

Some Comments on Comrade Erber's Proposed Resolution

on the Jewish Question

(This is my very hurried reaction to the Erber document. I was hoping that a resolution or statement would be put out by the political committee in sufficient time for me to get together with several comrades, and to discuss it, and if necessary to issue a separate document. There is no time to do this now, because the convention begins tomorrow and thus shuts off any opportunity for pre-convention discussion on the subject. I must introduce my criticism with this note because what follows is incompletely thought out, there are probably important aspects of the problem which do not occur to me at the moment because I am thinking hurriedly. But I hope these comments of mine will help widen the discussion.)

In my opinion, the Erber resolution on the Jewish question does not form a basis for initiating a discussion in the party. Rank and file members necessarily depend on the leadership for thorough research, for expert political analysis of the change in events, for a detailed program of immediate slogans and tasks, etc. before they can even begin to consider whether or not they agree with the political conclusions reached. It is not to be expected that each individual comrade will do this thorough job on his own. The Erber resolution is inadequate in all the things mentioned. Comrades cannot be expected to do anything more than nod "yes" to such a resolution and to go home no wiser. The ground has not been laid for a thorough understanding of what is new in the Jewish situation, particularly since the party has almost completely ignored this problem since its founding. The Erber document is obviously an attempt to brush off those comrades who insist that it is important enough to discuss and who insist that the party is missing a great opportunity for giving leadership -- and a great opportunity for winning the respect of large numbers of American Jewish workers, through drawing up a transitional program that gives the fullest and most satisfactory immediate answer to this complicated and tragic problem.

Erber's resolution is a restatement of the classical socialist position with the addition of a few words on the plight of the European Jews. But it can even be criticized from that point of view because it does not say anything about the American Jews, the largest remaining Jewish population in the world. The Erber document gives us no insight into why the European Jews think as they do today, it does not give recognition to the fact that the imminence of large scale fighting in Palestine demands of us a program of immediate slogans, the proposed resolution does not reveal any real will to intervene in this boiling situation as effectively as our forces permit us to.

Speaking from the broad historical point of view, the solution to the world Jewish question is essentially the same as it was before the war. In other words, only the realization of a socialist society can bring equality and justice to the Jews. Who in the party needs to be agitated on that score? Although Comrade Erber does not mention it in his document, I know he will agree that Palestine is not the solution for anti-Semitism in the United States. But no resolution on the Jewish question is worthy of the name if it does not make political characterization of the Jews in this country, if it does not make a bid for recruiting them into our party, if it does not warn them of the danger that threatens them because of their reliance on "liberal" anti-Semitism groups,

if it does not point out that the coming depression will victimize them to a greater extent than any other section of the American population with the possible exception of the Negroes. And no resolution that does not have a positive, concrete, transitional program on the Palestine question will gain us admission to Jewish circles in the U.S. Because Palestine is the burning issue today. As active revolutionaries rather than socialist dreamers we want an instrument that will push the Jewish labor movement toward becoming a leftward influence on the Palestine militants. Right now they constitute a pocketbook threat which the Zionists hold over the Jewish labor movement of Palestine. A section on the role of the American Jewish labor movement with respect to Palestine should also expose Zionist strategy today in the United States, which is playing off the American state department against the British foreign office. Too much bitterness is reserved for the British without a corresponding understanding of America's role in the Middle East.

question

Why didn't our party have literature on the Jewish question to distribute at the mass Zionist rallies held recently? Are we such babies that we cannot realize that when Jewish workers are burned up about the White Paper, that we must sympathize with them and show that we have something to say that is constructive? We handed out our general party leaflets at one occasion. One comrade was told to "give the leaflet to Attlee". And from my own discussions with Jewish labor Zionists I got the impression that the Trotskyist movement is noted for its cynical attitude on the Jewish question.

Why do our comrades snicker when the Jewish question comes up? I can only hazard the guess that it is because so many of our comrades (in the center) are Jewish and having joined the Workers Party, they have solved the Jewish question for themselves. But how does that prepare us to talk to masses of Jewish workers, or to talk to masses of Jewish workers, or to talk to other workers on that problem, for that matter? The long silence by the leadership encourages such a cynical attitude.

