

between the social nature of production and the private appropriation of the economic surplus.

Capitalism creates the working class—a class with no interest in maintaining exploitation in any form—organizes it in the nature of its role in the process of production; impels it into a constant struggle with the bourgeoisie for “better terms in the sale of its labor power.” In the course of this struggle, elements of the working class come to realize the nature of the system and the necessity of changing it, and are able to impart a conscious revolutionary character to the class struggle.

This takes place, not spontaneously, but by the fusion of the working class movement with the revolutionary socialist theory which develops independently through the extension to the study of capitalist society of the rational and scientific attitude which capitalism needs in its approach to nature.

Capitalism cannot just wish away equalitarianism, the rights of man, the right of revolution and the doctrine of the infinite potential of the individual; and it cannot prevent them from being integrated into a socialist humanism and linked with a rational analysis of capitalism to expose the realities of bourgeois society and to prepare the working class for its overthrow.

In this framework, Marxism-Leninism becomes a methodology of human initiative for the exploited, the oppressed and the alienated. Just because capitalism cripples men and violates human potentiality, it will be unable to withstand the attack of a class and a movement armed with such a weapon and determined to build a society “worthy of man.”

On the Jewish Question

PAUL NOVICK

Nihilism, Bourgeois Nationalism and Assimilation

The Draft Resolution on the Jewish Question published in the August issue of *Political Affairs* correctly states:

While we oppose the influences of nationalism and Zionism, we must at the same time not fail to fight, as part of the Jewish people, for their national rights and interests, for their progressive culture and traditions, and against the insidious influences of national nihilism, which rejects the continued distinct existence of the role of the Jewish people and the need to give specific attention to their problems and struggles.

National Nihilism

How does national nihilism express itself? In what way is it of assistance to the forces of bourgeois nationalism and even the forces of imperialism? A detailed examination of these and other questions in relation to the national problem is not out of order, I think.

National nihilism, it seems to me, is one of the legacies of the Second International in the Marxist movement, particularly when dealing with this movement in the United States. As is well known, German socialists migrating to this country during the second half of the past century were among the founders of the socialist movement here, and they brought with them the influences of the German socialist leader Ferdinand Lassalle. Subsequently, the influences of Karl Kautsky, leading theoretician of the Second International, made themselves felt. Both of these German socialist leaders enunciated quite harmful theories on the national question.

It was Ferdinand Lassalle who stated: “I recognize the right of nationality only for big cultural nations.” As for smaller nations, Lassalle defined their “right” thus: “They should become assimilated and advance with the aid of the stronger cultural nations.”

This credo of Lassalle regarding the national question is quoted in a booklet in the Yiddish language by S. Dimanstein: *The Struggle of Leninism Against Luxemburgism* (Emes Publishing, Moscow, 1933). Dimanstein, who was a close co-worker of Lenin and the head of the

Jewish Commissariat in the Soviet government under Lenin, correctly notes that Lassalle (who was of Jewish extraction) was a "fervent German nationalist" and when he spoke of "big cultural nations" he actually meant big *states*.

Lassalle was a disciple of *German state nationalism*, predicated on the idea that Germany was to swallow smaller nations and in such a way "solve" their national problems.

Karl Kautsky offered the same "solution" to the Slav peoples in Austria prior to 1914; that they discard their language and culture, adopting the German language and culture instead (the Polish-Jewish Marxist in Warsaw, M. Mirski, dwelt in detail on this aspect, in a series of articles in the *Morning Freiheit* during July and August of last year). As to the Jewish question, Kautsky had a good deal to say in a similar vein in his well-known book *Are the Jews A Race?*, published—let us take note of that—by International Publishers in 1926 (the book was written in 1914). Let us take a brief look at that book.

