

# ZIONISM AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL: II

By Moses Miller

**I**N our last article we showed that communist support of Israel does not and never did constitute an endorsement of Zionism. We noted that Zionism is not a philanthropic movement but a political ideology and that one of its basic tenets is that Jews constitute a world-wide "nation." No matter in what part of the world a Jew may reside, he belongs to this world-wide "nation." We further noted that this view evolved out of a specific concept of nationhood based on such subjective factors as "national fate or will" or "unity of destiny and culture." These factors, according to Zionism, are the decisive and determining elements of nationhood.

Some people are completely mystified by the to-do about the definition of a nation. "What difference does it make," they ask, "how you define the nation?" But a proper answer to this question is crucial to any analysis of the Jewish, as of the national question as a whole and therefore demands further probing.

One does not need special powers of discernment to see that the peoples of the world differ in many ways. There are differences of sex, color, hair texture, etc. But there are also social differences of language, class, nation; state, religion, art, philosophy and custom. The most superficial knowledge of history teaches that the world has had different types of societies, primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist. While the first category of differences lie properly within the sphere of biology and anthropology, the other differences, that is, the cultural, political, economic and

national, properly fall within the sphere of the social sciences. What accounts for these social differences? How do they arise and develop? How can we account for the birth, development and decline of societies? What forces cause these changes in human history?

Every political ideology or philosophy gives its own answer to these questions. Zionist ideology, too, gives its own answers. Of course, we must bear in mind that most Zionist theoreticians and leaders limit themselves to interpretation of Jewish history alone. Some even insist that Jews are completely different from all other peoples and that, therefore, general theories which might explain the pattern of the history of all other peoples do not apply to the history and life of the Jewish people.

## *"Will" Runs History*

The general philosophy of Theodore Herzl, father of political Zionism, can be summarized in his own words: "If you will it, it is no fanciful tale. And if you do not will it, it will remain mere fancy." In these words Herzl was stating his theory of social action. The supreme element in social movement is for him the "will" and upon this "will" depends the course and destiny of Jewish life. Dr. Chaim Weizmann was giving his interpretation of history when he stated before the Anglo-American commission, as we pointed out in the previous article: "Some mystical force, some belief that one day the God of Israel will liberate them

[the Jews] and they will return, and it is this hope of return which has kept us in one way or another consciously or unconsciously alive." What is implied when one says that "hope of return" has kept the Jewish people alive? It means simply that the *consciousness* of the Jew, his thoughts and feelings, determined his existence, that his "inner will" was *the* decisive factor in determining the course of Jewish history, that the wishes of the people were the essential element in molding the objective realities of their existence.

If one adopts such a viewpoint, there is little justification for studying the inter-relationship of Jewish and general history, for trying to correlate events in Jewish history of any epoch with events and movements in the surrounding world. According to this view, any attempt to analyze problems, struggles and differences within the Jewish community on a socio-economic basis is nothing short of heresy. History, at best, therefore becomes a sort of moral judgment of whether events and epochs advanced or hindered realization of the national will or consciousness. The history of peoples and the causes of differences among them can only be explained in terms of the presence or absence of a sense of national will, of the strengthening or weakening of this sense of destiny and national fate. Although Zionists may be inclined to consider this philosophy to be unique to the Jewish people, it is in fact the interpretation of history of all nationalist movements. History thus becomes a series of struggles created by the subjective urge and inner determination for national survival.

### **Emancipation As Catastrophe**

It is no accident therefore that, in line with this theory, many Zionist leaders and theoreticians considered the emergence of the Jew from the ghetto with the emancipation that opened in the 18th century as a great catastrophe because it weakened the ties binding the Jewish people together. Or that many Zionist historians should have regarded the Haskala (enlightenment) movement that resulted from emancipation as a tragedy. For it follows logically that, if national consciousness is the determining factor in history, all movements and events should be judged in relation to it. Dr. Weizmann was therefore quite consistent when he said that the fate of the emancipated Jew was more tragic than that of his persecuted brother.<sup>1</sup> Or that Ahad Haam, exponent of cultural Zionism, should have held that the plight of "unutterably poor, persecuted, ignorant and degraded Jews" of tsarist Russia was preferable to the life of the emancipated Jew in western Europe. Or that Bialik, noted Hebrew poet, should have held that Hitlerism was in one sense a blessing, since it forced Jews to return to a consciousness of their national destiny.

It should now be clear that the definition of a nation underlying one's policy is not an academic question. For this definition is based on one's ideological outlook and therefore governs one's program of action. It is therefore apparent that the Zionist view of the national question is

divorced from space or time, is considered to operate in isolation from all social, political and economic problems.

