

## Exploring the Parallel Between Two Movements

# ZIONISM and STALINISM

By HAL DRAPER

Perhaps it could have happened only in England.

England is the country where even Stalinist intellectuals sometimes write with a freshness and independence never seen in any other country's party-liners or fellow-travelers. Whatever it is in the English tradition of independent thinking that breeds a relative nonconformity even in monolithized movements, the same thing is true of the English Zionists.

The official organ of the British Zionists, *Jewish Observer & Middle East Review*, is edited by Jon Kimche; and in the past too it has sometimes carried material which would not have been touched by its American counterparts with a ten-foot pole. Yet it was still startling when in its May 13 number this Zionist organ published an article which set out to draw a parallel between the Zionist movement and ideology and—Stalinism.

The parallels between the two movements have often impressed themselves upon anti-Zionists, including the present writer; and as far as we are concerned, most sharply with respect to the question of attitude toward critics and opponents. No other movement that pretends to be democratic is as similar to the Stalinists in its frequent readiness to vilify the mildest critic, and to do so with a Stalinist-type formula: Where, for the Stalinist, his opponent is semi-automatically an "agent of fascism" or "agent of reaction," for the fanatical Zionist his critic is semi-automatically an "anti-Semite." (One of the latest of the phantasmagorical smear campaigns in the American Zionist press has been against Arnold Toynbee, as nothing less than an "anti-Semite," because of the viewpoint he expresses on the Israel-Arab conflict in a concluding volume of his *Study of History*.)

But this sort of thing is not at all what Michael Lewis is thinking and writing about. He is concerned precisely with the politics of Zionism, and most particularly with a parallel which goes like this: In Stalinism there is the problem of the relations between the world Communist Parties and the state apparatus of Russia; in Zionism too there is the problem of relations between a state, Israel, and the world Jewish communities.

The finding of neat parallels, in history past or current, can be a very tricky and self-deceptive pastime; but let us see how far Lewis has pushed his parallel and what he has turned up.

### Heart of the Parallel

His starting subject is "What's Happened to Zionist Ideology?" The underlying problem is one we have discussed at various times in these pages: Does Zionism have any role outside Israel, now that its state exists, other than to funnel all the "exiled" people back to their promised land as immigrants?

This suggests the first parallel to Lewis. "In some ways, despite obvious differences, world Zionism has reached a similar impasse to world Communism." It's the "negation of the negation": as communism is realized in practise, the need for communist parties naturally withers; and as Zionism is realized in practise (i.e., insofar as all Jews return to Israel), the need disappears for Zionist parties, organization, activity and theory.

At first glance, to one who is reading very rapidly, this may appear like a neat parallel, but a moment's thought shows an oversight by the parallelizer which will reveal much.

When communism is "realized in practise" in Russia (to follow Lewis' parallel), does the need for the communist parties in the rest of the world tend to disappear?

Lewis is obviously completely unaware that this question even exists in the terms of his parallel. Throughout, he slurs over the difference between the "realization" of the program and its "realization" in one country, in which latter case the need for militant parties in the other countries is not less but if anything greater.

This, of course, would completely destroy his neat parallel. For by the terms of its ideology, the Zionism of Israel—unlike genuine Marxian socialism or communism—looks to victory only in one country.

Implicitly, therefore, the communism with which Lewis is working his parallel is the national-chauvinist "Communism" of Stalin's theory of socialism-in-one-country. The movement with which Zionism is put in parallel is not, and cannot be, an internationalist communist (Marxist socialism) but only Stalinism.

Before we see where this leads us, let us note that Lewis shows in passing throughout his article that he naively accepts Stalinism in this sense. Of the "realization" of Communism "in practise," and the consequent "end [of] the need for the class struggle, for Communist ideology, and therefore for Communist and other parties," he says:

"With the rise of the Soviet Union, and now of Communist China and Eastern Europe, that stage is at least theoretically many decades nearer."

He uses more than once the typical Stalinoid apologetic phrase about the inevitable difference "between partial achievement [in Russia] and the ideal goal," with its subsumed notion that the disconcerting blemishes which one might find in the Russian system are temporary imperfections incident to transition toward the ideal.

