revolutionary force—only then does it warrant the withdrawal of support from this movement. Moreover such a withdrawal of support is justified only to the degree that the people and the national movement involved have failed to produce vigorous and potent progressive opposition forces to the reactionary leadership—forces whose struggle have a reasonable chance of victory in the given historical perspective.

We cannot find an instance in our time when revolutionary socialist thinkers categorically and principally rejected the right of self-determination of any national movement. Recent historical alternatives were between general support for a specific national liberation movement under its official leadership (even when this leadership was reactionary in composition and social character at some particular stage) and the rejection of the reactionary, traitorous and appeasing leadership of a national movement, while giving support to progressive, revolutionary elements within the movement itself.

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There are two contradictory interpretations of the Soviet Union's attitude toward Zionism. Both interpretations contain an element of



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truth. The one holds that the Soviet attitude toward Zionism is dependent on Israel's political orientation. The other argues that the primary factor in changing the Soviet attitude is the creation of increasing Zionist achievements and facts in Israel. If the test is "tactical expediency," then one must conclude that there is no stable or fundamental approach on the part of the Soviet Union towards Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. There is no need therefore to consider Stalin's definition of the Jewish problem in 1913 and his prognosis of assimilation as its ultimate and desirable solution as the basis of the Soviet attitude to Zionism. Its attitude is re-determined at each phase of historical development, in accordance with the position of the Zionist leadership toward imperialism. Thus the Soviet attitude toward Zionism during the British Mandatory Regime in Palestine was a negative one, during the War of Independence it became positive and now, as a result of the Ben Gurion Government's subservience to America, it has become negative again. The logical conclusion of this analysis is that so long as the Ben Gurion government remains in power, there can be no change in the Soviet Union's attitude toward the State of Israel or Zionism. Furthermore, this analysis leads to the conclusion that since the official Zionist leadership, with its dominant reactionary forces, cannot be expected to "aid the anti-imperialist struggle in the world," the presence of progressive forces within it is of little practical consequence. Therefore these facts cannot serve to refute and to change the general negative evaluation of Zionism without distinction for its several elements.

There is no doubt that the process of territorial concentration of the Jewish people (which is, after all, still at its beginning) is capable of breaking down the hostile barriers between the Soviet Union and pioneer, revolutionary Labor Zionism. Yet this correct hypothesis needs some qualification and clarification. It is true that the greatly accelerated and augmented ingathering of exiles and the establishment of the State of Israel are capable of refuting the theory that assimilation and ultimate Jewish national disappearance from the stage of history is the only possible solution of the Jewish problem.* The theoretical distance

* The facts of mass immigration and the independent existence of Israel of themselves largely refute the previous evaluations of Zionism as "utopian" or "visionary."



between the two points of view has narrowed objectively since the early part of this century. It is not impossible therefore that socialist theory should recognize the fact of Jewish territorial concentration as it is being realized in the State of Israel as the starting point of the renaissance of the Hebrew nation in all its identifying marks. However, here is the essential difficulty: While the existence of Israel has objectively lowered the theoretical barrier, the nature of Israel's Government and its policies tend to increase and deepen the actual political abyss between Israel and the Soviet Union.

Had the Soviet Union acted toward the Jews in accord with the socialist theory of the right of self-determination of nations; had it recognized, in principle, the Hebrew nation in the territorial concentration of those Jews wishing to settle in Israel, the actions of the Ben Gurion Government and its ever-increasing subservience to imperialism could not in themselves have resulted in the negation of Zionism and the Jewish liberation movement in its totality. The Jewish national movement as a whole would not be identified with its reactionary leadership.

However, since the very idea of Jewish national renaissance in Israel by means of Jewish territorial concentration is not accepted *a priori*, it is clear why the increasing political distance is reflected in ideological theory and prevents the drawing of the inevitable and logical conclusions rising from the changes which have occurred in the Jewish reality since 1913. Thus it is that the Jewish national movement appears completely identified with the government of Israel, with the reactionary tendencies in American Zionism and with Israel's retreat from its original policy of neutrality expressed during and after its war for liberation to its negotiations with the Bonn government, its request for American military aid and finally its readiness to join a Mediterranean Command.

