

A Revolutionary Program for the Jews

By LEO LYONS

In the revolutionary movement there is no lack of paralyzing dogma that passes for theoretical thought on the Jewish question. T. Cliff's article, in the January 1946 *Fourth International*, elucidating his position on Zionism provides a striking display of the sterility often displayed when dealing with the present stage of the Jewish national problem.

Cliff poses the whole problem as follows: "Can Zionism be anti-imperialist?" This artificial posing of the question enables him to knock down the proverbial straw man with consummate ease: "... whatever happens during an uprising of the peoples of the East against imperialism, Zionism will not go over to the revolutionary side." The essence of Cliff's position revolves around this proposition: that since Zionism is an agent of British Imperialism the Jewish national movement is essentially a force designed to oppose the Arab movement for national liberation. Therefore the Zionist movement is reactionary in its entirety.

Instead of disposing of the question by the method of stringing together reactionary speeches made by the Zionist leaders, it is of primary importance to understand the importance of Jewish history, both past and present, in order to gain a correct perspective on the Jewish question as it presents itself today. In the course of this article I will try to demonstrate, on the historical plane that the prolongation of capitalism in its declining stage forces the reconstitution of Jewry upon a territory of its own as a compelling historical tendency.

In 1937 Trotsky wrote: "During my youth I rather leaned toward the prognosis that the Jews of different countries would be assimilated and that the Jewish question would thus disappear in a quasi-automatic fashion. The historical development of the last quarter of a century has not confirmed this perspective." (My emphasis — L.L.) Let us proceed to examine why Trotsky's perspective was false and how we should re-orient ourselves in relation to the contemporary Jewish problem.

Historical Analysis of the Jews Under Capitalism

In their embryonic periods the developing capitalist countries of England, France, Holland and Spain absorbed the Jews into the pores of their economic organisms and later purged them from their systems as the cycle of their economic evolution passed to a higher stage. The next countries to attract the Jewish goldbags (the Jewish merchant was a catalytic agent that stimulated economic progress) were Germany, Poland and Russia.

European Jewry was alienated from the feudal community because a) the Jews acted as agents of the nobility (as tax collectors for the large estates, etc.), and b) the Jew, in the role of usurer, played all strata of the Gentile community. This unpopular role of the Jews caused the ethnological differences to become greatly magnified in the eyes of the masses. Only modern industry was able to batter down the Ghetto walls and bring the Jews out of isolation. When it became possible for the Jews to enter the doors of the secular world of Christianity, assimilation became the norm. Therefore, capitalism, in its rising years, with its seemingly limitless opportunities, superficially seemed to offer a final solution to the Jewish problem. However, the milieu of the 1840's did not prevent the young Karl Marx from seeing that "the question of the capacity of the Jews for emancipation is from our standpoint transformed into the question, what particular social element has to be

overcome in order to abolish Judaism? For the capacity of emancipation of the modern Jew is the relation of Judaism to the emancipation of the entire world."

In Russia, due to the lateness of capitalist development, only the proletarian revolution was able to destroy the Ghettos and Pales. However, the failure of the world revolution, which resulted in the isolation of the Soviet Union in "an angry sea of capitalism" brought about its degeneration. This degeneration, fostered by economic backwardness, only intensified the Jewish national problem. The bureaucracy unsuccessfully tried to eliminate the problem by transforming the Jews from their white-collar status to a more normalized existence (integrated into agriculture and industry) within the territory of Biro-Bidjan.

The regression which began in Russia, the country which liberated the Jews to the greatest degree in the shortest time, spread to the European continent with exceeding rapidity. The disorientation of the German revolutionary movement from 1923 through 1932 by the Stalinist bureaucracy was instrumental in dragging down the Weimar Republic beneath the boots of Fascism. The Nazis began to rejuvenate the medieval tradition by re-erection of the Ghettos, confiscation of Jewish wealth and a terroristic anti-semitism unparalleled in history. The virus of Fascism spread throughout the Old World like a contagious disease, and one of its effects was the cementing of previously dissolving Jewish national consciousness. Even the Jewish labor movement in the United States, traditionally opposed to Zionism, now endorses and supports the World Zionist Organization.

The first major wave of Jewish immigration from Europe to America and Palestine was stimulated by the Czar's pogroms. The spasmodic pressure of the world crises (since 1929) caused Jewish capital to flow into Palestine, in turn increasing Jewish immigration into the Holy Land. Hitlerism, however, qualitatively changed the shape of the Jewish national movement. The carnage suffered by millions of European Jews made the half-million Jews in Palestine a bulwark of hope for Jewry's very physical existence. From the body of decaying capitalism a cataclysm of pus (rotting European Fascism) has washed the Jews from Europe and reconstituted a segment of world Jewry upon the soil of Palestine.

