

ZIONISM AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL: III

By Moses Miller

AN analysis of Jewish status from a Marxist standpoint demands that we first place the question in the framework of the tendencies now manifesting themselves in Jewish life. Otherwise we should be discussing the problem in a vacuum and our analysis might be interpreted as an abstract and dogmatic set of propositions, rather than the living and vital theory that the Marxist view of the Jews really is. Nor can the ideological scene today be grasped fully without a glimpse of several leading interpretations of Jewish history in which these ideologies are rooted.

Serious discussions are going on today within the American Jewish community as to the status and outlook of the Jewish people. These discussions are an outcome of the experiences of the Jewish people since the rise of Hitlerism and particularly of the emergence of the state of Israel. On the one hand, there is a growing uneasiness on the part of many Jews as to the validity of concepts which they had previously accepted unquestioningly. On the other hand, we are witnessing an attempt by certain bourgeois ideological and political leaders of the Jewish community to reinterpret Jewish history and status in such a way as to assure their own continued influence and hegemony over the Jewish masses.

Those who follow the Jewish press are aware that a controversy has been raging regarding the future of the Zionist movement in terms of the relationship of Jewish communities to the state of Israel. Some Jewish leaders, including some Zionists, insist that the Zionist movement has fulfilled its function and should now bow itself gracefully out of existence. However, the majority of Zionist leaders insist that the Zionist movement is needed now more than ever. The American Jewish community, they insist, must be "Zionised." Exactly what this implies, even the Zionists have found difficult to explain. Does it mean support of Israel? But most American Jews are doing that, whether they are Zionist or not.

Control Through Illusions

Though the Zionist leadership is in a dilemma, one thing is clear. This leadership is fighting tenaciously for political control of the Jewish community. While the nature of Zionism as a political ideology was obscured to some people by its philanthropic and humanitarian appeal, its real political character emerges quite clearly now that Israel is a reality. Zionist leadership is not content to greet the creation of Israel, to mobilize support for it and to acknowledge that each Jewish community will still have to solve its own problems within the framework of the economic, political and social problems in its own country. Zionist leadership is insisting that Israel is the center around

which all Jewish communities must revolve; that Israel is the answer to Jewish problems everywhere.

The fantastic illusions that some Zionists are today to spread in order to bolster their own ideological position are evidenced in a recent article by Eliahu ben Horin in the *New Palestine* (organ of the Zionist Organization of America) of May 12. In an article, "Israel: Remedy for Anti-Semitism," ben Horin writes: "Jewish minorities are no longer as defenseless as they were in the past. Whatever prestige and influence Israel will possess, would be available for the defense of Jewish rights. Anti-Semitic governments may be mindful of complications on the international scene if they allow Jew-hatred to blossom. . . ."

"The very fact of Israel's existence on God's earth is bound not only to discourage anti-Semites but also to encourage the Jews greatly. A Jew in Brooklyn or in Buenos Aires, reading at breakfast a dispatch about the session of the Israeli parliament instead of a gruesome story about the latest anti-Semitic outbreak, will find it a refreshing change. Reports about President Truman entertaining President Weizmann, or about the flag of Israel flying over Blair House or at Flushing Meadows are a new source of pride for the Jews everywhere. They give the Jews the feeling of normalcy and equality.

"Israel may yet do wonders for the Jew, for his sense of security and for his relations with the non-Jewish world. This, in turn, may prove to be the best psychological cure for anti-Semitism."

This is not only nonsense. It is dangerous nonsense. No one will deny that Jews take pride in seeing Israel become a full fledged member of the UN and that its flag flies over Flushing Meadows. But it is madness to disarm a people and fill it with illusions that the state of Israel can solve the problems of anti-Semitism and discrimination everywhere. Without making a lengthy analysis of the question at this point, it should suffice to ask oneself if the "independence" of India will solve the problems of the Indian minority in South Africa; if the existence of a Mexican nation solves the problems of the Mexican community in the United States; or if an independent Puerto Rico would solve the problems of Puerto Ricans in the United States. Ben Horin has reduced the problem of anti-Semitism to an absurdity; he has brushed aside the very real dangers of race-hatred and anti-Semitism growing out of basic economic, political and social problems in each country. His romanticism is as dangerous as it is foolhardy.