This does not imply that all Zionist theoreticians and writers deny the role of economic, social and political factors in the life of the Jewish people. Some assign an important role to these elements. But it remains true that Zionist ideologists either totally ignore them or at best subordinate them to that which the Zionists regard as decisive and determining, the national.

There is little essential difference between the Zionist interpretation of history and the religious interpretation of Jewish history. The latter ascribes Jewish survival to God's will and to the fact that Jews in all ages held firmly to their religious precepts and code of moral law. But essentially both approach history from an *idealistic* viewpoint, that is, they agree that mind or consciousness, whether divine, as in the case of the religious or theocratic interpretation, or human, as in the nationalistic interpretation, is primary and dominant, while matter, that is, the material conditions of life, have either no reality at all or at best secondary significance. Both are founded on an autonomous, self-sufficient will, divine or national, which is independent of the material conditions of life. This will molds the course of a people's history and accounts for the ability of the people to survive and adjust itself to each crisis.

The absurd lengths to which some apostles of this view can go, is exemplified by the scurrilous attack by Menahem Boraisha<sup>2</sup> on Ilya Ehrenburg's article in *Pravda*.<sup>3</sup> In the course of his diatribe, Boraisha takes issue with Ehrenburg's contention that "Jews were compelled to live apart and isolated from the rest of the population. . . . The Catholic inquisitors created the ghetto, not the Jewish mystics." Boraisha labels this statement "untarnished ignorance" and concludes: "Had Ehrenburg wanted to be accurate, he could easily have learned that 'ghettos' were in existence long before the time when the Catholic Inquisition imposed them; that Jews *chose* to be separated from non-Jews so that they could live their own life and together resist the pull of assimilation; that neither mystics nor persecutors invented the ghetto and, finally, when walls were thrown around the Jewish quarter, the quarter had already been established by Jews themselves."

### **Who Is Ignorant?**

An examination of history would readily show, however, that it was Boraisha and not Ehrenburg who was guilty of "untarnished ignorance." True, there are records of Jewish ghettos prior to the Middle Ages. But almost every Jewish historian has recognized that "the era of the ghetto proper begins with the sixteenth century. . . ." A. L. Sacher in his *History of the Jews* summarizes the history of the ghetto as follows: "Already in the early Middle Ages a number of cities had established compulsory segregation. Salerno had its ghetto in the eleventh century and Bari

<sup>1</sup> See *Zionism and the Jewish Future*, edited by H. Sacher, 1916, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Congress Weekly*, December 6, 1948.

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted on pages 25-28 of this issue—Eds.

<sup>4</sup> See Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, 1896, p. 62.

even earlier. In Toledo the Cortes ordained in 1480 that 'all Jews and Moors of every city, town, and place in these our kingdoms . . . shall have their distinct Jewries' and Mooreries by themselves, and not reside intermixed with Christians nor have enclosures together with them.' But the sixteenth century was the ghetto age. City by city and province by province the institution was established until there was scarcely a spot in Europe where Jews were not herded together. The ghettos were usually marked out in the filthiest and most unwholesome parts of the towns, and, though their population grew, their areas were not increased. Incredible overcrowding, with its attendant illnesses and plagues and its frequent devastating fires, made Jewish existence a torment."

So much for the theory that "Jews chose to be separated." One might add that Boraisha showed ignorance about the so-called voluntary ghettos which existed before the sixteenth century. If he had remained faithful to history instead of indulging himself in hysterical outbursts, he would have said, as Sacher points out, that "They felt more secure, too, in a ghetto, where they avoided the insults and the dangers which would be inevitable if they were scattered in a hostile community. In Majorca, in the fourteenth century, the Jewish community begged for the continuance of the ghetto as a protection against the growing intolerance of the Balearic Islands."

It does not follow that Jewish existence was the result solely of this negative element. Out of this ghetto life affirmative values were likewise strengthened, values that were transformed into cultural and intellectual creativity. These in turn promoted and influenced subsequent Jewish development.

The absurdity of Boraisha's position emerges even more clearly if one turns to the period of Jewish emancipation, when the Jew emerged from the ghetto. If the "Jews chose to be separated," why did they leave the ghetto in the eighteenth century? Why did so many Jewish communities wage such a bitter struggle for the removal of ghetto restrictions? Why did Jews, as individuals and as groups, constantly look for ways to move out of the ghetto? Nor could Boraisha explain why Jewish emancipation occurred just when it did. Or, for that matter, why emancipation came much earlier in Western than in Eastern Europe.

Boraisha approaches Jewish history from the same viewpoint as Dr. Weizmann and Ahad Haam. For them Jewish emancipation was a grim tragedy since it helped to break down the separateness and isolation of the Jew. But the Jew who had the opportunity to leave the ghetto and the many cursed aspects of that life, surely did not look on this as a tragedy.

