

NOTES ON THE JEWISH QUESTION

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In a previous bulletin on the Jewish Question, this writer presented the following position: 1. Open the doors of the world to Europe's remaining Jews who wish to escape the land of their degradation and start life anew among their families and friends in other parts of the world. 2. Wherever there exists among the displaced Jews of Europe a desire to return to Palestine and live a Jewish national existence, it behooves the revolutionary socialists to give support to the realization of these national aspirations. It goes without saying, of course, that such a Jewish national movement which we would support, must not tread upon the toes of other people; in this particular instance the Arab masses of Palestine. A governmental and economic formula must be devised which would make the welfare of these two Palestinian people compatible.

The correctness of the latter solution to the present day problems of European Jews flows--we stated--from the Leninist position on nationalism and national movements. During the first World War and immediately afterwards, a dispute was carried on by Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg on the position that the revolutionary socialist movement should take on national movements of that day. Rosa Luxemburg argued that the days were over when national movements could be considered progressive movements. National movements were progressive in the 19th century when they aided the expansion of the capitalist economies. Now, she argued, we are living in a period where international socialism is on the order of the day. National movements divide the solidarity of the workers of the world. National movements militate against the creation of a workers international economy which is needed as a basis for socialism. She therefore opposed national self-determination in the case of the Ukraine, in the case of Poland, etc.

Lenin argued differently. The international social order is arriving at a time, said he, when national sentiment is still strongly entrenched in the political consciousness of many people, particularly in the political consciousness of those people who are being nationally oppressed. "The policy of oppressing nationalities is the policy of dividing nations." If we are to continue the subjection of these national sentiments, and not allow these national sentiments self-expression, we risk the danger of alienating these suppressed nationalities from the revolutionary socialist movements. The revolutionary socialist movement cannot and may not impose the higher internationalist sentiment by force from above. Instead, the Bolshevik movement must channelize these national sentiments along revolutionary socialist lines. The Bolsheviks must explain and prove to the oppressed national masses that it is only capitalist society which suppresses nationalities. The only way the nationally oppressed people can realize their aspirations towards true national freedom and cultural autonomy is by aligning their forces with the revolutionary socialist movement.

Lenin was therefore in favor of the slogan of national self-

determination for the Ukraine, for Finland, for all oppressed nationalities. Bolsheviks do not preach nationalism. However, where it does exist it attempts to work with it, to channelize it along revolutionary socialist lines. It should follow therefore, that if national sentiments exist among Jews, revolutionary socialists must not fight against it, but must channelize this sentiment along revolutionary lines. One would consider this formula quite logical and clear. Yet Lenin himself was opposed to the Jewish national movements, and also subsequent Bolshevik-Leninists opposed it as well.

Lenin, and the revolutionary marxist movement in general were opposed to the Zionist movement for several substantially, although perhaps not absolutely correct and valid reasons. It is these reasons which we propose to discuss in this document. We propose to show that these reasons which were once valid no longer retain their validity. On the contrary the conditions which prevail today among the Jews of Europe and Palestine are such that it flows logically from the previously mentioned Leninist position, which we accept, that we today have it as our revolutionary socialist duty to support the migration of Jews to Palestine and to support their desire to live a national existence. The point is Comrades, ZIONISM MAY BE REACTIONARY AS PRACTICED BY THE VARIOUS ZIONIST ORGANIZATIONS, BUT IT IS NOT INTRINSICALLY REACTIONARY. Present day Zionism is the legitimate and understandable aspiration of an oppressed group of people to reorganize their lives and regain their self respect in a national community. It is basically progressive. As socialists, it is our task to make it so. What were the erstwhile objections to the Zionist and general Jewish National movements held by Revolutionary Socialists?

1. "The Zionist movement is an instrument used by British Imperialism to gain control of the Near East".--This argument which was reasonably valid at the inception of the Zionist effort after the Balfour Declaration is no longer true. On the contrary, the Jewish community in Palestine stands at loggerheads with the British Empire. Since the Balfour Declaration, the British foreign policy for the Near East has gone through a diametrical change. Let us review very briefly the policy of the British in the Near East.