The Jews and Arabs in Palestine

Under the "benevolence" of the Balfour Declaration Jewish money and labor was permitted to transform the Palestinian sand dunes into more fertile soil. The impetus of Zionism, which concentrated much capital in Palestine caused a radical change in the historical development of the Palestinian Arabs.

It is over-simplification to state that Jewish immigration is a force "oppressing the Arab movement for national liberation." As a matter of fact, Zionism was the very factor that developed Arab nationalism in Palestine.

This is easy to demonstrate. Before World War I there was a steady exodus of Arabs from Palestine. Under the impetus of Jewish immigration this tendency was brought to a halt and an opposite tendency set in.¹ The non-Jewish population of Palestine increased from 673,000 in 1922 (census figure) to 940,000 in 1935 (official estimate). This amounts

¹ These statistics appeared in a pamphlet entitled "Jews and Arabs, in Palestine."

to an increase of 40% in fifteen years. By way of comparison, during the period from 1920 to 1932, the population of Egypt increased only 13%, while that of TransJordan has remained practically stationary since the First World War. In even sharper contrast, emigration from Syria has averaged 9500 per year during the period from 1920 to 1930.

Arab population near Jewish settlements has shown a marked increase compared to that in other sections of Palestine. In Jaffa, near the all-Jewish city of Tel-Aviv, the Arab population increased 69% in the period from 1922 to 1935, and in Jerusalem, with a large Jewish community, the Arab population increased 47%. By contrast, in the Arab cities of Jenin and Nablus, the increase was only twelve and eight percent respectively. This tendency is shown even more clearly in the case of Arab villages near Jewish settlements:

	Population Increase
Salama (near Tel-Aviv)	212%
Zarnuqa (near Rishon-le-Zion)	102%
Yibna (near Ness-Ziona)	101%

Compared to this, the population in the non-Jewish districts of Tulkarem and Nablus increased only thirty-five and twenty-eight percent respectively.

The development of the productive forces in Palestine by Jewish and Arab capitalists produced the phenomenon of Arab trade unions. Despite the smallness of the productive forces the concentration of the Palestinian proletariat made it necessary for the Arab unions to affiliate with the General Federation of Jewish Labor (Histadrut) in order to fight their class enemy, the bourgeoisie. These Arab unions have a membership of 2,000.² Other Arab trade unions, hostile to the Histadrut, were organized by the government in order to split the labor movement nationally, — they have a membership of 5,000. Despite this split, in 1943 eleven Arab strikes took place with 4,143 workers participating. Four additional strikes of 4,000 Jews and Arabs together also occurred. Special note should be taken of the one-day strike of 30,000 government employees, half-Jewish and half-Arab.

Therefore we see that the Jewish immigration into Palestine brought in its wake a large Arab influx into the country and created the basis for a genuine Arab national movement despite the chauvinism of the official Zionist leadership and a good part of its membership. There has thus been created in Palestine a peculiar bi-national problem, resulting from the economic interdependence of Arabs and Jews.

It is not for a Marxist to balance upon a moral scale the acts of anti-Arab chauvinism against the positive results of Jewish immigration. The situation is there, and it is our task to utilize every avenue of constructive work that this bi-national problem opens. The struggle for an independent Arab-Jewish republic is a serious blow to British Imperialism and hence progressive.

British Imperialism has, needless to say, been quick to grasp every possible weapon in its attempt to divide Arab from Jew. The reactionary Zionist dream of a "Judenstaat" (Jewish Commonwealth) was channelized to the good advantage of a Britain anxious to maintain its grip upon the Near East Empire. John Bull's tentacles are sunk deep into the Holy Land: pipe lines from the Iranian oil fields pump England's blood into the Palestinian city of Haifa, and the newly-constructed naval base at Tel-Aviv threatens even the pre-eminence of Alexandria. The tremendous influx of British **Fommies** into Palestine signifies the conversion of the land into

an armed camp, aimed at guarding against both a rival imperialist penetration of Britain's lifeline and rational uprisings of Jews and Arabs.

In order to maintain its domination, Britain has played the age-old game of setting one nationality off against the other. It has alternately used Jews against the Arab struggle and Arabs against Jewish national aspirations. Now, at the close of World War II, it is the turn of the Jews to be clubbed over the head. Britain finds it important to retain the support of the Arabs as a lever against the French in Syria and, more important, as a means with which to hold off the threatening American imperialist penetration of British possessions in the Near East. For these reasons, Churchill and Attlee alike cut Jewish immigration to a trickle and inaugurate a campaign of intimidation against the Jewish population.