On page 154 Kautsky refers to one Ignaz Zollschan who declared (remember, 50 years ago!) that in the United States "the process of dissolution of the native Jewry is proceeding at full speed." On page 241: When emigration from Russia to America will be ended and the second and third generations will no longer understand Yiddish, will no longer live in compact quarters of their own, and when religion will become a matter of indifference to them, "thus the last barrier to their assimilation will be removed." On page 244: "The Jewish misery can disappear only under a political and social condition of Eastern Europe which will *impel* the Jews in those regions to speak the language of their environment, which means the beginning of their assimilation." (Emphasis added.) On page 246: "We cannot say we have completely emerged from the Middle Ages as long as Judaism still exists among us. The sooner it disappears the better it will be, not only for society, but also for the Jews themselves."

Let us be charitable to Kautsky by adding that he meant to be fighting anti-Semitism; his book was supposed to have been part of this fight. Regrettably, as such things sometimes happen, some books which may not be intended to be anti-Semitic turn out to be anti-Semitic in fact or in effect. The last few lines in the above quotation advocating the "disappearance" of "Judaism" have a gruesome sound in view of what happened in our time. As to Kautsky's "predictions," they fall to the ground by themselves. The utter bankruptcy of these "predictions" should serve as a lesson to people who shy away from the "solution" Kautsky aimed at.

Developments since the days of Ferdinand Lassalle and since

Kautsky gave his advice to the Slavs and to the Jewish people have glaringly underscored the bankruptcy of their theories. Think of all the new nation-states (of formerly oppressed nationalities) that have emerged after World Wars I and II in Europe, Asia and Africa, including the birth of Israel—*scores* of new nation-states! And are we not witnessing *now* national liberation movements in many parts of the globes—*wars* of national liberation?

I do not mean to predict there will *never* be amalgamation but I still have the "weakness" of remembering what Lenin wrote *after* 1917, as well as what he *did*, in building the cultures of scores of nationalities, including Jewish culture—in Yiddish, Hebrew (the Habima Theatre) and Russian. In his "*Left-Wing "Communism": An Infantile Disorder*" (written in the spring of 1920), where he dealt both with the vulgar reformists and the dogmatists, he stated:

As long as national and state differences exist among peoples and countries—and these differences will continue to exist for a very long time even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale—the unity of international tactics of the Communist working class movement of all countries demands, not the elimination of variety, not the abolition of national differences (that is a foolish dream at the present moment), but such an application of the *fundamental* principles of Communism (Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat) as will *correctly* modify these principles in *certain particulars*, will properly apply them to national and national state differences (V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, International Publishers, New York, 1938, Vol. 10, p. 135).

To repeat: "These differences will continue to exist for a very long time, even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale" and "the abolition of national differences . . . is a foolish dream at the present moment." I am therefore worried over the role of progressives *now* and of certain "premature" assimilationist or amalgamationist policies with regard to nationalities, languages and literatures, policies which hamper progressives in fulfilling their role. That moved me to write my article "A Proper Approach to the National Question" (*Political Affairs*, January 1965).

I am definitely worried over a certain national nihilism among some progressives. I saw how the Goldwaterites were attempting to get a foothold among the various nationalities in the USA—and, unfortunately, *did* get some foothold—playing up demagogically to their special demands, desires, sentiments, national pride, cultural aspirations, etc. It may be of interest to consider the following figures from the 1963 report of the American Council for Nationalities Service (20

West 40th St., New York). There were 25 million foreign born in 47 cities of the USA. The Council issues press releases in 23 languages. There were, in 1963, 768 "foreign language and nationality publications" in the USA; 863 radio stations were broadcasting foreign language programs. There is no question that progressives are in need of much more information and of a thorough analysis on what is going on among the nationalities or national groups in the USA.

I am worried over the primitive "internationalism," remnants of Lassalism in the old socialist movement in the USA and of De Leonism—again, national nihilism. The effect of this approach is to leave the field among the national groups in this country to the nationalists, the chauvinists, the obscurantists, the nazi collaborators among the Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Hungarians, etc.