Other Zionist leaders offer different reasons for the continuation of the Zionist movement. Some for example, are aware that increasing numbers will question the need of a separate Zionist movement, if support of Israel is its only *raison d'être*. They have therefore begun to propagate the

idea of *haluziut*, of the need for American Jewry to prepare for its own exodus to Israel. Even Ben Gurion, Prime Minister of Israel, has announced, though in guarded tones: "Our cultural forces have been destroyed; and there remains, in fact, only one Jewry intact in life and property—American Jewry, from Canada to Chile. But it is not to be expected that that Jewry will come to this country in masses during the next few years, *although I am sure that it will come eventually.*"¹

Back to the Synagogue

We shall return later in this series to this current in Jewish life. Here, however, we shall go into another new trend, which received representative expression in a series of articles published in the *Menorah Journal* during the past year. This is another type of attempt to resolve the problem of status of Jewish communities outside of Israel and of their relationship to Israel. The position can briefly be indicated by a quotation from an article, "Toward a Noble Community," by Henry Hurwitz, *Menorah Journal* editor. Says Hurwitz in the Autumn 1948 issue: "There are some extreme Zionists who look upon American Jews as 'expendable.' Though domiciled here, they neither see nor desire any future for Judaism in America. In their view, the only use of American Jews is to provide the financial resources to Israel—through the United Jewish Appeal, through loans and investments—and to exercise all possible political pressure upon the United States government, upon congressmen and voters, in behalf of Israel. As soon as Israel is strong enough to dispense with American funds and political influence, according to this belief, American Jews will no longer be necessary and need not survive. Such Zionists are, in effect, colonials of Israel.

"Most Zionists are far from taking this view. However, if the utterances of their political leaders and intellectuals are a true indication, they propose not to liquidate American Jewry, but to make it a permanent cultural dependency of Israel. What else can be the meaning of their talk about 'Zionizing' American Judaism, directing all Jewish education in America, and seizing control of the whole community, its agencies, organizations, institutions?"

"From this program too, when its full implications are realized, the vast majority of American Jews will recoil. The vast majority include not only the anti-Zionists, many of whom are now giving their support to Israel for humanitarian motives. They include also most of the Zionists themselves who, however ardent their love for Zion and their desire to help Israel grow and flourish, will reject any move by Israel's government and the world Zionist leaders to control or improperly influence American Jewish life. . . .

"Level-headed Zionists who are concerned for their children's future in America—who in fact are first and last Americans, however fervid their hopes for the success of Israel—will realize that the center of their Jewish life must be, not in any land overseas however dear, but in America itself."

¹ Speech before the Israeli Labor Party, Feb. 1949. Emphasis mine.

Hurwitz's article is an example of the type of thinking that is prevalent in far broader circles, including the Zionists, than some may at first blush imagine. But what answer do Hurwitz and practically all other *Menorah Journal* writers offer? They maintain that the Jews are not a nation or even a nationality but a *religious group* whose orientation and program must be directed toward the revitalization of religion as the center of Jewish life and activity. But these writers recognize that it is not enough merely to assert the primacy of religion in Jewish life. They must bolster up this thesis with an analysis of Jewish history proving that the Jewish people throughout the ages were basically a religious community, that religion acted as the unifying force of the people and that only thus can we account for the survival of the Jews. This view is shared by many writers.

The concept of the Jewish people as a religious group is not new. From ancient times down to the nineteenth century the religious or theistic concept of Jewish history reigned supreme. Despite modifications and variations and subtle theological differences introduced from age to age, all Jewish historians believed that a divine power guides the destinies of men, that God's will determined the course of human history. The task of the Jewish people was therefore to proclaim the glory of God. All Jewish history could be understood in terms of moral and religious behavior.

Many who reject the fundamental tenets of Zionism are turning to this concept of Jewish status. True, they use much sugar coating and modern sociological terms to make the concept more palatable. "Hence," says Hurwitz in the article cited above, "it is the religious sanction of Jewish life which is paramount; that is the common cause of all of us who want Judaism to flourish in America. . . . This way lies the true Jewish future in America—that all of us throughout the country who regard religion, broadly conceived in the comprehensive classic Jewish sense, as the sole justification of *organized* Jewish life in America should now withdraw from the secular bodies and concentrate on a religious reorientation and reorganization of all legitimate Jewish interests. This can be done only on the basis of the Synagogue."

Haskalah Historians

This theistic interpretation of Jewish history and status now being revived, underwent some modification and even revision in the nineteenth century. The theories devised in the early part of the nineteenth century by a school of historiography known as *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (science of Judaism) was basically an extension of the idealistic interpretation. That is, these writers held that the ideas of men, whether supernatural or naturalistic in character, have an independent existence and do not depend upon the material conditions of social life. Associated with this school were such men as Leopold Zunz, Solomon Judah Rapoport, Nahman Krochmal, Samuel David Luzzatto and Heinrich Graetz. Representatives of this school

were in the main German Jews, although a few Galician and Austrian Jews adhered to it.