But the Palestinian Jews, with the remnants of European Jewry on their conscience, have shown that they are not willing to submit to such a scheme without resistance. The assassination of Lord Moyne in Cairo by Jewish terrorists last year was like a flash of lightning before the storm. It served as a warning that the Jewish masses in Palestine were on the verge of launching a determined national struggle.

The Jews in Palestine consist, for the most part, of refugees from Czarist Russia and Poland and, lately, from Hitler's Europe. Most have suffered the severest oppression in their homelands. Is it therefore any wonder that, after fighting a war on the side of Allied "democracy" against a foe who murdered four million of their brothers in Europe, they rebel upon finding that Allied "liberation" leaves Jews incarcerated in concentration camps, leaves them to fight pogroms, unaided, from France to Poland, does nothing to relieve their plight in Europe and yet will not let them come to Palestine.

The Jews of Palestine are fully conscious of the role they must play. They believe that the weight of the remaining one-and-a-half million European Jews is on their shoulders. In the struggle for "Unlimited Jewish Immigration into Palestine" the Jewish masses have expressed their antagonism to British Imperialism by a campaign of mass terror. Their attacks upon police stations, jails, and airfields have clearly revealed the character of their struggle. The British C.I.D. (Criminal Investigation Division) has taken brutal counter-action to halt these attacks. It has met them with a campaign of terror, deportations, and police victimization, coupled with a threat of the death penalty for all members of terrorist organizations.

The Irgun Nvai Leumi (National Military Organization) and the fanatical Stern Group represent only an extremely small section of the Underground movement. Unlike the Russian terrorists of the 1860's they display Fascist manifestations.³ However the Haganah (Self-Defense) which today is

³ This tendency among Zionist circles is called "Revisionism" because it broke from the official World Zionist Organization in 1935. They find (as did the Fascists) no contradiction in raising different slogans for different national and class groups. A major plank in their platform is opposition to the "class struggle while a state is being built" — everything must be subordinated until the Jewish National State is erected. Therefore, strikes and all manifestations of class conflict must be regulated by their "National Arbitration Board." This is the same tune Mussolini and Hitler whistled.

Abba Achimeir, one of the leading theoreticians of the Revisionist movement, told the Zionist youth:

"We must create groups for action; to exterminate the Histadrut physically; they are worse than Arabs. It is by the amount of bloodshed that you can evaluate a revolution, and not by the beautiful ideas for which the blood is shed. You're no students; you're just so much mclasses. There isn't one among you capable of committing murder after the fashion of those German students who murdered Rathenau. You are not possessed of the nationalist spirit that dominated the Germans. . . . Not one of you is capable of murder after the manner in which Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg were murdered."

They carry their Fascist ideology out as far as they are capable. Strike-breaking and Arab-baiting have been two of their chief pre-occupa-

² Statistics are from the "Palestinian Year Book" — 1944-45.

the real underground in Palestine, is controlled by the Jewish Labor Movement and the Kibbutzim (Jewish collective farms). This movement cannot be dismissed, as it is by Cliff, by saying that it represents only a movement of the Jewish bourgeoisie going over to American Imperialism. Although the Jewish bourgeoisie tries to run to the head of the movement and channelize it for its own purposes, it isn't successful in the present situation. It can no longer impose the concept of Havlaga (Self-restraint) any more than Ghandi can stop the rioting and mutiny in Bombay with his tactic of "non-violence." The Jewish Resistance represents a progressive force against British Imperialism. As such it merits revolutionary support.

To be sure, our comrades in Palestine must explain that Blanquist, putschist tactics will not solve the problem, but their duty is not exhausted when they finish explaining that only a radical change in society will put an end to oppression of the Jews. They must utilize on their fulcrum of revolutionary activity every lever presented to them in the present explosive situation.

They must be the first to fight for the progressive slogans of the day. The democratic right of unrestricted Jewish immigration into Palestine must be championed by the entire International, and the false British propaganda that this is in opposition to the interests of the Arabs must be exposed.

While supporting and developing the struggle for Jewish rights in the Resistance fight against British Imperialism, our comrades must bend every effort towards cementing a unity between the Arab and Jewish masses. Especially necessary is a struggle against the reactionary Zionist Kibbush HaAvodah (Conquest of Labor) policy which is aimed at excluding Arab labor from Jewish-owned enterprises. Both Arab and Jewish workers must be made to realize that only a combined labor movement can be effective in achieving their national and social aims. Such an amalgamation would also go a long way towards eliminating the split in the countryside.