As a Jewish progressive I am especially concerned with the wrong, harmful, nihilistic approach towards "Jewish activities"—toward the building and strengthening of Jewish cultural mass organizations. As the Draft Resolution points out, there is a Jewish community of close to six million in the USA, concentrated in the big cities, exerting an influence politically, economically, culturally. It is a *highly organized* community. Shall it be left to the nationalists, the chauvinists, the obscurantists to hold sway over it, or should progressives try to exert *their* influence by building progressive Jewish culture in Yiddish and in English, by keeping alive progressive Jewish traditions of the Jewish labor movement, of heroic figures in Jewish history, in the freedom struggles and revolutionary movements over the generations down to the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto? Did not Dimitroff warn progressives against national nihilism, which in Italy, as an example, played into the hands of the fascists who adopted the heroic national figure of Garibaldi for their purposes?

One cannot say he is *against* national nihilism and for the progressive Jewish activities indicated above, while at the same time predicting the *dissolution* of the Jewish nationality, stressing assimilationist tendencies, *propagating* assimilation in effect.

The Decline of Yiddish

One of the glaring symptoms of assimilation, according to some people, is the decline of Yiddish as the language of the Jewish masses. That there is a decline, there can be no doubt. But what does it prove?

It is common knowledge that even in the period when Yiddish was in its heyday, so to say, there were millions of Jews who did not speak Yiddish—American-born Jews, Sephardic Jews in Greece and North Africa, Yemenite Jews, Jews born in the Latin-American countries,

etc. Still, *they were part of the Jewish people*. Yiddish began to *develop* about one thousand years ago, but the Jewish people is, of course, much older than that. For generations, Aramic and Arabic were used by considerable sections of the Jewish people, together with other languages. In modern times, one of the most important histories of the Jewish people was written in German, by a German Jew, Heinrich Graetz. The great Jewish historian, Shimon Dubnow, wrote his history in Russian. But Graetz, like Albert Einstein, was a Jew, although his language was German and Dubnow was a Jew, although his language was Russian.

Far be it from me, of course, to diminish the importance of Yiddish, Yiddish literature, theater, press, Yiddish folk-songs and other forms of Yiddish culture—the importance of it because of its *progressive content*. And let me stress this point, if I may: Builders of Yiddish culture in the United States and Canada, Mexico, Argentina and other countries in South America, as well as in Poland, France, Israel and other countries, have recently been marking the hundredth anniversary of the birth of modern Yiddish literature. This literature was born in old Russia under the influence of the great humanists of Russian literature, during the rise of the Russian revolutionary movement. The birth of the Jewish labor movement in Russia, in England and here in the United States, gave tremendous impetus to the development of this literature. It was the literature of the fighters against the sweat shop, on the picket-lines and in the strike halls where the songs of Morris Winchevsky, David Edelstadt and Morris Rosenfeld were sung. These same songs were heard in the struggle against the sweatshops in London and in the struggle against Czarism in Russia. Because of its progressive content, Yiddish was despised by the Jewish bourgeoisie, by the Zionists, the bourgeois nationalists.

Be it as it may, it is true that the use of Yiddish is diminishing. The language of the majority of American Jews is English. *But by this fact they do not cease to be Jews*. In fact, there is more nationalism among English-speaking Jews, among whom Zionists and other nationalists hold sway, then among the Yiddish-speaking adherents of the Yiddish classicists Mendele Mocher Sforim, I. L. Peretz and Sholom Aleichem, and of the above-mentioned proletarian poets and contemporary poets and writers following in their footsteps.

The fact that Yiddish is on the decline cannot be used as a prop between Jews and non-Jews in the USA. But what does it mean as far as the Jewish community is concerned? Certainly, there is some intermarriage! Certainly, there is some assimilation! The problem is, *is there a Jewish community?* Will there be a *Jewish people?* There

was some intermarriage and assimilation during past decades, or more—and the Jewish community in the USA has constantly grown. Immigration into the USA was curtailed in 1924, but since then the Jewish community in the USA has grown from about three million to close to six million. Likewise, there was and is a constant growth in the activities of the religious congregations of the B'nai B'rith with a membership of about half a million, of the various Zionist and other nationalist groupings. There are 207 *national* Jewish organizations in the USA, with thousands of affiliated local organizations. Yiddish periodicals have, regrettably, diminished in number—but Anglo-Jewish periodicals are multiplying. There were 144 such publications in 1964, according to the American Jewish Yearbook for that year, including 45 weeklies, 13 bi-weeklies, 30 monthlies and 31 quarterlies. (There were 20 Yiddish periodicals, including three dailies, and seven periodicals in Hebrew.) Almost *all* of these Anglo-Jewish publications are of a nationalist type.

