

ZIONISM AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL: I

By Moses Miller

DURING the past few months the press has been filled with articles bemoaning "the recent communist change of attitude toward Zionism. . . ." ¹ According to these writers, support given by the Soviet Union and the new democracies to the *Yishuv* in Palestine and to its struggles for statehood constituted a reversal of previously-held positions and marked the adoption of a positive attitude toward Zionism. But, these writers weep, the change of heart lasted a short time. True, the Soviet Union, the new democracies and communists throughout the world still support the struggle for the independence and freedom of Israel. But they no longer support Zionism. Thus the late Menahem Boraisha, in commenting on an article of Mr. Ehrenburg in *Pravda*, declared: "The substance of Mr. Ehrenburg's exposition is that, while the Soviet Union sympathizes with Israel's aspiration for statehood, it has no sympathy whatever for Zionism or for Israel's government, which it considers 'bourgeois.' . . . In short, if any one had hoped that the consistent support given to Israel by the Soviet delegation at the United Nations augurs a more tolerant attitude towards Zionism within the Soviet borders, such hope must now be regarded as a case of wishful thinking."²

No Endorsement of Zionism

That communists fully support the struggle of the masses of Israel for freedom, independence and self determination, is unequivocally true. But it would be hard to find where these writers ever got the idea that communist support of the state of Israel constituted endorsement of or allegiance to Zionism. Certainly they could not have read this in any article or thesis in any official communist publication. On the contrary, if they had read such organs, they would have found clear and unequivocal statements to the contrary. Thus, for example, as far back as July 1947, an article in *Political Affairs* (official organ of the CPUSA) by Alexander Bittelman outlined a communist program of support for the *Yishuv*. He urged united action of the widest sort toward realization of an independent Jewish state, but he concluded: "We Communists support the program of united action set forth above without giving up any of our ideological opposition to bourgeois nationalism." And a few paragraphs later: "It is still true today that the Zionist conception that the Jews of all lands constitute one single nation, is of a bourgeois nationalist character."

Again in August 1948 in the same journal Bittelman greeted the creation of the state of Israel and called for full support for its struggles. But again he distinguished sharply between the bourgeois nationalist and the prole-

tarian internationalist approach to Israel. Here again, he characterizes Zionism as "bourgeois nationalism" and concludes that in the struggle for Israel, "communists fight and work in this broad coalition as working class internationalists and not as bourgeois nationalists."

These two quotations clearly show that communist support for Israel did not from the outset in any way constitute endorsement of Zionism. On the contrary, communists maintain that Zionist ideology is inimical to the interests of the Jewish people whether in Israel, America, Poland or any other part of the world. Communists maintain that Zionism as an ideology is bourgeois, that is, anti-proletarian, in its origin and outlook and can therefore serve only to divert the Jewish masses from their real allies, without whom there is no hope of solving the Jewish question.

Many of the writers who rant today know full well that this has consistently been the position of the communist movement. They rave today not because they have discovered a sudden disaffection of communists from Zionism, but because they fear the consequences of the fact that masses of Jewish people have begun to look to the Soviet Union with friendship and understanding because they found in the Soviet Union the most consistent, the staunchest fighter for Israel. Consequently they now seek to move the Jewish people into the current of anti-Soviet, anti-communist hysteria by way of this tremendous discovery that communists are not Zionists.

Unfortunately, widespread confusion on this point, even within the progressive and communist movement, makes it necessary to explain once again some basic theses on Zionism, Israel and the Jewish question as a whole.

Let us first recall the basic tenets of Zionism itself. Zionists will be the first to tell you that Zionism is not a philanthropic movement designed to aid downtrodden and persecuted Jews. Nor is it, according to the Zionist view, merely a momentary reaction to anti-Semitism. "In the case of most Zionists," said Max Nordau, one of the most illustrious of Zionist leaders, "anti-Semitism was only a stimulus causing them to reflect upon their relations to the nations, and that reflection has led them to results that must remain for them a permanent intellectual and spiritual possession, even if anti-Semitism were to vanish completely. . . ."

Zionism is a Political Movement

Modern Zionism is a *political* movement arising in a definite historical epoch and, as we shall show later, a result of very specific historical circumstances. It is based on the ideology and world outlook of nationalism, from which derive its conception of the Jewish people and its solution to the Jewish question.

¹ William Zuckerman, *The Jewish Review*, March 17.

² *Congress Weekly*, December 6, 1948.

One of the first exponents of Zionism, Leo Pinsker, proclaimed his credo in 1881 in a book entitled, *Auto-Emancipation*. He attributed the plight of the Jew to the fact that the Jew is "a stranger everywhere, wanted nowhere, and having no home of his own, he cannot claim hospitality. . . . Consequently, it is our bounden duty to devote all our remaining moral force to re-establishing ourselves as a living nation."