But not for one moment can these political facts be accepted as justification for the Soviet Union's failure to draw new ideological conclusions toward the Jewish national liberation movement. Nor can they justify the identification of the movement, its efforts and achieve-

ments in colonization and absorption of immigrants with the capitalist regime which dominates the State. But the very emphasis of these facts underlines the historical guilt of Israel's social-reformists which endangers the worldwide integrity and unity of the Jewish people, the prospects of its future territorial concentration from Eastern Europe and the renewal of Israel's contacts with the Jews of the Soviet Union.

The relationship between the concrete pro-American policies of Ben Gurion and the fundamental attitudes of the Soviet Union toward Israel and Zionism may therefore be summed up as follows:

The roots of total negation of Zionism are to be found in the theoretical misunderstanding of the Jewish question. This misinterpretation had begun to weaken and disappear in the light of the essential anti-imperialism of the Zionist Movement and the Jewish community of Israel. This revealed itself during the Second World War, increased during the anti-British struggle in the post-war period and reached a climax in the War of Independence in 1948-49. The resultant "softening" of attitude might have deepened to theoretical revision and recognition in principle of the universality of the Jewish problem and its Zionist solution. However, this was nullified by the policies of the Ben Gurion government. Thus alongside the mistaken understanding of the Jewish National problem must be placed the decisive part played by the pro-imperialist policies of the Ben Gurion government in reversing the "de facto" recognition of Zionism which would finally have become "de jure" recognition.

The second thesis that time itself and the addition of Zionist concrete achievements would eventually bring about complete understanding is neither certain nor accurate. The addition of constructive "territorial" facts such as new immigrant settlements, conquest of the wasteland, drainage of swamps, etc., will help to the extent that such efforts are accompanied by a broad national patriotic struggle for independence, democracy and peace. This struggle must oppose subservience to imperialism and the yielding of military bases for anti-Soviet adventures. But such a struggle cannot be led by a rootless deviationist faction without prospects of growth because of its negation of the very idea of Jewish nationalism and Jewish territorial concentration. The leadership of this anti-imperialist struggle must be in the hands of the revolutionary wing of the Jewish national

movement itself. In other words, the addition of concrete Zionist achievements in Israel will have an effect to the extent that in the center of this renaissance movement will be a strong Mapam, united, organized, disciplined, rooted in the land and fighting indomitably for the very essence of Zionism and for hegemony the state.

If this "other Zionism" and this "other Israel" — progressive, militant, anti-imperialist — will appear to the Soviet Union as equally representative of Zionism and its undertaking as the Ben Gurion government and the majority of the World Zionist leadership (even though it is still in the minority and in the opposition while the present leaders have a numerical majority) then will the "Zionist-territorialist facts" be really able to exert an influence in the effort to eliminate the barriers between Israel and the Soviet Union.*

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Borochof, the great Socialist theoretician of the Jewish national movement, emphasized repeatedly that national sovereignty and independence are the ultimate goals of every national liberation movement including the movement of the Jewish people in Palestine. Nevertheless in Borochof's day Jewish national independence was merely a "dream of the future," an apocalyptic vision all the more remarkable since he foresaw that the chief protagonist in the struggle for independence would be the workingman and his class. In our day, the territorial concentration of the Jews takes place in the midst of great international tension, of constant imperialist intrigue and feverish preparations for a new world war. Now that Israel has attained its independence and its sovereignty and has absorbed substantial numbers of newcomers, the complex problem of safeguarding that national independence against the onslaughts of imperialism has demonstrated the natural and logical correctness of the socialist analysis of the national problem.

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* The common denominator of these two approaches to the problem is their fatalistic foundation. The one bases the possibility of a change in the anti-Zionism of the Soviet Union on future objective developments exclusively. Both approaches fail to take into account the Soviet Union's mistaken total negation of Zionism as a movement of national liberation and the failure to distinguish between its reactionary leadership and the progressive aims inherent in the movement and operative in the present.