### ***Outer Reality Determines History***

Above all, it is most important to note that this subjective and mystical approach to Jewish history fails completely to grasp that the subjective will of the Jew never was or could be the determining factor in shaping his destiny. Neither the creation of the ghetto nor emancipation from

it depended on the Jew's own choice. Forces operating independently of the Jewish will determined their destiny. In the early Middle Ages, for example, Jews lived in comparative peace and received extensive privileges from their rulers. In the later Middle Ages, however, the severest, most drastic restrictions were placed on the Jew. Can the subjective will of the Jew account for the difference in his situation during these two periods? Must one not rather analyze the history of the period and look for differences in the economic, social and political developments of the two periods to account for the greater tolerance of the Jew in the earlier period and the grave intolerance in the latter? Similarly, what sense can one make of the emancipation, unless one delves into the history of the period and accounts for it in terms of the breakdown of feudalism and the weakening of absolutism, the growing separation of church and state, the abolition of privileges of the clergy? All these forces laid the groundwork for the emancipation of the Jew, because the achievement of the free market demanded the application of the principles of equality—formally, at least—to all peoples, and therefore to the Jew as well.

If one attempts, like the Zionist theoreticians, to remove the national question from its actual social and economic framework and to set it up as a development operating independently of time and space, one's attempt to explain any period of Jewish life raises insoluble difficulties. Why, for example, did political Zionism arise in the late 1880's and not earlier? Or how explain the Zionist thesis that the homelessness of the Jew is responsible for his sufferings when it is a historical fact that the Jew could live in comparative peace for many generations in certain countries at the very same moment that Jews in other countries were subjected to persecution and pogroms?

### ***The "Ingathering" Panacea***

Or let us note another aspect. According to Boraisha, as well as many other Zionists, Jews chose to live apart "so that they could live their own life and together resist the pull of assimilation." Once the ghetto walls were broken down and Jews were granted a degree of political, social and economic equality, Jewish ties began to dissolve. It follows therefore from the Zionist viewpoint that the greater the opportunities offered to Jews to participate in all aspects of a country's life, the greater will be the danger of assimilation. Hence, say the Zionists, the only hope for Jewish survival rests in the "ingathering of the exile" to the national homeland.

The Zionists advance still another argument. The Jew is a stranger everywhere. Anti-Semitism, according to Weizmann, is a mystical phenomenon which the Jew carries with him wherever he goes. So strong is antipathy to the Jew, that a cure is impossible. Whatever the Jew may do to overcome anti-Semitism will be of no avail. Take the case of the German Jews, the Zionist says. Did any Jewish community ever try harder to identify itself with the cultural and social life of their country? The German Jew, cries the Zionist, was more German than the Germans.



And what was his fate? The Zionist therefore concludes that the Jew is the scapegoat of history and little can be done about it. The only hope for the Jew is return to his own homeland.

Because communists dare to oppose such ideas as these, reactionary Zionists and the reactionary Jewish press have hysterically accused the communists of lack of concern for the fate of the Jew. Yet, what greater indifference can there be to the fate of millions of Jews all over the world than is inherent in the logic of these two Zionist arguments? For the Zionists maintain that anti-Semitism is inevitable and will of necessity increase wherever the Jews reside. Therefore, there is hardly any likelihood that the Jew will ever assimilate. At best the Jew can look forward to a return to the ghetto. On the other hand we are told that even if real equality could be achieved by the Jew, it would be undesirable. For freedom would automatically lead to assimilation. These arguments leave the Jews in a hopeless situation. What alternative is then left for the Jew? To go to Israel? But this is certainly no solution. For even the most irresponsible Zionist would not dare to assert that approximately eleven million Jews throughout the world could go to Israel—even if they wanted to. But the fact is that millions of Jews consider the country in which they live as their home and they have no desire to leave.

### ***Hopeless Zionist Conclusion***

Zionist ideology is thus at an impasse. And what is more important, the Zionist leaves the Jewish people at this impasse. Consider the implications of the Zionist ideology for the American Jewish community. America's five million Jews form the largest Jewish community in the world. Should the Jews of America consider themselves as living in outer darkness because they do not live in Israel? Are they second-class Jews whose energies, creativity and effort are meaningless except as directed toward the upbuilding of Israel (and this, incidentally, only in terms of money-raising)? Is the Jewish community of America to resign itself to the Zionist thesis that disaster and destruction must ultimately overwhelm it? Certainly there are forces in America determined to destroy civil liberties, trample democracy underfoot and embark upon a drive for world domination which, if unopposed, can lead to another world war, with its particularly dire consequences for the entire Jewish people. But there are other forces in America, too, forces that fight for the expansion of democracy, for the broadening of civil liberties, for a program of peace. Can the Jew be indifferent to the outcome of this fight? Has the Jew no part to play in this struggle? For that matter, if the progressive forces in America do not succeed in halting the tide of reaction and fascism, if war should break out, is there any greater guarantee of safety for the Jew in Israel than for the Jew in America?