This school is a product of the Haskalah (enlightenment) movement in Jewish life and is the counterpart of the general enlightenment movement that developed in Western Europe during the eighteenth century. (We shall discuss the Haskalah movement more fully in a future article.) But there was one important difference between the Jewish and general enlightenment movements. While the latter doubted religion itself, the Jewish enlighteners were much more conservative, for they never broke with religion itself, although they carried on a fight against mysticism, dogmatism and Hasidism. The rise of capitalism and its penetration into Jewish life made necessary a modification of ideologies previously held. When emancipation came to the Jewish people in western Europe in the nineteenth century, a new bourgeoisie had begun to arise in Jewish life. This development made it necessary for the Jews to adapt their ideological concepts to the new social and economic status. The problems of this rising bourgeoisie, emerging slowly out of the ghetto and confronted with the difficulties of integrating itself into the general bourgeoisie, gave rise to a rationalism which was at once more conservative and less willing to break with the past than the general European enlightenment.

Hence we find the Haskalah seeking to reformulate its concepts of Jewish life more in the spirit and philosophy of the age. The general enlightenment had engendered a critical approach to history, to Biblical criticism and to critiques of metaphysical concepts of religion. Reformulation of religious beliefs in Jewish life became inevitable. This new school developed the theory of the Jewish "mission." "God scattered us over the world . . . to be both pupil and teacher," writes Rapoport in a letter to Luzzatto. According to this concept, God was still very much present. But it is the "spirit of Judaism" rather than God that becomes the driving force of Jewish history. Jewish history was then interpreted as the gradual advance and development of the "spirit of Judaism" under differing conditions throughout the ages.

There were minor differences in the approach of the various members of this school, but basically their definition of the Jew was that of a *Volksstamm*. This meant that, while the Jewish people were an integral part of the nations in whose midst they lived in terms of language and culture, the Jewish people constituted an international entity bound together by religion and history.

Nationalistic View of History

It is not surprising, therefore, to find in the work of Heinrich Graetz, the great historian of the Jews, little treatment of the actual conditions, of the specific and concrete economic development of the Jewish people at each stage of history in each given country. Jewish history, for Graetz, is a record of Jewish martyrdom and an account of the making of spiritual weapons which, in his view, enabled the Jew to survive. History became a glorification

of the Jewish spirit, which flourished in all ages and had a special destiny to fulfill.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the nationalistic interpretation of Jewish history was advanced in the work of Simon Dubnow and Ahad Haam. We showed in our first article how this school maintained that the Jewish people constituted a nation bound together by a common culture and common historical destiny. This school broke with the religious interpretation of history, although it considered religion an important and integral part of Jewish development. For this school Jewish nationalism is a secular process. "I can adopt," says Ahad Haam, "even that scientific heresy which goes by the name of Darwin without any danger to my Judaism" (*Selected Essays*, p. 194).

Fundamentally, the interpretation of history of this school remains idealistic. Jewish history becomes for it a working out of the "national will" of the Jewish people throughout the ages, with little or no recognition of the relationship between the economic, social and political processes of the countries and the consciousness of the peoples in whose midst the Jews dwelt. Struggles within Jewish life are depicted either as conflicts of a religious character or as a struggle between national and assimilationist forces. Ahad Haam particularly stressed his theory of the "innate will to live" which led him to consider Jewish development in terms of the various spiritual weapons which Jews had forged in order to guard against assimilation. He held that the Jews had a special and unique character, culture and religion, which account for their survival. Dubnow, who was aware that his definition did not correspond to the attributes which are obviously present in other nations, proceeded to develop his own theory of Jewish exceptionalism by arguing that, while all other nations constitute political entities, the Jewish people constitute a nation by virtue of spiritual-cultural and historical, rather than political factors.

A "Unique" People

What emerges from even a superficial analysis of both the religious and the nationalistic interpretation of Jewish status and history is, that under these theories the laws which govern Jewish history are different from those general social laws by which all other peoples live. The Jews are conceived as a "chosen people" whose course of development is unlike that of any other people and not subject to a rational analysis.

To the advocates of "national will," as well as to the religious school, Jews erected a wall about themselves by creating the Torah, the commandments, the Talmud and the whole religio-cultural structure with which they fenced themselves off from the surrounding world. By the ensuing isolation the Jews helped to save themselves from extinction. But how does this theory jibe with practice? In the first place, it is a fact that many Jewish communities were *not* isolated. Many Jewish communities in ancient, medieval and modern times shared in the general cultural

developments of the countries in which they lived. This was the case in ancient times in Hellenistic Egypt, which was historically the most important Jewish community outside of Palestine up to a few centuries ago. According to the estimate of Philo this Egyptian Jewish community numbered approximately a quarter of a million. Nor did the Jewish communities of medieval Spain or southern France and Italy live an isolated life. There are many more such integrated Jewish communities in modern times.

