

DIGEST OF THE MONTH

A Soviet View of Zionism

IN PRAVDA (October 21) Ilya Erenburg makes the following comment on Zionism:

I RECEIVED a letter from Alexander R. in Munich. He writes:

"You may be surprised that I turn to you, but I read some of your books and I turn to you as to an author—help me find my way in a problem which I find difficult. I am a German Jew, naturally, an anti-fascist, I am a medical student. In 1938 I succeeded in escaping to France. When the Nazis invaded that country I hid and later served with the *Maquis* for two years. I fought in the partisan detachment Gabriel Perry. After the victory I returned to Munich. I confess, I was naive. I thought that fascism had been destroyed. Now I have to experience humiliations daily. When Hitler was in power I thought that it was a temporary eclipse, and considered anti-Semitism to be one of the symptoms of the 'brown plague.' But why must I now read disgusting inscriptions on the walls? Why must I hear students shouting to me: 'Get out to Palestine!' Why was one of my friends rejected as a professor and explicitly informed: 'This is no place for a Jew!' You cannot imagine how unbearable are these insults to one's dignity. I long for the simplest thing—the right to exist without a badge of humiliation. The Nazis put a yellow patch on our chests; now things are done more delicately, but they are the same. The same Nazis occupy positions of responsibility under American guard. You no doubt know of this, and I am not writing in order to register a complaint or to provide information.

"I want to know what is the attitude toward Israel in the Soviet Union. Can one see in it a solution to the so-called Jewish Question? For me these are not abstract speculations but a question of my life. In your novel *Boorya* (Tempest) I read terrible descriptions of the murder of Jews in Oswiecim and in other places. My entire family perished at the hands of the Nazis. How to prevent the repetition of these horrors? Yesterday I heard one of my colleagues declare in a loud voice: 'It is necessary to finish the Jews!' I was never a Zionist, but I am beginning to believe in the idea of a Jewish State. I am waiting for an answer from you, because you are an author of that country in which I believe with my whole heart."

I think that the question posed by the correspondent, whom I do not know, interests not only him, and not only Jews, but all sensible and conscientious people. I therefore decided to answer not with a private letter but with a newspaper article.

ALEXANDER R. asks what is the attitude toward Israel in the Soviet Union. One can answer this question very briefly: The Soviet government was the first to recognize the new State, it energetically protested against the aggressors, and when the armies of Israel defended their land from the Arab legions which were under the command of British officers, all the sympathies of the Soviet people were on the side of the injured and not on the side of the offenders. This was just as natural as that the Soviet people should sympathize with the patriots of Viet Nam and not with the French subjugators, with the patriots of Indonesia and not with the Dutch chastisers.

Alexander R's first question can also be answered more extensively. The representatives of the Soviet Union in the United Nations said that our people appreciates the feelings of the Jews who had experienced the greatest

tragedy and finally received the right to exist on their own land. Wishing success to the toilers of Israel, the Soviet people do not shut their eyes to the tribulations awaiting all honest people of the young state. In addition to the invasion of the Anglo-Arab armies, Israel is subject to still another invasion, less publicized but no less dangerous, the invasion of Anglo-American capital. For the imperialists Palestine means oil, above all else. The predatory competition of Standard Oil on one hand and the Anglo-Iranian Petroleum Company and Shell on the other, interfered with the life of the young state. The interests of the Palestine Potash Company, the flow of oil from Kirkuk to Haifa, American projects for concessions and military bases, these threaten Israel next to King Abdullah's cutthroats. At the head of the State of Israel do not stand representatives of the toilers. We have all seen how the bourgeoisie of the European countries with their great traditions and long established statehood sold out the national interests for the sake of the dollar. Can the Soviet people count on the bourgeoisie of Israel to be more conscientious and more sagacious than the bourgeoisie of France or of Italy? Hardly. We have faith in peoples. But if the people of Israel fights and fights gallantly, this does not mean that the people rules.

There are many laborers in Israel urban and rural. The entire burden of the defense of the country fell upon them. Not long ago Mikunis, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Israel, declared: We have neither a property nor an income tax: manufacturers here have shamelessly raised their profits. In this manner the toilers have to struggle not only against the invaders but also against the greed of their own bourgeoisie for whom the war means profit, above all, as it does for any bourgeoisie.

I believe that the progressive people in Israel, its workers, will find the correct way in unusually difficult conditions. I am convinced that socialism will triumph in the whole world, and also in Israel. But though I believe in the future of Israel, I must answer in the negative to the second question of my correspondent who asks whether the establishment of this State constitutes a solution of the so-called "Jewish Question."