We can now see clearly that the Zionist idea that Jews all over the world make up a single nation, has immediately practical and serious consequences. For, under this theory the fulfillment of the Jewish "national will" becomes the

decisive task of Jews everywhere. And since the fulfillment of the national will can be achieved only in Israel, it necessarily follows that all Jews must view Israel as the fulcrum around which all Jewish communities must revolve and to which all Jews must dedicate their lives.

Few Jews in America will deny the urge and the need to help Israel and its people achieve security and independence. Although the American Jewish community has contributed greatly, both materially and politically, to the cause of Israel, few will deny that much more remains to be done. Does this oblige us to accept the Zionist thesis that our tasks and program are determined by some mystical "national will" unrelated to and independent of the concrete political, social and economic environment of which we are a part and which molds our lives? To accept such a thesis is to tear the Jew away from reality. Above all this means divorce of the Jew from those general political struggles upon whose success depend the well-being and the security of the Jew. All people of one nation have common tasks which grow out of their common life on a common territory and in a common economy. From such struggles grow not only a national consciousness and a national culture, but also struggles which decide the course of the nation. Hence, can we say that the Jews in America, in Poland, in the Soviet Union, in Israel, in Brazil face the same economic, social and political problems?

Karl Marx once wrote: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted by themselves." This profound truth must be heeded in any analysis of the Zionist concept of the Jews throughout the world as a single nation. Certainly Jews, like all other peoples, make their own history. But they do not make it by their "will" alone, independently of time and space or of the concrete circumstances in which they live. Since the Jews of any given country are confronted by different circumstances from those of the Jewish community in another country, the tasks that confront them differ accordingly. Jews in any country will either be guided by the problems in which their own country are involved, or they will dissipate their energies in tilting at windmills. They will, consciously or not, either completely refrain from participating in those struggles upon which depend the extension of democracy and therefore their own well being, or they will at best subordinate these questions to the so-called struggle for "national fulfillment," which in the final analysis means subordinating reality to illusion.

### ***Jews Are Not an Exception***

The situation will become clearer if we see how the problem operates among other national groups or minorities.

Take the case of the Italians who have emigrated to America. In Italy they were part of an Italian nation. There they participated not only in a common cultural life, but also in a common economic life. Their thinking, customs and outlook were molded by the conditions and

struggles within the common and unified territory of Italy. But if we accept the principle that nationhood is dependent upon the subjective factor of national will or consciousness, we must conclude that Italians, whether they lived in Italy or not, are still members of the Italian nation. It is true that the Italians in America have certain things in common with the Italian people in Italy which make for continued interest in and concern for what is happening in Italy. Certain limited common actions by Italians all over the world in relation to Italy are possible and legitimate. But in the final analysis these common actions of Italians all over the world are subordinate to the objective political, economic and social conditions under which the Italians live in America. For the subjective will and consciousness of Italians here necessarily undergo a transformation and are molded by their life in America.

Similarly with the Jew. Of course there are certain differences in the situation of the two peoples in America which we must note and which we shall discuss in detail in the next article. But it is absurd to maintain that there exists an eternal national consciousness independent of time or space and of the concrete political, social and economic conditions under which the Jew lives. Certainly, anyone with any knowledge of Jewish history can verify that Jewish cultural development in different countries, while having certain features in common, nevertheless underwent most important changes in the concrete conditions of their existence. The Jew in Spain created a different Jewish culture from that of the Jew in Babylonia, the Jew in Poland from

that of the Jew in America, and so on through history.

### *Our Fight Is in America*

The fate of the Jew in America, for example, who has certain common ties with Jews throughout the world, is, in the final analysis, determined by the concrete social, political and economic conditions of life in America. His struggle for survival, for security, for cultural achievement will therefore be dependent upon his struggles here. And for that matter, the efforts he will make on behalf of Jewish communities elsewhere are equally determined by his life in America. The American Jew who is concerned with the independence and security of Israel, fights best for Israel by applying his energies to the political arena in America, by joining with the progressive forces who struggle for democracy and against imperialism and who are therefore waging the only struggle that can assure the independence of all peoples.

Therefore the Zionist attempt to define the Jewish people as a world-wide nation, when objective factors independent of his wishes have given different roles, different problems and therefore different programs of action for each Jewish community, can only lead the Jew into confusion and to futile action inimical to his own interest.

What, then, is the character of the relationships among Jews throughout the world? And what *are* Jews throughout the world, according to the Marxist viewpoint? This we shall discuss in our next article.

*(To be continued.)*