Theodore Herzl, father of political Zionism, came to the same conclusion in his *Judenstaat* (The Jewish State), published in 1896. "The Jewish question exists wherever Jews live in perceptible numbers. Where it does not exist, it is carried by Jews in the course of their migrations. We naturally move to those places where we are not persecuted and there our presence produces persecution." The normalisation of Jewish life, according to Herzl, could not be achieved except through the creation of a *Judenstaat*.

One is struck by the basically similar view expressed by a contemporary Zionist leader, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, now president of the state of Israel. In his testimony before the Anglo-American Commission on Palestine in 1946, Dr. Weizmann declared: "I believe the one fundamental cause—it may seem trivial—of anti-Semitism is that the Jew exists. We seem to carry the germs of anti-Semitism in our bags, wherever we go. The growth and intensity of anti-Semitism is proportional to the number of Jews, and to the density of Jews. . . . Here is a group of people which . . . has maintained its extraordinary existence as a sort of ghost nation stalking the arena of world history. . . . Now what has kept the Jews firm in the face of inhuman treatment? Some mystical force, some belief that one day the God of Israel will liberate them and they will return, and it is this hope of return which has kept us in one way or another consciously or unconsciously alive."

Zionist Theory of the Diaspora

Flowing inexorably from this thesis is the Zionist view of Jewish life and communities throughout the world. The economic abnormality of the Jews, says the Zionist, is matched by his spiritual and cultural abnormalities. Both are the result of the dispersion of the Jews and of the consequent transient and unstable character of his existence. Wherever he may live outside of Palestine is *galut*—exile or diaspora. Only Palestine is *aretz*, the land, the only home and center where cultural creativity and a full Jewish life are possible.

Following from this outlook is the Zionist theory of *shelilat ha-galut*, or negation of the diaspora, the view that Jewish communities outside of Palestine are doomed to extinction as Jews.

To grasp the full implications of this theory, one should read the statement of Carl Alpert, a leading Zionist educator, written immediately after the UN adopted the partition proposal. Says Alpert: "Whatever convictions I may previously have had about the continued existence of world Jewish communities are beginning to disappear. I believe that the creation of the Jewish State now at last spells the

ultimate doom of Jewish communities elsewhere. Indeed, the *galut*, the diaspora, as we have known it heretofore, no longer exists. The existence of a Jewish State means that there is no *galut* any longer—no *galut* as a Jewish group status. Now there are only Jews outside of Judea, and it will become increasingly difficult for us to continue to exist as Jews in the true sense."³

"Socialist" Zionism

It is important to take note of a trend within Zionism, which, though fundamentally in agreement with the general Zionist credo, seeks to give a socialist turn to the problem in order to win working-class support. Though this approach has a number of variations, we shall merely give its basic outlines, particularly of that variety which pretends to have created a synthesis of Marxism and Zionism. According to this view, the Jews are an expatriated nation, having no land of their own and constituting a separate entity in all of the lands in which they live. Consequently the Jews lack the normal development which all other peoples have undergone. For historical reasons the Jew has been unable to participate in the basic sectors of the economy of a country and is forced to concentrate in periphery occupations. Neither the Jewish bourgeoisie nor the Jewish worker are in the position to develop normally. Having no territory of their own and being perpetually subject to job discrimination, their ability to participate in the class struggle and to engage in conflict with capital is strictly limited. The Jewish working class can participate in the struggle for socialism only on a territory of his own.

Ber Borochov, one of the leading theoreticians of this left Zionist camp, who claimed to be a Marxist, developed the theory that "the national question of an oppressed people is divorced from its basis in the materialistic conditions of production; the cultural necessities acquire an independent significance and all members of the nation become interested in the freedom of national self determination."

We have seen that one of the basic tenets of the Zionist credo is that the Jewish people in the world as a whole constitute a single nation. "We are a nation. One nation," Herzl had declared in his *Judenstaat*. And Ber Borochov developed his own theory of a world-wide "landless nation" and his own rationale for rejecting nationalism among the proletariat of all non-Jewish peoples while urging nationalism on the Jewish working class.

In the recent vitriolic attacks in the Jewish press against Ilya Ehrenburg and communists generally following the startling discovery that communist support of Israel did not constitute endorsement or acceptance of Zionism, much venom was directed against communist rejection of the Zionist concept of a world-wide Jewish nation. Thus Menahem Boraisha, in the article referred to above, lamented that "what it amounts to is that there is no Jewish nation and there never was one."