During the latter half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, prior to World War II, the British Foreign Office sided with the Sultan of Turkey against the rest of Europe. Britain hoped to secure its passageway to India, to gain the right of exploitation in the Near East, by friendship with the Sultan. During the war the Sultan sided with the Central powers, and at the end of the war was deposed, after his empire disintegrated completely. Britain was again faced with the need for an instrument by which she could impose here hegemony over the Near East. For a while she toyed with the idea of creating a Jewish State in the Near East for just that purpose. If she were instrumental in setting up a Jewish state in the Near East, that state would look to her for leadership. It was a popular notion during the early days of "Balfour" Zionism that the Jewish State would join the British Commonwealth. In this manner Britain hoped to retain her hold over the Near East even after she would be forced out of Egypt. Palestine could be used as a crossroad of transportation and a center of communication, and a central point

from which to tap the oil fields of the Near East.

However, Britain very soon had a change of heart. A modern progressive state in a backward colonial area might become substantially independent and prove difficult to handle. The economic and political potentialities of such a state for the backward Near East were too dynamic and might prove dangerous to "Empire". Also the reactionary princes and Bedouin chieftains of the Near East stood in mortal fear of a modern western progressive state in their midst. Such a state they must oppose with might and main, and Britain soon rose to the occasion! Perfidious Albion! Britain soon decided to retain control over the Near East by aiding and abetting the reaction of the Sauds, the Husseinis, the Arab League. Britain followed a policy of draining the oil of the Near East and pouring gold into the tents of Ibn Saud and the palace of Emir Abdullah, now King Abdullah by the Grace of Allah and his Britannic Majesty's government. If any Bi-National state is to arise in Palestine in which the Jews will participate, it can only arise through a struggle against the British Empire.

The Jews who wish to migrate to Palestine are a western and modern people. The state set up by the Jews would be a modern state with democratic ideas. It would at the very least be a comparatively progressive state, and the most progressive in the Near East. It could lead the Near East in the direction of industrialization, towards democratic ideas. The reactionary Arab leaders fear such a state. The "Foreign Office" is concerned with Empire and not with political and economic progress for colonial peoples.

It is apropos at this point to make some remarks about the Arab leaders in the Near East. They are a reactionary lot whose only interest it is to rule as absolute despots, to exploit their people, and the land. Millions in gold have been poured into their money chests. What part of it has gone towards the betterment of the living conditions of the Arab masses? Nothing! Ibn Saud, the Arab potentate par excellence, has no conception of what it means to rule in the interest of his people. He rules because he is divinely ordained to rule. He is a descendent of a founder of a religious puritannical sect in Islam. He kills non-believers with his own sword and his own hands. He has no people. He recognizes only religious followers whose duty is to pray to Allah, live a puritannical life, and turn away from western ways. His domain isn't mediaval, it is ancient, Biblical, pastoral, nomadic, disease-ridden, steeped in superstition and ignorance, and right in the eyes of Allah. He is opposed to Jewish migration to Palestine, and Britain agrees with him. King Abdullah of Trans-Jordania is a puppet ruler set up by Britain. His country is part pastoral-nomadic and part feudal. His country is closest to Palestine and he is afraid that the Jewish labor movement in Palestine will give the masses of his country some ideas. He too is opposed to Jewish migration to Palestine. Egypt, the most industrially advanced of the Arab states in the Near East, is also part feudal, and tends towards reaction. Iran is little more than an oil field for competing imperialist interests. The one or two other states are as backward as these.

All this reaction, organized under the Arab League is opposed to Jewish migration to Palestine. The league is hardly an organization

of the Arab masses. It is the social center for the reactionary leaders who gather to discuss means of getting more gold out of Europe for their oil rights and how to keep western ideas from making inroads into the lives of the Arab masses. THE PRESENT STRUGGLE OF THE JEWISH "YISHUV" IN PALESTINE ISN'T A MOVEMENT IN CONJUNCTION WITH BRITISH IMPERIALISM BUT A STRUGGLE AGAINST BRITISH IMPERIALISM.