In the face of such facts, again, the decline of Yiddish cannot and *must not* be used as “proof” of the advance of assimilation. Such argumentation is historically false and can only do harm, by making progressives oblivious to a very serious development in the Jewish community, due to bourgeois-nationalist and extreme Right social-democratic leadership, as the hysterical cold war campaign on “Soviet anti-Semitism” has shown.

Now, are there any forces, or motives, working *against* assimilation of Jews? Let us see. The well known Soviet writer, Ilya Ehrenburg, is certainly “assimilated” from many a viewpoint. He does not know Yiddish, has not been connected with any Jewish activities since the war (when he was a member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow). He is a Soviet writer, writing in Russian. Still he openly proclaimed in his autobiography, as well as when he was awarded the Order of Lenin on his 70th birthday in 1961 and on many other occasions, that as long as there will be “one anti-Semite” in the world, he will publicly state: “*I am a Jew.*” In an article in *Pravda* in September 1948—an article of a certain fame, for many a reason—he stated that there is no connection between a Jew in Tunisia and a Jew in Chicago, if not for the fact that there is anti-Semitism in the world.

Well, there *is* still anti-Semitism—so there is still a relationship between such “unrelated” Jews as those in Tunisia and in Chicago. It goes without saying that there is a closer community of interests among Jews in Chicago or in the USA generally, as well as between American Jews and Jews in Canada and other countries in the Western hemisphere, in West and East Europe, Israel, etc. But anti-Semit-

ism—and that includes remnants of it in the socialist countries (and Ehrenburg, as I imagine, has in mind remnants in the USSR)—is by far not the only element making for national consciousness. There is *Jewish culture* in Yiddish, Hebrew, English, Russian and other languages, and the *history* of the Jewish people that binds large sections of the Jewish masses together, a history of suffering, martyrdom and struggles. There is *tradition*, customs, a way of life, family relations between Jews—say, between Jews in the USA and various countries abroad. *Religion* is still a force that binds together Jews of various countries. Israel also plays a role among large sections of the Jewish people. There are *many* elements playing a role! The Hitlerite extermination of six million Jews, the untold suffering of the Jewish people during World War II, the pride Jews take in such things as the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto and the heroic struggles against nazism generally, all these and other elements result in national consciousness, national pride, or just bind Jews together. Delegations from Jewish communities in 18 countries were present at the ceremonies at Auschwitz in January of 1965.

These are the hard facts of life which Jewish progressives must take into account if they are not nihilists, if they want to fulfill their role in the Jewish community. Otherwise, they *forfeit* their role and make it easier for the nationalists to exert *their* influence.

Assimilation—Trend or Policy?

As stated above, there certainly *is* some assimilation—but I am not going to join the Zionists in sounding the alarm because of that. However, here I wish to make it clear, that I have in mind assimilation as a *trend*, not as a *policy*. There is a big difference between the two.

When Lenin was chiding the leaders of the Bund for their fear of assimilation, he meant—fear of a *trend*. The *policy* he pursued was—full equality, all guarantees for the development of national cultures at the expense of the government. This he stressed in his polemics in 1913, this he put *into effect* after the October Revolution, full equality, the fullest assistance. And he was fighting the “premature amalgamationists,” or policy-assimilationists, as seen from his “*Left-Wing Communism*.”

I know of no Marxist party having a clause in its program calling for the dissolution of nationalities, or for assimilation. Quite the contrary, wherever the national question is dealt with programatically, the policy is one of full equality, of equal opportunities for all cultures, and of the stronger national culture helping the weaker.