THE JEWS OF EUROPE

The Jews of Europe are the most dispossessed of a dispossessed generation. They do not have any illusions about bourgeois democracy. But neither do they look to socialism for the escape from their tragic position. That's a fact that we must face squarely. The socialist revolution didn't save them from what Hitler had in store for them, and so they have no faith that it will occur in the predictable future. The same thing is true of the general proletarian movement. Yes, but each section of the proletariat has a state apparatus, that it hopes to win over, parliamentary instruments, trade unions, etc. The Jews do not place any faith in the labor movements of their respective countries. They remember too clearly that Hitler used Poles, Ukrainians, Rumanians, Hungarians, etc. to carry out his tortures against the Jews. The experience of the Jews of Europe with the Allied governments only adds fuel to their conviction that they must have a state of their own, an army, an apparatus, etc. Assimilation proved not to be a shield for the Jews of Germany and of other countries. Every experience they have endured tends to confirm their nationalist aspirations. Is this not a change worth mentioning in a Workers Party resolution on the Jewish question? Hundreds of thousands of Jewish workers were close to the socialist movement before the war if not actually in it. The Bund was very strong in Poland. Yet these same Bundists who fought Zionism as a disruptive influence in the labor movement, feel that Zionism is the only salvation.

Our comrades do not seem to understand that Jewish nationalism has been raised to heights never before known. Most of the young people, and those older ones who have retained any interest in the struggle for a better life link their destinies with Palestine.

That does not mean that we do not make a big fuss about the slogan of "Open the doors of the United States to Jewish and all immigration". Of course we do. It is tremendously important as an expression of American working class solidarity for Jews all over the world. It is an effective way of exposing the Zionist program with its utter silence on America's shameful record on this issue. It is a means of exposing their utopian reliance on British and American favors. An American labor movement that is not afraid of admitting Jews into the United States has taken a big step forward in eradicating anti-semitism from its own ranks. It becomes more international minded, it will be drawn closer to a sympathy with colonial revolt in the Middle East, a revolt in which the Jewish problem plays a major role.

It is significant to note in connection with the heightened nationalism of the Jewish masses in Europe, that in the resistance movements, France, Poland, Holland, etc. Jews formed their own Zionist cells.

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What/ve to say to these European Jews who place Arab opposition to Jewish immigration on the same level as British opposition? Our sections in Europe, small though they are, can do a good educational job if they will take an interest in it. We must say to them that "the Arab natives are as much the victims of imperialist aggression as you are? In your case it was Germany, in their case it is the British and American empires? You cannot hope to overcome Arab opposition to immigration without linking yourself to the anti-imperialist struggle. The demand for a Jewish commonwealth as a concession from the British against the wishes of the Arabs will make your position absolutely hopeless. Your only hope of realizing a Jewish state in Palestine is through the creation of a socialist federation of Middle East Arab states? This is not immediately realizable because the Arabs do not trust you as yet, because they are not in a position to grant this demand for a host of reasons. (see below) Show your solidarity with the Arab fight and you will see how quickly Arab prejudices against Jews will melt away".

At this point, I must quote Trotsky lest I be accused of being a "Zionist apologist."

"Are we not correct in saying that a world socialist federation would have to make possible the creation of a 'Biro-Bidjan' for those Jews who wish to have their own autonomous republic as the arena for their own culture. It may be presumed that a socialist democracy will not resort to compulsory assimilation. It may well be that within two or three generations, the boundaries of an independent Jewish republic, as with many other national regions will be erased. I have neither time nor desire to meditate on this. Our descendants will know better than we what to do. I have in mind the transitional historical period when the Jewish question, as such, is still acute and demands adequate measures from a world federation of workers' states. The very same method of solving the Jewish question which under decaying capitalism has

-4-

"a Utopian and reactionary character (Zionist) will under the regime of socialist federations, take on a real and salutary meaning. This is what I wanted to point out. How can any Marxist or even any consistent democrat object to this?"

I do not raise this as an immediate slogan for trade unions, labor parties, armies, etc. It is the type of propaganda that only a genuinely revolutionary party can put forth. It represents a sharp cleavage from the line of present Zionist parties, even the most left of them. It will not alienate Arabs if it is made clear that only within the framework of a Middle East Arab federation of states can such a program be realized. The Middle East is the most underpopulated section in the world. The Arabs have a great deal to gain from Jewish colonization. The Middle East cannot hope to dig itself out of its backwardness unless western industrial techniques are introduced;—vast irrigation works, factories, commerce, schools, hospitals, etc. The opening up of the Middle East (and I don't mean by imperialist methods) to western culture helps the Arab shake off his feudal dependency. And again to quote Trotsky, the transfer of populations can under a socialist society take on a progressive character. (Arabs to purely Arab states, Jews to Palestine, or a change in boundaries, etc.)