2. The Jews are not a nation. The Jews are a caste argued Kautsky and Bauer. Therefore revolutionary socialists need not support a Jewish Nationalist movement, a Zionist movement.--The question as to whether the Jews are or are not a nation has been raging over a hundred years now. Some sociologists have argued that the Jews are a nation because they possess certain characteristics of a nation. They have a common origin, history, culture, religion, even a common language in Yiddish or Ladino, and also a strong in-group feeling. Other sociologists, including the Marxists, argued against this position. Prime requisites for a national existence are a common area of concentration, that is, a land of one's own, and a common government for a majority of the nationals. In the absence of these two factors, the other factors of nationality are weakened. The Jewish culture in America shows signs of diversification from the culture of European Jews. The same applies to history and language and all the other elements of nationality. The Marxists in addition, argues that the Jews were a caste. They served the community only in certain economic capacities. Their in-group feeling is constantly being weakened, and as society progressed towards a higher level of productivity, as society advances socially, democratically and culturally, the greatest aspiration of the Jews is to be treated as an equal citizen in the land of the their residence.

But the moot question with regard to Jewish nationalism isn't whether they live a national existence in the diaspora (Kautsky was certainly right in arguing that they did not live a national existence but whether they desire to live a national existence. While capitalism was on the incline, the international-assimilationist solution tended to prevail as the choice solution to the Jewish Question. However, as soon as capitalism began to flounder on the rocks and succumb to evils of crises and imperialism, anti-Semitism increased. The recent Hitlerian experience of the European Jews has brought about a condition where it is safe to say that at least 50% of the remaining Jews of Europe want to go to Palestine and live a national existence. The rest would like to travel to America and the rest of the world to be reunited with the remaining members of their families, friends, uncles, cousins. The Jews who wish to go to Palestine feel the social and psychological need to live in a society where they will be completely accepted and not merely tolerated as strangers. These people never did live a true national existence, do not now live a national existence, but their uppermost desire is to live a national existence. It is our duty as revolutionary socialists to aid them in their aspirations.

3. The imminence of socialism in the world and particularly on the European scene where the greatest number of Jews were concentrated and the immediacy of the need of the Socialist movement, makes the Jewish Nationalist movement first of all superfluous, and

secondly, diversionary and confusing--wrote Lenin in the period immediately prior to World War I. "Whoever directly or otherwise puts forward the slogan of Jewish National Culture (however well intentioned he may be) is the enemy of the proletariat, the defender of the old and caste elements in Jewry, the tools of the Rabbis and the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, those Jewish Marxists who join up in the international Marxist organizations with Russians, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians and other workers their might to the creation of an international culture of the working class movements, are continuing in the traditions of Jewry".

This argument is tied up with the previous one that the Jews are not a nation, but a caste living in the various European countries. They do not have a strong national sentiment, that is, a desire to live a national existence. It is therefore reactionary to force Jewish nationalism upon them. They are immediately needed by the Marxist movements among all the nations of Europe. Let them join the Ukrainians, the Lithuanians, the Russian Marxist movements. The struggle for the social revolution is most immediate, and the preaching of Jewish nationalism and separatism would only lead to a diversion of political effort and confusion among the Jews. The objective situation for the Jews has changed since then.

1. Jewish national sentiment among the remaining Jews of Europe is very strong. 2. (And this point is most decisive) There is no basis for political activity or social activity or economic life for the remaining Jews in Europe. They have no place in European society today. They are de-classed and dispossessed. They are the wards of UNNRA. They are neither capitalist nor middle class nor proletariat, neither fish nor fowl. The only possibility for any social existence in general, or a socialist political existence in particular for the remnant of Jewry is to leave Europe and start life anew. For those Jews who wish to start life anew within a Jewish national group, Palestine presents itself as the only practical solution.

Zionism, and by this I mean a Jewish Nationalist aspiration, is today basically progressive. Our job is to move this desire for national existence along socialist channels. We must give the Zionist movement in Palestine critical support. Open the doors of Palestine to Europe's Jews! Yes! Political support to the various Zionist organizations in Palestine? No! We must present the Jewish community in Palestine, and the Jewish Zionists in Europe with a revolutionary criticism of the present Zionist political effort. We must aid in the building of a 4th Internationalist movement in Palestine.