The conflict between Marxism and Zionism on this point is far more than a quibble over terms. The issue involves

³ *National Jewish Post*, December 5, 1947.

more than the definition of a nation, though that is basic to an analysis of the problem.

Nationality and Class Struggle

The national question is of grave import to the working class generally and therefore to the Jewish working class as well. The "circumstances" which confront any working class have a basically class character. The final objective of the working class is to liberate itself from those "circumstances" which impose endless exploitation and misery upon it. But the working class of each nation or national minority or people lives under "circumstances" of a national character, that is, have specific characteristics derived from the conditions of their particular time and place. The character of the national struggle must be determined by any working class by a concrete analysis of the specific features of the group of which it is a part. But the working class also recognizes that the national struggle is not separate from all social struggle, that it does not arise or go forward in a vacuum. The national struggle is born out of class struggle and unfolds within the framework of class struggle. The working class therefore cannot judge any given national struggle without deciding whether it advances or retards the class struggle.

To arrive at a concept of the status of any group of people, is at the same time inevitably to point to a course of action designed to fulfill a desired status. A concept of one's social group determines in what struggle the group will participate and what allies it will seek out. By the same logic, the guiding idea will lead the group to reject certain struggles and allies who are considered unimportant and even inimical to the fulfillment of one's goal. If the status and character assigned to a given group are unreal, the group's struggle will not only turn out to be utopian and illusory, but will gravely endanger its very survival.

A clear-cut definition of the status of Jews throughout the world is therefore no mere exercise in logic. It is an essential prerequisite to drawing up any program in the struggle for Jewish survival. It will therefore be necessary for us to gain an adequate idea of the true meaning of "nation" before we proceed further in our critique of Zionism.

More than 30 years ago, a bitter controversy raged on the question of what constituted nationhood. This discussion was no academic debate over terminology, but was part of a stormy political struggle. Men like Otto Bauer, R. Springer and Karl Renner, accepted by many at the time as authoritative spokesmen on the national question, were leading political parties into a program of action on the basis of their theoretical approach. Stalin participated in the raging controversy and in the course of this ideological conflict he formulated the Marxist approach to the problem.

"A nation," declared Stalin, "is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture."⁴

⁴ All quotations from Stalin which follow are from his book, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*.

This definition supplied a basis for determining the actual status of any given group and for deciding how and within what framework any given group could achieve full freedom and the right to determine its own destiny. And only those who have been driven to insanity by their anti-Soviet neurosis, will deny that the Soviet Union, proceeding on the basis of Stalin's theses on the national question, has reached the most far-reaching and most thoroughgoing solution of the nationality problem within its own borders.

Nation a Modern Product

But it is important to note that Stalin's definition was not static. Nor had Stalin selected a number of features and arbitrarily decided that they must *all* be present, before a group could be considered a nation. In its full implications Stalin's definition gives a description of the historical process by which nations came into being. Stalin had arrived at his definition by subjecting the problem to a searching historical analysis, in the course of which he recognized that nations, and therefore "national consciousness" in the modern sense, had not existed from time immemorial but had arisen at a definite stage of social development. "Modern nations are a product of a definite epoch, of rising capitalism. The process of the abolition of feudalism and the development of capitalism was also the process of the development of peoples into nations. The British, the French, the Germans and the Italians formed into nations during the victorious march of capitalism and its triumph over feudal disunity."

Before the rise of capitalism the world contained tribes, feudal domains, principalities and kingdoms. But it knew no such division as the nation. It therefore knew no relationships such as those which grow out of national consciousness. If one were to look at a map of medieval France, for example, one would immediately be struck by the crazy quilt effect of the division of the country into dozens of feudal domains. The inhabitant of the Duchy of Gascony felt no kinship to the inhabitant of Brittany, Champagne, Burgundy, Provence, Flanders, Dauphine or Anjou. The inhabitants of any of these duchies would have looked askance at anyone who told them that they were all "Frenchmen." Or, for that matter, if anyone mentioned the concept of "patriotism."

The point is well illustrated in George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*. An English churchman and an English feudal lord are discussing the military ability of a French lord.

"The Chaplain: He is only a Frenchman, my lord.

"The Nobleman: A Frenchman? Where did you pick up that expression? Are these Burgundians and Bretons and Picards and Gascons beginning to call themselves Frenchmen, just as our fellows are beginning to call themselves Englishmen? They actually talk of France and England as their countries. Theirs, if you please! What is to become of me and you if that way of thinking comes into fashion?"

"The Chaplain: Why, my lord? Can it hurt us?"

