

# ZIONISM AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL: V

By Moses Miller

**I**N OUR last article we indicated that knowledge of the background out of which the national question arose in Europe is necessary for a basic understanding of the problems and status of the Jewish people. We therefore analyzed the basic features of feudalism. Those which reflected the dominating position of the church were *supra-national*, while others which resulted from the isolated, self-contained nature of the manor economy were *anti-national*. We then showed how the growth of trade, the rise of the bourgeoisie and the development of the town gave rise to increasing conflict within the feudal order. This conflict initiated the process of welding peoples with all sorts of differences into nations.

"Throughout the world," writes Lenin, "the period of the final victory of capitalism over feudalism has been linked up with national movements. The economic basis of these movements is the fact that in order to achieve complete victory for commodity production the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, must have politically unified territories with a population speaking the same language, and all the obstacles to the development of this language and to its consolidation in literature must be removed. Language is the most important means of human intercourse. Unity of language and its unimpeded development are most important conditions for genuinely free and extensive commercial intercourse on a scale commensurate with modern capitalism, for a free and broad grouping of the population in all its separate classes and lastly for the establishment of close connection between the market and each and every proprietor, big or little, seller and buyer.

"Therefore the tendency of every national movement is toward the formation of national states under which these requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied."<sup>1</sup>

## ***Bourgeois Struggle for Political Power***

Thus, in the early stages of capitalism the urge of the bourgeoisie to achieve the broadest and speediest development of capitalism is the driving force in the struggle for the formation of the nation. In its quest for economic power and expansion, however, the bourgeoisie is constantly harried and restricted by the fact that the feudal lords still hold political power. In France, for example, the clergy and the feudal lords constitute the First and Second Estates, which are the ruling classes, while the bourgeoisie is lumped with the peasantry and the working class as the lowest class, the Third Estate. "What is the Third Estate?" cried Sieyes, one of its eighteenth century French leaders. "It is everything. What has it been hitherto in the political

order? Nothing! What does it desire? To be something!"

The struggle for economic power is thus transferred to the political arena. But the bourgeoisie cannot succeed in its bid for political power by itself. It needs allies in this struggle. It begins, therefore, to appeal to the other groups within the Third Estate, the peasantry and the working class. To these groups the appeal of the bourgeoisie is powerful. For in the first flush of these struggles in the days of rising capitalism, the bourgeoisie poses the question of political emancipation of all who are oppressed by feudalism. It speaks not of bourgeois rights but of human rights. It proclaims itself the champion of the "rights of man."

"Who would dare to maintain," declared Sieyes, "that the Third Estate does not possess all that is necessary to form a complete nation? It is a strong and robust man, whose one arm is still in chains. If the privileged order were removed, the nation would not be something less, but something more. So what is the Third Estate? Everything, but an everything that is fettered and oppressed. What would it be without the privileged order? Everything, but an everything that is free and prospering. Nothing can go on without it, everything would go much better without the others. . . . The Third Estate consequently embraces everybody who belongs to the nation; and everybody who does not belong to the Third Estate cannot regard himself as belonging to the nation."

Sieyes' contention that the ruling class is not part of the nation and that the defense of the nation necessitates a struggle against the ruling class is a most revolutionary concept. Sieyes here suggests a basic Marxist precept, namely, that the national question is not an independent question and can never be posed apart from the class struggle. And when one examines the rise of nations in Western Europe, one finds that the national struggle was in every case an integral part of the class struggle. The English and the Dutch nations were formed during the revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while the French nation was unified during the revolution of 1789.

## ***Limit of Bourgeois Struggle***

Most bourgeois historians and ideologists are always extremely vague in their analysis of the rise of national movements and in their definition of the nation because they are unable or are afraid to face the facts of the relationship between the development of the nation and the class struggle. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that the few bourgeois historians who have been able to achieve some understanding of this relationship, go off the track in another respect. The well known historian, Carle-

<sup>1</sup> *Rights of Nations to Self-Determination*, p. 10.

ton J. Hayes, for example, points out: "It is the bourgeoisie that start the revolutionary cry of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,' and it is this cry in the throats of the masses which sends terror to the hearts of nobles and kings. . . . Yet the triumph of the bourgeoisie is not assured. The Revolution has been but one battle in the long war between the rival aristocracies of birth and of business—a war in which the peasants and artisans now give their lives for illusory dreams of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,' now fight their feudal lords and now turn on their pretended liberators, the bourgeoisie. For already it begins to dawn on the dull masses that 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' are chiefly for their masters."<sup>2</sup>

Hayes is quite right in asserting that the struggle is essentially bourgeois and that, although the bourgeoisie proclaims liberty and equality for all, it is really concerned with achieving these rights for itself alone. The working class learns this very quickly, particularly when it takes the bourgeoisie at its word and moves on to attempt to win social equality for itself. But Hayes sees only one side of the picture. He fails to take into consideration the historic advance achieved by the working class as a result of this essentially bourgeois battle. The struggle for democracy, for the destruction of feudalism, for turning the mass of the people into free citizens of the nation rather than subjects of the feudal lord is a prerequisite for any further progress.