The Palestinian comrades can conduct an especially fruitful propaganda in this direction among the Left-wing Zionists in the Histadrut. One-third of the Federation (The Left Poale Zion, Kibutz Artzi, and the left wing of the Mapi) supports the slogan of a bi-national state, an Arab-Jewish Republic, as opposed to the chauvinist slogan of a "Jewish Commonwealth." Our comrades should utilize every opportunity to agitate the rank-and-file of these organizations to press their leadership into translating into practice their pious declarations. Every slogan that can bring about Arab-Jewish collaboration must be seized hold of.

Foremost of these is the slogan for the immediate (and the emphasis is important) convocation of a representative Constituent Assembly. This slogan would be a powerful lever with which to win over the Arab masses, since it sets itself against both the reactionary Zionists who fear an Arab majority and the Arab Effendis who are frightened of the masses. The slogan, if adopted by the Jewish labor movement, would not only have a tremendous effect in winning over the Arab masses to support of Jewish immigration, but it would be tremendously effective in driving a wedge between the Arab landowners and fellahin (peasants). It would dispel the illusion, held by wide layers of the Arab masses, that the Arab landowners are anti-imperialist and for national freedom; an illusion created by the antagonism existing between landowner and imperialist over division of the surplus value wrung from the masses.⁴

tions. Undoubtedly a certain section of the Jewish bourgeoisie would like to utilize them as a means of transferring allegiance from British to American Imperialism; for this reason their activities have recently been acquiring a more pronounced anti-British character.

Such a course of propaganda and agitation, championing and welding together the needs of both Jews and Arabs can enable the Palestinian party to transform itself into a mass organization and become the catalyst which sharpens the struggle against British Imperialism.

Tasks of the International and the SWP

The Fourth International as a world organization must elucidate the inter-relationship of the whole colonial eruption. The Second World War has ushered in revolutionary movements of a much more significant nature in the colonies than in Europe. The colonial struggle presents one of the most important fields for our revolutionary activity today.

Australian dock workers strike and refuse to load ships for imperialist use in Indonesia. American soldiers demonstrate in the Phillipines and elsewhere against being sent to intervene against the colonial peoples. These and innumerable other possibilities for fruitful revolutionary work present themselves to us. Through agitation around different aspects of the colonial question we gain access to sections of the masses (dock workers, soldiers, minority groups, etc.) whom we can reach no more effectively.

The SWP must take cognisance of its duty in connection with the problem of Palestine, especially with regard to the question of Jewish immigration. In our press we must demand that the gates of Palestine be opened to unlimited Jewish immigration, in addition to agitating for unrestricted immigration into the United States itself.

The rally at Madison Square Park last October in which 150,000 took part, as well as other protests that have taken place, have demonstrated not the organizational strength of Zionism but a heightened political awareness and sensitivity on the part of the Jewish masses. The slogans for free Jewish immigration into Palestine such as "The Stench of Oil is in the Holy Land," "Is Attlee Another Churchill?" (a remarkably frequent question nowadays), etc., testified to the heightened consciousness and progressive aspirations of the demonstrators.

The SWP should take the initiative in conducting widespread agitation for such progressive slogans among the Jewish population, and not permit the Stalinists to beat us to the punch as they did in connection with activity among the Indonesian seamen. Such agitation would open up many avenues for us in the needle trades unions; we would reach them with political work and thus make it possible to raise our trade union work onto a broader political level. While we conduct a program of education in the "Militant" and "Fourth International" around the Jewish question as it presents itself today, various resolutions should be introduced into the trade unions presenting our position. Propaganda can be carried on in Yiddish as well as English in the principal Jewish centers such as New York and Philadelphia. There is an unlimited field of work for us in this direction.

If we in the United States do our revolutionary duty, and the Palestinian comrades fulfill theirs, then the revolutionary struggle in an important sector of the world will have its best guarantee of victory. In the stage of declining capitalism the liberal bourgeoisie is reduced to impotency. Today the task of maintaining and fighting for basic democratic rights rests upon the shoulders of the proletariat, and first of all upon its conscious vanguard. To conduct this fight in an uncompromising fashion is the first task in its struggle for the revolutionary transformation of society.

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⁴ More effective than all the propaganda in the world in breaking down Arab prejudices against the Jews would be strikes by the Egyptian and Syrian masses. Our comrades should do everything possible to convince the Jewish workers of the value of such a demonstration.