I ALWAYS thought, and still think, that the "Jewish Question" can be solved everywhere only as a result of general social, and consequently also spiritual progress. The toilers of all the countries will solve it, and not utopians or diplomats. I am full of admiration for the courage of the fighters of Israel when they beat off the attacks of the British mercenaries, but I know that the solution of the "Jewish Question" depends not on the military successes in Palestine but on the triumph of socialism over capitalism, the victory of the high international principles of the working class over nationalism, fascism, and racism.

The forces of darkness have long ago dreamed up idle fancies in an effort to represent the Jews as special beings unlike other people about them. They said that Jews lead a separate and different existence, sharing neither the joys nor the sorrows of the nations among whom they live. They insisted that Jews were people lacking a sense of attachment to a motherland, eternal nomads. They swore that Jews of different countries are united among themselves by some mysterious bonds. All these fancies found their extreme expression in Hitler's vile book *Mein Kampf*

and were repeated by SS who buried old Jews alive and threw infants into crematoria or buried them in pits.

Yes, Jews lived apart when they were forced to do so. The ghetto was invented not by Jewish mystics but by Catholic fanatics. At the time when the eyes of humanity were veiled with a religious fog, there were fanatics among the Jews, as there were among Catholics, Protestants, Greek Orthodox, and Mohammedans. As soon as the gates of the ghetto were opened, as soon as the fog of medieval darkness lifted, the Jews of the various countries entered the common life of the nations.

It is true that many Jews left their homeland and emigrated to America. But they did not emigrate because they did not love their land. They emigrated because violence and humiliation deprived them of the land they loved. Indeed, were the Jews the only ones to seek salvation, at times, in other countries? Did not the Italians and Irish act likewise? Or the Slavs of the countries dominated by the Turks and Germans? Or the Armenians, or the Russian sects? Jewish toilers, like all others, are strongly attached to the land where they were born and where they grew up.

Jews live in many lands. Many live on the same soil whither their predecessors came in immemorial times past. Jewish monuments in Tunisia, Georgia, Italy, date back to great antiquity. The forces of darkness say that there exists a certain mystic bond between all the Jews of the world. But in fact there is little in common between a Jew of Tunisia and a Jew living in Chicago who speaks the language of America and thinks in American terms. If a bond does exist between them, it is not of a mystical nature but one resulting from anti-Semitism. Were a madman to declare tomorrow that all red-haired people, or all those with flat noses should be persecuted and exterminated, we would witness a natural solidarity among red heads or flat nosed persons. The unheard-of bestiality of the German fascists, the principle of exterminating the Jews which they widely announced and put into effect in many countries, the racist propaganda beginning with humiliations and ending with the crematoria of Maidanek—these aroused within the hearts of Jews of different countries a sense of deep affinity. This is the solidarity of the humiliated and aroused. . . .

OF COURSE there are nationalists and mystics among the Jews. They have created the program of Zionism, but it was not they who settled Palestine with Jews. Palestine was settled with Jews by the ideologists of hatred among people, by the adepts of racism, by the anti-Semites who drove people from their homes and compelled them to seek beyond the seven seas, not happiness but the right to human dignity. We all recall the epic of the ship *Exodus* which carried refugees from Western Europe to Palestine, people who by chance escaped the crematoria of Oswiecim and came under the fire of British soldiers. The State of Israel reminds us of this ship, an ark, a raft bearing people who had been caught in the bloody deluge of racism and fascism.

Why is my correspondent, Alexander R., inclined to see salvation in Israel? Because those people who had deprived him of his homeland continue to rule in Bavaria, because the German racists have found dependable protectors—the racists of New Jersey and Alabama; because for the Jew of Bavaria, Hitlerism is not merely a horrible memory but something alive, guarded and cultivated. It is possible that under these circumstances Alexander R. has no choice but to hurdle the obstacles set up by the various "observers" and to make his way to Israel. But if that should be a solution to the personal drama of Alex-

ander R., it cannot be a solution to the drama of the Jews who live in various countries where money, falsehood, and prejudices rule. . . .

The greatest number of Jews live in the United States. When I was in America I saw how the trans-Atlantic racists insult the dignity of Jews, Negroes, Chinese, and Italians. Everyone understands that American Jews are threatened with the growing racism in the U. S. and everyone understands that the salvation of American Jews lies not in the State of Israel, which could not absorb even a small part of them, but in the victory of progressive America over racist America.

THE ZIONISTS say that the recent tragedy experienced by the Jews of Europe is explainable by the fact that the Jews lived scattered among other nations. Let us recall that in 1942 the armies of Hitler penetrated Egypt and were close to Palestine. Even had a sovereign Jewish State existed at that time it could not have opposed the armored divisions of Rommel. What saved the Jews of Palestine? Stalingrad, the victory of the Soviet people over the fascists, for Hitler was compelled to look to his defenses instead of undertaking a campaign against Jerusalem.