A *policy* of assimilation already smacks of *forced* assimilation. Where

such policy-makers have not as yet obtained state power, they tend to spread nihilism, to discourage progressive cultural and other activities in the Jewish community. They are a *divisive* element hampering the struggle for unity among the Jewish people—unity against war and fascism, against anti-Semitism and all racism, for civil rights. With the exception of the American Council for Judaism, a big bourgeois outfit, there is not a segment in the Jewish community of the U.S.A., including progressives, who are not opposed to assimilationist *policies*.

Some people may think that there is something progressive in a policy of assimilation. Is that idea correct? Let us see. The American Council for Judaism *is* for assimilation. Throughout generations it was the Jewish *bourgeoisie* who was “solving” the Jewish question by assimilation. The proletarian poets mentioned above, who were internationalists, including an outstanding progressive like M. J. Olgin, one of the founders of the *Morning Freiheit* and its editor for many years, were *not* assimilationists. In the old Socialist Party of the USA the *opportunists*, like Abraham Cahan and others, were for assimilation. It follows from these “peculiar” *facts* that the mere adherence to a policy of assimilation, does not, *ipso facto*, turn one into a progressive, or an opponent of bourgeois nationalism. Some “premature amalgamationists” against whom Lenin warned, *play* into the hands of the bourgeois nationalists by spreading nihilism among progressives. Aside from these very important considerations, one must avoid assimilationist slogans for tactical reasons, as well. It is not new that for the sake of unity, certain slogans, even correct ones, are not placed on the order of business at the present moment. Certainly, socialism is a much closer reality than the amalgamation of nationalities. Still the slogan of socialism is *not* put forward if it stands in the way of unity for immediate aims.

Assimilationist theories on the part of Marxists can only influence certain elements among the nationalities to reject socialism, since they might mistakenly conclude that socialism eliminates national culture—which is wrong, of course, when one remembers what Lenin wrote and *did* after 1917.

What Is Forced Assimilation?

A word is in order here, I think, on forced assimilation—and one may express some hope that all progressives are really opposed to that. What *is* forced assimilation? How is one forced to assimilate—by edict, by the threat of punishment if he does not do so? There were such forms of assimilation, too, in the history of the Jewish people—in Spain, for instance, during the Inquisition. Nowadays, however,

forced assimilation is a more subtle matter (though at times not so subtle, either). It is done more by “omission” than by “commission.” If, for instance, New York Jews who want to teach their children Yiddish are not given government assistance—the use of school buildings, teachers, at government expense, or if they are unable to get textbooks, they are the victims of a certain form of forced assimilation. Then, there is a “subtle” form of pressure, of conformity. There is the Anglo-Saxon imperialism in the cultural field which looks down upon the cultures of the nationalities as upon something inferior. All this constitutes a form of forced assimilation.

Voluntary assimilation, whether under capitalism or under socialism, is possible only under *complete equality*. It is possible only if the Jewish nationality is offered the same opportunities as other nationalities to have schools, newspapers, publishing houses, theaters, scientific institutes, etc.—*everything* other nationalities have, *everything* the *leading* nationality in the country possesses. Without such complete equality there can be no talk of voluntary assimilation. No amount of rationalizing will help. Even if there is no direct suppression of Jewish cultural institutions (newspapers, theaters, choruses, dramatic groups, etc.) the mere fact that such institutions are not assisted by the government, while institutions of other nationalities *are* assisted, constitutes forced assimilation. And certainly, when no textbooks can be obtained, not even an alphabet to teach children the language of the nationality, it is a clear case of forced assimilation.

The Draft Resolution (which has my fullest support) correctly looks forward to the “full restoration of the administratively suppressed Jewish cultural institutions” in the USSR in the days of the “cult.” But one comes across Marxists who tell you that in the USSR the process of the merging of nationalities is already under way. Is that a correct approach? I wonder. I read the report of L. Sobolev to the convention of the Writers’ Union of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), containing the statement that the number of literatures in non-Russian languages had *increased* during 1958-1964, from 48 to 56 (*Pravda*, March 4, 1965). How come?