It is particularly difficult for this school to explain the assimilation and disappearance of a number of Jewish communities from the face of the earth in every single period of human history. If the "spirit of Judaism" or the "national will" were responsible for Jewish survival, why did Jewish communities like those of Hellenistic Egypt, of Babylonia, of Southern Italy—all of them large and important Jewish communities—become assimilated and disappear? Or for that matter, how can we account for the rise of the Haskalah and of nationalism, which emerged with a secular outlook and thus helped to undermine the religious concept in Jewish life and began to establish the basis of Jewish existence on non-religious grounds?

Sachar's Defective Method

One would imagine that all of these obvious contradictions would lead Jewish historians to seek answers in an analysis of the socio-economic conditions of Jews in each age. Yet such is not the case. Such historians do indeed pay much lip service to socio-economic conditions. Take for example, the *History of the Jews* by Abram Leon Sachar, a leading contemporary Jewish historian. In his introduction Sachar writes: "Too many scholars, strangely uninfluenced by the revolution wrought in modern historical writing . . . continue to grind out their tales almost exclusively in terms of religious and philosophical phenomena. I have not neglected these factors. . . . But I have not permitted them to crowd out the account of the life and labor of the multitude, the development of social institutions, the rise of modern capitalism, the impact of science and Darwinism upon the Jewish outlook, the creation of trade unions and their effect upon social life. . . ."

"The interpenetration of Jewish and European history also needs constant emphasis, else one's view of Jewish history is distorted."

This is indeed a promising note. Yet nowhere is it fulfilled. The role of the trade unions in recent Jewish history is limited to exactly one page and part of that is devoted to eulogising Samuel Gompers as the exemplary trade union leader. Of the role of Jews in the great revolutionary movements in Russia there is not a single word. No mention is even made of the great school of progressive and proletarian Yiddish writers.

Sachar accounts for the persecution of the Jews during the 14th century and particularly during the period of the terror of the Black Death by "the rumor spread that the cursed Jews had done it all . . . by poisoning the wells, the food, the very air" (p. 201). The persecution stops be-

cause "at last pity came back to human hearts, and the orgy of bloodshed ended" (p. 201). The author concludes: "One wonders how flesh and blood could survive such trials; not years, not decades, but centuries of unremitting woe, and more to follow. *The Jew, however, seemed to have remarkable powers of adjustment*" (page 203. Emphasis mine—M.M.). No explanation of these "remarkable powers" is offered.

This sort of historical explanation, which in reality explains nothing, is particularly deficient when Sachar attempts to explain Jewish life in the eighteenth century, "the age of rationalism," in his chapter on "The End of the Jewish Middle Ages." After pointing out that in the Middle Ages "Jews were everywhere sunk in superstition; learning had decayed . . ." Sachar goes on: "Yet the spark of life had not been completely extinguished. It smoldered in the very heart of the dry-rot. And at last . . . three magnificent characters appeared to give it strength and to guide Judaism out of the cave of death. Israel of Moldavia (known as the Baal Shem, founder of Hassidism—M.M.) . . . created a warm, emotional faith which brought new life to thousands of neglected souls in eastern Europe. Elijah, the venerable sage of Vilna, revitalized Talmudic studies, destroying the old intolerable hair splitting which had reduced it to a gibberish. Moses Mendelssohn, one of the most lovable figures of the eighteenth century, restored self-respect to the Jews and ushered them into the intellectual and aesthetic life of the European world. The trio, each appealing to a different element, at length closed the dreary Jewish Middle Ages . . ." (p. 263).

Here is a perfect example of the blind alley into which the idealistic interpretation of history must lead. Since Sachar does not explain why rationalism emerged only in the eighteenth century, he blunders into presenting three figures of this era as a trinity, when in fact they constituted three conflicting viewpoints. For not all three were leading the Jews out of the Middle Ages. As a matter of fact, only Mendelssohn, representative of the new bourgeoisie arising in Jewish life, and the whole Haskalah (enlightenment) movement of which he was a part, helped to bring the Jews out of the ghetto. Having failed to probe the material conditions and the new relations into which men of the eighteenth century were entering upon, Sachar could hardly see, let alone explain, the ferment that these influences were creating in men's minds and the resultant revolution in men's outlooks and philosophy entailed thereby. Nor can Sachar explain why Mendelssohn, the enlightener, should arise in western Europe; or why Israel of Moldavia, the mystic, should arise in Eastern Europe.

From this analysis it should be clear that the idealistic interpretation, basing itself either on a "supernatural" will or a "national" will, cannot resolve the problems of Jewish history or help us to determine the status of Jews today. We can realize a sound approach only if we analyze the material conditions which determined the social movement of each Jewish community and the ideas arising out of those conditions.

(To be continued.)