In a fateful encounter the Soviet people defeated the enemy of all the nations—the bloody German fascism. The same Soviet people which saved Europe also saved the lives of millions of Jews. Not long ago I was in Wroclaw. The new Jewish settlers there invited the participants in the World Congress of Intellectuals to visit them. Polish scholars, Negro authors, Brazilians, Czechs came. A little girl pioneer addressed the Soviet delegate with the following words: "Tell the Soviet people that we, Jewish children of Wroclaw, offer flowers to your countrymen who lie in the mass grave. Tell the Soviet people that we know who saved us from perishing."

There exists only one solution to the "Jewish Question"—the victory of the progressive forces of mankind. Should we for a moment visualize the terrible picture of a victory of world reaction, then we could declare with certainty that the State of Israel would be turned into a new Oswiecim or Maidanek.

THERE was fascism in a number of countries in Eastern and South Eastern Europe before the war. There Jews were subject to persecution. Suffice it to recall the Iron Guard and the pogroms in Poland of that day. Then came the Hitlerites. They encouraged gangsters from the dregs of society and organized the mass extermination of the Jews. But under pressure of the peoples, and with the aid of the Soviet Army, the fascist rulers fell. The gentlemen who dreamed of the rebirth of the pre-war regimes, half liberals, half pogromists, fled overseas. The toilers took the government into their hands. And I saw with what devotion and patriotism the Jews of the various countries of the peoples' democracies are rebuilding the destroyed cities, working, studying, writing books, planting trees. In Poland, where the Pilsudskyites tormented the Jews before the war, there is scarcely a city that does not have a street named after the heroes of the Ghetto. The heroic struggle of the Jews of Warsaw against the German invaders is the pride of the entire Polish people. When some years ago the fascist dregs tried to stage a pogrom in Kielce, the people's government punished them as enemies of Poland. The people of Bulgaria succeeded in saving the Jews of Bulgaria from mass shipment to the death camps. After September 9, People's Courts convicted the Bulgarian fascists who stained their hands with Jewish blood. Now the Jews of Bulgaria,

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among whom are numerous partisans, together with the entire Bulgarian people, are building their new democratic government. Their future is not overseas but in Sofia, Plovdiv, and Russia. . . .

More than once the founder of our government, V. I. Lenin, flayed anti-Semitism and stamped it as shameful in wrathful essays and speeches. The October revolution brought freedom and equal rights to all the citizens of the Soviet country, including the Jews. Some of the Jews count Russian as their native tongue, others Ukrainian, still others Yiddish, but all of them consider the Soviet country their homeland and are proud that they are citizens of the land where exploitation of man by man has been done away with. In 1931, when the terrible cloud was spreading over Europe, and foreseeing the evil deeds of the cannibals, J. V. Stalin said:

"National and racial chauvinism is a remnant of a man-hating morality characteristic of the period of cannibalism. Anti-Semitism, as the most extreme expression of racial chauvinism is the most dangerous survival of cannibalism." When cannibalism tried to consume Europe, the Soviet people under the leadership of Stalin destroyed the cannibals. Soviet Jews, together with the people of other nationalities, defended the great ideas of our society and their native land with self-sacrifice. Girls, boys, and old men went out of the ghettos of Vilno and Minsk to join partisan detachments. The native soil has become still dearer to each Soviet Jew. When he recalls the destruction of the innocent victims of fascism, he remembers the fierce battles and the fallen heroes. He is bound to every other Soviet citizen by bonds of fighting friendship, and to every inch of land by precious graves.

Let my correspondent, Alexander R., think of the events of the past decade and he will understand that the "Jewish Question" can be solved in only one way: the destruction of the "Jewish Question."

WE HAVE sympathy for the struggle of the toilers of Israel. They have the sympathy not only of the Soviet Jews but of all Soviet people. There are no partisans of Glubb Pasha in our midst. Nevertheless each Soviet citizen understands that not only the national but also the social character of a State is important. A citizen of the Soviet society considers the people of any bourgeois land, including the people of Israel, as wayfarers who have not yet emerged from the dark forest. A citizen of the Soviet society can never envy the fate of people who have to bear the yoke of capitalist exploitation.

The fate of Jewish toilers in all lands is bound up with the progress and the fate of socialism. The Soviet Jews, together with all Soviet people, are building their socialist homeland. They do not look to the Near East; they look to the future. And I think that the toilers of the State of Israel, who look for justice and are far from the mysticism of the Zionists, now look to the North, to the Soviet Union, which is in the vanguard of mankind on the way to a better future.