As a matter of fact, one finds a certain *nationalistic* development in some parts of the Soviet Union, in spite of a general policy of friendship between the nationalities and in spite of *many accomplishments* of this policy. (There is also some nationalism among Soviet Jews because the synagogue is the only institution for mass activities while institutions for progressive Jewish activities—newspapers, clubs, publishing houses, state theaters, etc. have not been reestablished as yet, —although the magazine *Heimland*, the publication of some Yiddish

books, Yiddish concerts, are welcome signs of progress in this field.) There is no question that Palmiro Togliatti was correct when he stated in the memorandum prepared by him shortly before his death:

A fact worrying us, and one we do not succeed in explaining fully, is the manifestation among the socialist countries of a centrifugal tendency. In this lies an evident and serious danger with which the Soviet comrades should concern themselves. Without doubt there is a revival of nationalism. However, we know that the national sentiment remains a permanent factor in the working class and socialist movement for a long period, also after the conquest of power. Economic progress does not dispel this, it nurtures it. Also in the socialist camp perhaps (I underline this "perhaps" because many concrete facts are unknown to us) one needs to be on one's guard against the forced exterior uniformity and one must consider that the unity one ought to establish and maintain lies in the diversity and full autonomy of the individual countries! (*Political Affairs*, October 1964.)

We are dealing here with a very serious and very complicated problem. There must be no simplification and no glossing over. There is no question that there is need for a *broad theoretical evaluation of the national and colonial question*, not based on conditions prior to World War I (strange as it may seem, to put it mildly), but on conditions existing in 1966, taking into consideration what transpired after the October Revolution, during and after World Wars I and II, and as a result of the historic upsurge of the nations and nationalities in Asia and Africa, etc., etc. Some struggles in India (language struggles, for instance), or in British Guiana where the Jagan forces rely on certain nationalities or races, just to cite a few examples, must be better understood. This is a big order, of course, but I do not see how a broad theoretical evaluation of the national and colonial question, in the light of *present-day realities*, both under capitalism and under socialism, can be much longer delayed.

In my article in *Political Affairs*, I tried to merely touch upon a neglected problem here in the USA—the nationalities' or national groups' problems, including the Jewish problem. I am fully convinced of the correctness of my statement in that article that "the correlation between proletarian internationalism and the struggle for national interests represents one of the most important and most delicate problems before the Marxist movement."

Yiddish Culture in West and East*

Often when anti-Soviet propagandists assert that today Yiddish culture is in a serious plight in the Soviet Union and that soon the Soviet Jews will be without a literature and language, they appear to try to leave the impression that conversely in the West, the Yiddish language and literature are flourishing. Actually the reverse is true. Yiddish literature is at a very low ebb in the USA and is virtually extinct in Britain, but in the Soviet Union there is still considerable creative activity in the Yiddish language. According to the 1959 Soviet census returns 470,000 out of the 2,700,000 Jews declared their mother tongue to be Yiddish, probably a higher percentage than in any other country in the world, including the USA which has the world's largest Jewish population, over 5,500,000.

Yiddish, a younger language than Hebrew which goes back to antiquity, was derived from Middle High German between the 10th and 12th centuries and after the Jewish migration eastward to Poland and Russia, was mostly spoken in Eastern Europe where it was enriched by new words and word formations. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries when millions of Eastern European Jews migrated to the USA, Britain, and almost every other country in the world where civic and educational equality existed, Yiddish continued to be spoken by the migrants but declined as their children acquired the new languages and became integrated into the life of the new countries. In none of the countries of migration has Yiddish blossomed forth into works of prose, poetry and drama to the extent that it did in Russia and still does.

It is not surprising, of course, for modern Yiddish literature was born in the mid-19th century in Tsarist Russia in which lived nearly 50 per cent of the total Jewish population of the world at that time. Yiddish cultural expression grew up in the Pale of Settlement, that vast ghetto set up in 1835 by Nicholas I, in parts of Byelorussia and the Ukraine, in which most of the Jews were compelled to live. The majority of Jews engaged in petty commercial pursuits and lived in indescribable poverty. They had their own distinctive language, Yiddish; their own costumes, customs and religion; were denied entry into Russian schools and universities, and had even fewer political

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