In fact, as he goes along in the article he even explicitly mentions "the building of socialism in one country" as something which Russia was "forced" to retreat into, by disappointment over the failure of revolution in Germany. "The distortions of the original ideals of Russian Communism can be traced from this point," he explains, and it is clear that for him these regrettable "distortions" were necessary and unavoidable (Stalin's "realism").

### The Border-Guard Role

What, now, Lewis is doing in his article is paralleling present Zionist difficulties to these "distortions," i.e., to the Stalinist transformation of the revolution into national-chauvinist lines.

Thus for Stalin, the Communist Parties did indeed have to disappear as *communist parties*; they had to be transformed into border guards for the national state of the new Russian bureaucratic ruling class—parties which continued to speak in internationalist terms but which functioned decisively only in terms of "What is best for the immediate national interests of the Russian fatherland?"

But this is exactly the function which Lewis (and many other Zionists) see for the Zionist groups of the diaspora now—to do for Israel what the Stalinist parties do for Russia, most particularly, to mobilize political support for the Israeli government's aims. (Of course, the function of financial support is a special Zionist form of this role.) If Israel is attacked by an Arab foray, the Zionists and their fellow travelers must make an international scandal of it; if Israel massacres an Arab village, the Zionists must cover up, and denounce any critics as anti-Semites; etc.

This "border guard" function for the world Zionist movement is, of course, explicitly verbalized by most Zionists, and by Lewis also, although they also try to think up domestic reasons for Zionist existence. The results here are sad, including futile talk about the Zionist movements finding a home-grown function by pretending to be community activity groups. Lewis' article does not go in for this, though he winds up with a hopeful sentence about "Zionism will succeed only to the extent that it answers the needs of the different sections of world Jewry, and not only of the state of Israel." How this devoutly-wished-for consummation is to be achieved by Zionism-in-one-country is not disclosed, since Lewis' article ends right there.

### Two-Stage-Consolation

Lewis' identification of Zionism with precisely the *nationalist-chauvinism* of Stalinism is further set down in words as he writes:

"What conclusions can be deduced from this situation [conflict of interest between Israel and non-Israeli Jews], particularly in terms of contemporary Zionist ideology? The most obvious is that Zionism can only be realized in stages, and not as an uninterrupted process."

Since the whole article is cast in the form of the analogy with Stalinism, by "uninterrupted process" Lewis is of course thinking of the world-revolutionary perspective ("Permanent Revolution") which was counterposed to Stalin's nationalist counter-revolution.

The Stalinist theory of "stages" which is behind his words is this: In the first stage, the Russian state (in which The Revolution is deposited as in a safety-deposit vault, or like the caterpillar in the cocoon) grows and grows and grows, on its own nationalist-state basis, until the day when it has become so strong that (second stage) by its own sheer power it spreads The Revolution further. Indeed, we have seen Lewis' own reference to this second-stage revolution in Eastern Europe and China.

We know that what actually came out of the cocoon of Stalinism-in-one-country was not the butterfly of socialism but the slugworm of a new bureaucratic despotism which is as anti-socialist and anti-labor as it is anti-capitalist. But all this is quite alien to Lewis' thinking. He is trying to suggest that Zionism, because it is so like Stalinism, can perhaps also solve the WORLD Jewish problem in safe "second stage," but only after a first stage (the present one) in which the slogan is "Everything for Israel." This functions as a justification—a consolation—for the imperfections of the present stage.

But even within the framework of the Stalinist analogy this is plain silly. Stalinism can be spread to all countries, or be imposed on them, for it is now a type of social system, albeit one which has developed out of a nationalistically degenerated revolution against capi-

talism. But it is simply meaningless to think of "spreading" Zionism outside of Israel in any sense. The "realization of the program" of Zionism is the reverse of a spreading; it is the notorious "Ingathering of the Exiles." The consistent Zionist program for solving the problem of world Jewry is to abolish any world Jewry.

Lewis in one passage notes the difference with regard to direction ("concentrates inward" versus "spreads outward") but does not link it up with his later musings about "stages."