JEWISH LABOR MOVEMENT IN PALESTINE

The Erber document has another serious failing. It does not point out the vanguard role of the Jewish labor movement in Palestine or draw concrete programmatic conclusions from it. The resolution, in fact, makes no serious attempt to analyze the various forces in Palestine today. It does not state, for example, that there is no Arab nationalist party in Palestine and that the first point in a transitional program is the building of such a party. The Mufti party (commonly used title of Arab Nationalist Party in Palestine) does not have the confidence of the masses and it does not have them enrolled in large numbers. There are a few small Arab parties that are opposition groups. But they are so small, and it is impossible to get any information on them in this country. It must be mentioned here that all the Arab groups are all united in opposition to Jewish immigration. The spokesman for the Mufti party is the Arab Higher Committee which is the Palestinian arm of the Arab League, which in turn is the creation of the British colonial office. It calls for independence from Britain only when the Jewish question is on the agenda. It has no program for the masses, it depends on paid troublemakers to carry out its line, it would sharply squelch any attempt at land reform, at achieving a popular parliamentary set-up, it will sabotage the demand for a constituent assembly, it opposes genuine Arab trade unions, and helps organize company unions—in fact the Arab Higher Committee is very closely attached to the British colonial office. It talks about independence only when it is in a bargaining mood. How can Erber's resolution mention the tasks of the Arab nationalist movement without saying that it remains to be built in Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and other backward Arab countries. In Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, etc. there are mass nationalist parties which are powerful, and they too must be won over to attitude of friendship for the Jews, but there the tasks are different.

The point I am trying to make is that you cannot raise such demands as constituent assembly without relating it to the task of building a genuine nationalist movement. Transjordan was given its "independence" by Britain.

How does that help the masses of that country? The British made a deal with Emir Abdullah whereby they secure military bases, get other exclusive rights, etc.

I would like to hear this point explained more thoroughly. Exactly where do you raise it, in what context, who is to raise it, should not this slogan be linked with some form of protection for Jewish local autonomy — which is something already in existence to a certain extent in Palestine?? I don't see how this slogan can stand by itself.

The vanguard role of the Jewish labor movement, it seems to me, is the point at which we start our transitional program. Since it is the most class conscious group in the Middle East, we, the Trotskyists must say to them: "You have built strong worker and farmer unions. Unless you organize the Arabs into these same unions, you have built your house on sand. The tractor and the plow made of a crooked branch cannot exist side by side. The misery of the Arab peasant arises from his backwardness; from the fact that he is in constant danger of losing his land to the usurer; that where he works as a sharecropper, he does not derive enough from the land owner to exist, that the civil administration is a British administration and not a Palestinian one, consequently it does not protect him against the landlords and usurers, and that the British and the landlords are in a coalition to keep him depressed. We join you in fighting for your demands, and for ours, and cease your opposition to Jewish immigration, etc. etc."

It should also be noted here that the most progressive Arab trade unions are the ones organized by the Histadruth despite the fact that they are Jim Crow unions.

Comrade Erber writes: "To the democratic demand of land to the peasant (my note— the biggest source of worry to the Arab peasant is that he keeps losing his little patch to the usurer) must be linked the transitional program of the Fourth International, as adapted to the specific conditions of Palestine.

I would like to know how we, the Workers Party, make the adaptation.

Thus the crux of my criticism of Erber's proposed resolution is that he is very hazy on everything except the establishment of a "powerful revolutionary Marxist party" in Palestine.

Fine. But don't we have something concrete to say on the problems of today and tomorrow. Is Arab-Jewish unity and constituent assembly enough?

I meant to suggest a list of slogans in accordance with the ideas outlined here, but there is no time for that now. It is not important at this moment. If the party decides that it must go into the question more thoroughly, such a program will be devised. If the party feels that it is not our job, my slogans certainly won't be necessary.

But I think we can make an important contribution to the Jewish question, one that will act as a guide to our European comrades on this question, a program that will be a beacon in the Arab-Jewish anti-imperialist struggle, a program that will win Jewish workers in the United States to our movement.

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822