"The Nobleman: Men cannot serve two masters. If this

cant of serving their country once takes hold of them, good-bye to the authority of their feudal lords and good-bye to the authority of the church."

What Is a Nation?

Stalin showed that the modern nation is a product of the bourgeois revolution, that the new rising class—the bourgeoisie—in its struggle for the market and for power, is responsible for the unification of whole areas under one common economy and of masses of people in a common struggle of a new type, the national struggle. The nation thus arises within a definite historical context and within the framework of a developing class struggle.

But granting that all this is so, why does it necessarily follow that all the elements enumerated by Stalin, and only those, are necessary for nationhood? And why should not a group which may lack any of these characteristics be able to lay claim to nationhood?

Stalin's concise historical and scientific analysis of the problem clearly answers these questions. First of all, the characteristics of the nation.

Stalin begins with the statement that "A nation is primarily a community, a definite community of people." It is neither a racial nor a tribal community since one can readily establish that modern nations result from the amalgamation of various races and tribes. Thus "the modern Italian nation was formed from Romans, Teutons, Etruscans, Greeks, Arabs, and so forth." It follows therefore that a nation is "a historically constituted community of people." But were not the empires of Cyrus and Alexander also constituted historically out of different tribes and races? They were, says Stalin. But it would be difficult to conceive of these "casual and loosely connected conglomerations of groups, which fell apart or joined together depending upon the victories and defeats of this or that conqueror," as nations.

Stalin concludes therefore that a nation is a "stable community of people." But, he proceeds to point out, there are stable communities which no one would dream of calling nations. Take the case of the former Russian Empire or the Austro-Hungarian Empire. These were both stable communities but certainly not nations, for they were political, but not national, entities. What distinguishes these two "is that a national community is inconceivable without a common language, while a state need not necessarily have a common language." A common language is therefore "one of the characteristic features of a nation."

But what about the English and the Americans? They both speak the same language. Why then do they not constitute a single nation? The answer is clear. "A nation is formed only as a result of lengthy and systematic intercourse, as a result of the fact that people live together from generation to generation. But people cannot live together for lengthy periods unless they have a common territory." Therefore, although the two originally formed one nation, they formed two nations after a compact group left and settled in America, and "in the course of time came to form

the new American nation." Common territory is therefore "one of the characteristic features of a nation."

But all of these factors are still not sufficient to unite a group into nationhood. There is need of an "internal economic bond which welds the various parts of a nation into a single whole." Here again Stalin points to America and asks what kind of nation America would be if the various parts of the country were not "bound together into an economic whole, as a result of division of labor between them, the development of means of communication, and so forth." He also gives the example of the Georgians, his own native people, who did not constitute a nation, even though they lived on a common territory and spoke a common language. For centuries they had been "split up into a number of disconnected principalities, they could not share a common economic life; for centuries they waged war against each other and pillaged each other by inciting the Persians and the Turks against each other. . . . Georgia came on to the scene as a nation only in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the fall of serfdom and the growth of the economic life of the country, the development of means of communication and the rise of capitalism, instituted a division of labor between the various districts of Georgia, completely shattered the economic self-sufficiency of the principalities and bound them together into a single whole."

To this basic feature of "community of economic life" essential to a nation, Stalin added this final one, "a community of psychological make-up, which manifests itself in a community of culture." Different conditions of existence necessarily lead to differences of "national make-up." This feature "is not a thing that is fixed once and for all, but is modified by changes in the conditions of life; but since it exists at every given moment, it leaves its imprint on the physiognomy of the nation." And since "it manifests itself in a distinctive culture common to the nation it is definable and cannot be ignored."

These, then, are the features which manifested themselves as essential to the historical development of nations. Hence Stalin concludes: "And it is only when all of these characteristics are present that we have a nation."

Are the Jews a Nation?

Let us now return to our problem. On the basis of this historic approach let us analyze the character of the Jewish people and judge the Zionist conception accordingly.

The concept of the Jewish people as a national entity did not arise until the rise of capitalism. Unless one is prepared, as many Jewish historians are, to develop a theory of "exceptionalism" with regard to Jewish history, that is, to contend that criteria applicable to all other peoples are not valid for the Jewish people, one must recognize that such a concept as nationhood could not have arisen amongst the Jewish people before capitalism any more than it could have arisen among any other people. Zionists, of course, attempt to show that the Zionist concept is as old as the Jewish people and that Jews from time immemorial longed

for return to Zion. But even a superficial analysis of Jewish history clearly shows that *political* Zionism, as distinct from mystical and religious references to Zion, is a modern phenomenon arising with modern capitalism and as such a qualitatively different and new phenomenon. Political Zionism, which is the manifestation of nationalism in Jewish life, could not have arisen earlier for the single reason that there was no such thing as a "nation" prior to the existence of capitalism. Even a bourgeois Jewish historian like Salo Baron, who rejects the Marxist approach, states that "Jewish nationalism is the belated offspring of European nationalism."