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only a few of our natural attractions for tourists. We have an abundance of such places, featured in tourist guides with no less emphasis than Niagara Falls, Yellowstone Park, Versailles or the *Forum Romanum*. But we have failed to exploit the tourist potential of these places. Every historical site or holy place should have a railroad or bus station, good inexpensive hotels, fine restaurants, shaded rest places and gardens. Otherwise tourists will not visit them in sufficient numbers, no matter how "holy."

The Jordan as a river cannot compete with the Mississippi or the Seine. But after the first moment of anti-climactic disappointment, the thoughtful tourist who has some sense of history must conclude that the Jordan is still the greatest river in the world, for the waters of this wandering little stream twice decided the fate of our people and of all humanity—once in the days of Joshua the son of Nun, and again in the days of Joshua of Nazareth!

So much for the past as an Israel tourist commodity. The present is another matter. What, for instance, can we show tourists in Tel Aviv—the sea, the zoo, the motor launches on the Yarkon River, the double-decker bus? Perhaps these are sufficient attractions for our own children from the settlements. But for adult visitors from America, a Tel Aviv department store is a drab imitation of their own merchandise marts.

I once accompanied a Swedish journalist on a walk through Tel Aviv and showed him the Herzliah High School. "That is the building that served as an experiment in creating genuine modern Hebrew architectural design," I said.

"Too bad," said my Swedish friend, "that the style was not incorporated in other buildings in the city!"

"Why," I replied, "even this one will be demolished soon."

It is well to point out that Tel Aviv is the first all-Jewish city in 2000 years, whose mayor, policemen and even street cleaners are all Jews. They are Jews, but sometimes it is difficult to see what is Jewish about them, Jewish in a significant, desirable way.

We can sell only one thing—that which is different from other places. But that "difference" is now under attack from the ruling circles of the land. The pressure is rising against the Kibbutz, against our workers' solidarity and independence, against Zionism itself. "Zionism," a high government official recently said, "has come to an end with the establishment of the state; yes, and *halutziut* (pioneering) too! Now, at last, we are like any other peo-

ple." If that is the case, if we have no swanky hotels, no cushy transportation facilities and no *halutziut* either, why should tourists flock to us?

The failure of our tourist trade is not only a financial but a great moral and national loss. The three million tourists who visited France in 1951 left \$350,000,000 there. The amount of goodwill they took out with them is incalculable. As against the 35,000 tourists who come to Israel, 26,000 Israel citizens left the country. The balance both in dollars and goodwill is lamentably obvious.

Territorial Concentration

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the Jewish people was a clear-cut fact and territorial concentration was only a prognosis. The increasing territorial concentration of Jewry, particularly since the establishment of the State, follows the characteristic and special goal of the Jewish national liberation movement as outlined by Borochof and the other theoreticians of *halutz* (pioneer) realization. But without in any way reducing this classic content of the Jewish national movement, a new aspect has been added. This is the patriotic struggle to preserve the independence of Israel, for democracy and peace. In other words, to the specific content of the Jewish national liberation movement has been added the acid test of a national liberation movement in the classic socialist sense.

Whoever fails to appreciate this dual nature of the Jewish problem and its solution in our day; its exterritoriality and territoriality-in-the-making at one and the same time, its Jewish universal and Israel national aspects, or whoever tends to minimize the relative importance of either one of these two aspects, which are the twin pillars of our ideological structure, thereby undermines and abandons the platform of Mapam. For without the struggle for independence, peace and democracy, without a militant fight against imperialism, the process of the ingathering of exiles, of territorial concentration, of the very continuity of our national effort and the future of our people is endangered. And without the rapid and sizeable expansion of our territorial concentration, without absorption, productivization and settlement of newcomers in a tempo matching their needs, the historical and actual base for the anti-imperialist struggle in Israel is destroyed and a fatal blow is dealt to the possibilities of victory throughout the Near East.