Here then, we have a Zionist writer who, frankly in a quandry about the impasse of his movement, turns to a sympathetic parallel with Stalinism in an effort to see a way out. He is disturbed by what the Zionist reality has turned out to be, and he reminds himself that he should not take this disturbance too seriously, or at least any more seriously than a good Stalinoid should take his qualms over the contradiction between "partial achievement" and "ideal" in the Russian reality. His practise in swallowing and rationalizing the crimes of Stalinism serve him in good stead to digest the peccadillos of Zionism.

This pattern can be seen at many points. Right after the train of thought above-noted about the "distortions" which Russia was "forced" into by socialism-in-one-country, he appends his parallel for Zionism:

"Israel, faced with Arab encirclement, and a threatened 'second round,' needs the victory of the Zionism of *aliyah* [immigration to Israel] in countries like England and the United States; but she, too, may find her original ideals and aims distorted by a lack of response and readiness on the part of Western Zionism."

Here (unrelated to the rest of the parallel, for these are just musings) the analogy of "world revolution" becomes, for Zionism, "the victory of the Zionism of *aliyah*" outside Israel. But this "victory," as we have already seen, points exclusively to the liquidation of world Jewry and not to any solution which "answers the needs of the different sections of world Jewry, and not only of the state of Israel."

Within his analogy—like all other Zionists who cannot steel themselves to accept the consistent program of "Ingathering of the Exiles"—Lewis is intellectually shuttling between lip-service to *aliyah* and efforts to establish some different kind of relationship between the State and the Movement.

### Common Ground

Yet, although his specific parallelisms break down again and again—and have to break down, since the example of Stalinism does not really offer any solution to the impasse of Zionism, which is *sui generis*—what Lewis has done is fix attention willy-nilly not on a tricky set of parallels but on a certain portion of common ground between Zionism and Stalinism.

It is a ground which is common not only to these two movements and ideologies but to others; that is true; but it is still a useful thing to highlight quite apart from "parallels."

This common ground is national-chauvinism, in the sense we have explained.

There are few things which are better guaranteed to make a Zionist boil with indignation than such a diagnosis. For the typical Zionist of the diaspora not only thinks of himself as an internationalist but is very proud of it. He is rightly scornful of the narrow bourgeois nationalism of anti-Zionists of the type represented by the American Council for Judaism. In fact, in the article by Michael Lewis under discussion here, it is "the international character of both movements" which, he says, produces the parallels he plays with.

This "internationalism" of the Zionist has a kernel of truth. The consistent American Zionist, for example, does not see politics through the nationalist lens of American (capitalist) interests, ideas and folk mythology about foreign affairs. He tends to see all politics through a different national (and nationalist) lens, the Israeli. The fact that his thinking is not tied down to, or primarily conditioned by, the nationalism of the country in which he lives, but by another country, is the basis of what he likes to think of as "internationalism."

It is obvious that the American Stalinists are just as "internationalist" in this sense, insofar as they are good Russian chauvinists (displaced geographically).

### The Exo-Nationalist Link

In this sense, too, it is correct that (as Lewis wrote) it is "the international [but not internationalist] character of both movements" which produces the parallels, such as they are. There are not many cases in the world where groups of people in many scattered countries have adopted politics which depend on an extra-national "lens" of the type we have described in.

In the case of Stalinism, we know the source of the appeal, and it is a political one. There is an extra-national "lens" effect in the case of world Catholicism, in part. There is one other appeal which has brought about this "lens" effect. It is racism. There was a quite small and embryonic example of it in the "displaced nationalism" of pro-Nazi Germans throughout the world for a period in the '30s. Yet this is hardly comparable to the "displaced nationalism" of the Zionist sector of Jewry, so great is the difference quantitatively. It is only in movements of an "international character" that this displaced nationalism can occur as a large-scale phenomenon.

Hence, although the common ground of Zionism and Stalinism is national-chauvinism, it is more specifically the displaced national-chauvinism, or—if we need to invent a technical term—the exogenous nationalism, of an internationally distributed group. This sums up what makes possible the finding of intriguing parallels between a totalitarian-political movement like Stalinism and a racist-political movement like Zionism.