When Zionism, as well as other nationalistic concepts, arose, the Jews were scattered over many lands. According to Arthur Ruppin (*Soziologie der Juden*), there were some 7,662,500 Jews in the world in 1880. These were distributed as follows: Eastern Europe, 5,726,000 (74.8 per cent); Western and Central Europe, 1,044,500 (13.6 per cent); America, 250,000 (3.3 per cent); Asia, 350,000 (4.5 per cent); Africa, 280,000 (3.6 per cent); Australia, 12,000 (0.2 per cent).

Obviously, therefore, all Jews did not reside on one common territory. The Jewish people as a whole surely had no community of economic life for they were generally part of the economic life of the countries in which they resided. Their political status varied with the country in which they lived and the presence or absence of democracy within any given country. Though many Jews spoke a common language, Yiddish, it was also true that many other Jews, particularly in western Europe and even many of the younger generation of eastern Europe, no longer used Yiddish as their primary language. It is true that a number of historical and social forces bound Jews together wherever they resided into a common entity with elements of common cultural development. And yet even from the cultural viewpoint the common bond was constantly being molded and reshaped as a result of the concrete social, economic and political forces encountered by the Jews in the particular country in which they lived. Thus, for example, while undoubtedly many elements in the Haskala (enlightenment) movement, as it developed in the various Jewish communities of Europe, were held in common, it is also true that there were local differences in the movement. And these differences were the result of the different circumstances of life of the respective Jewish communities.

From a Marxist standpoint, therefore, it is clearly impossible to define the Jews as a nation, for the Jews as a whole had no common territory or common economic life, which are essential to the rise and the development of a nation.

The Subjective Zionist Concept

What criteria did Zionism adopt to justify its characterization of Jews throughout the world as one nation? It found its rationale in the theories of Karl Renner and Otto Bauer, Austrian socialists. According to Karl Renner the basic elements of nationhood are to be found in the principles of "unity of destiny and culture." While language, territory and economy all constituted vital elements, Renner did

not consider any of these either separately or together essential for the achievement of nationhood. For Renner the one decisive element of nationhood is a common culture and the subjective feelings of the individual. Karl Renner went so far as to maintain that one could decide who is a member of a nation by taking a poll and having each person register the nationality to which he belongs.

Otto Bauer's definition varied little from Renner's. According to Bauer, "a nation is the aggregate of people bound into a community of character by a community of faith." How closely Zionism adhered to this definition can be seen from the opening sentences of a resolution adopted at a conference of Russian Zionists held in Helsingfors, Finland, in 1906, in which they formulated their demand for national autonomy in Russia. The resolution states: "Each Jew, who has not reported that he withdraws from the Jewish nation, is recognized as a member of the Jewish nation."

In his analysis of the national question, Stalin subjected these definitions to a thorough critique. Bauer's view, said Stalin, "which identifies a nation with its national character, divorces the nation from its soil and converts it into an invisible, self-contained force." "What then," asked Stalin, "distinguishes Bauer's nation from the mystical and self-contained 'national spirit' of the spiritualists?"

"Bauer, by divorcing the 'distinctive feature' of nations (national character) from the 'conditions' of their life, sets up an impassible barrier between them. But what is national character if not a reflection of the conditions of life, a coagulation of impressions derived from environment? How can one limit the matter to national character alone, isolating and divorcing it from the soil that gave rise to it?"

Stalin goes on to point out that, if one were to apply Bauer's definition to America at the end of the 18th century, one would be hard put to explain why America constituted a separate nation from England, since, at the time, those who lived in America very obviously still had the same national characteristics as inhabitants of England. If, therefore, we nevertheless recognize that America already then constituted a separate nation, this was so "not so much by its national character, as by its environment and conditions of life, which were distinct from those of England." Stalin therefore concluded that what results from Bauer's definition "is not a living and acting nation, but something mystical, intangible and supernatural."

By reducing the essence of nationhood to subjective feeling, both Bauer and Renner were removing the group from reality, from the objective social, economic and political factors which daily molded the life of the group, which imposed certain specific problems and conditions. Renner and Bauer were removing the national question from the social, economic and political framework and making it absolutely independent of its actual environment. It was therefore inevitable that those who accepted this definition, would direct their activity into Utopian and illusory programs and be removed from participation in the real and earnest struggles that were taking place.

(To be continued)