In addition, Hayes confuses the "patriotism" of the bourgeoisie, which is concerned mainly with the development, the unification and the growth of the nation only insofar as it serves to advance its own interests and its own profits, with the patriotism of the working class and the mass of the people who, as a result of the historic process of the formation of the nation, begin to develop love of their country and of the people with whom they have become one united national whole and of the whole cultural development flowing from their struggles. It is quite true that the working class, the "dull masses," recognize very soon that the bourgeoisie is betraying its interests. But this recognition does not lead the working class to go against the nation or to deny its validity. On the contrary, the working class begins to recognize that together with the mass of the people, it constitutes the nation and that the bourgeoisie, which in its early days was the defender of the nation, has now become the enemy of the nation. The battle to defend the nation, to maintain democratic traditions and democratic culture, now rests with the working class. Here too the national struggle is not isolated, but an integral part of the class struggle.

The process we have been describing constitutes the classic pattern for the formation of nations as they developed in all of western Europe, in France, England, Italy, Germany, etc. With but few exceptions (Ireland, for example) this process of unification, although involving the assimilation of various peoples, was a democratic one. Linguistic and cultural differences existed in every

country, as we have previously shown. But the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the ever growing unity arising out of joint struggles cause differences to tend to disappear. The people tended to become a unified mass.

### *Pattern in Eastern Europe*

The pattern we have sketched applies to western Europe. But another pattern emerged in eastern Europe. In western Europe the creation of centralized states coincides on the whole with the development of nations. Hence the typical situation in the west is that each nation takes on state power: one nation—one state. But in eastern Europe the situation was quite different. It is important to trace this development, if only in bare outline, if we are to understand why the "multi-national states of the east were the birthplace of that national oppression which gave rise to national conflicts, national movements. . . ." (Stalin.) Russia, for instance, was a vast country populated with a host of peoples of different historic backgrounds, with different cultural and linguistic traits, in varying stages of development. Some of these people still lived in a primitive patriarchal form of society while others were feudal.

Beginning approximately with the seventeenth century, Russia entered upon capitalist development, a process which had begun in most of western Europe much earlier. The growth of exchange and of commodity circulation led to the breakdown of the local, isolated markets and the gradual emergence of an all-Russian market. This process led to the formation of the Russian nation. Yet, despite the fact that the general development of capitalism in Russia followed the same general pattern as in the west, certain special conditions gave rise to important differences in the form of capitalism in Russia. Whereas in the west the developing bourgeoisie very quickly came into conflict with the feudal lords and early made its victorious bid for political power, the rising bourgeoisie in the east was far less combative. This bourgeoisie emerged when capitalism had already passed beyond its initial formative period and it feared the inevitable consequences of its bid for power more than it feared coming to terms with the feudal lords. In December 1825, the bourgeoisie had its opportunity to break the hold of the tsar and the feudal lords. The uprising which they began was well on its way to a victorious conclusion. But at the last moment, the Decembrists, as they were called, faltered and allowed the tsar to take advantage of their hesitations and thus to defeat them. One of the Decembrists, Steinheil, accounted for their reluctance to seek an alliance with the serfs, as follows: "A republic is an impossibility in Russia, and a revolution with a republic for its end would be a disaster; in Moscow alone 90,000 domestic serfs are ready to draw their knives, and the first victims would be our grandmothers, aunts and sisters." Because the bourgeoisie feared to accept the serfs as allies, feudalism remained an important political force up to the very eve of the October Revolution. But the fact that the Russian bourgeoisie (particularly the merchant class) was willing to come to terms with feudalism had

<sup>2</sup> *History of Modern Europe*, p. 594.

a profound effect upon the development of Russia, particularly in relation to the non-Russian peoples of the land.

### ***Russian Bourgeois Development***

The Russian people were strategically located most closely to the trade routes and means of communication of the time. A merchant class and trade therefore first developed among this people. But there was another important reason for this primacy. Historical circumstances, particularly the threat of invasion and the "exigencies of self-defense" (Stalin), made it necessary that a centralized state appear before feudalism was destroyed. The subsequent development of Russia was dominated by these two facts: first, that the ruling class of the emerging Russian nation already had complete control of its own state apparatus; and second, that the Russian bourgeoisie was incapable of challenging the political form of feudalism. While the western bourgeoisie eliminated feudalism in the course of the creation of a market, the Russian bourgeois drive for an all-Russian market rather led to the perpetuation of the peoples of Russia in a patriarchal-feudal status. This was the Russian bourgeois method of keeping all Russia subservient to it. This tsarist policy was so successful that many areas, particularly the border regions, remained extremely backward until the October Revolution.

Nevertheless the spread of trade and commerce inevitably had an effect upon many of the people of Russia. Consequently, as the process of capitalist development unfolded and the growth of trade proceeded, national sentiments and ties began to develop among many of the peoples. But the rising bourgeoisie in each of the various nationalities was confronted from the very start with the fact that a centralized state was already in existence, that this state was in the power of a dominant nationality, the Russian, which sought to conquer the whole of the market for itself and did not intend to share it with the bourgeoisie of the many nationalities. As much as the bourgeoisie of these subject nationalities might try to create national states and achieve independent existence, they were unable to do so. The territory in which they lived was part of the already organized Russian state. The local bourgeoisie was too weak to challenge the oppressing Russian nation with its full fledged bureaucracy, far flung state apparatus, army and police force.

We saw above how the very process of the formation of nations in western Europe was in fact one of breaking down barriers, of destroying differences and of uniting peoples into one common language and culture. This process was a democratic one. Out of it in each country emerged the creation of a single nation, the formation of a national bourgeoisie and a working class. But in Russia, Austria and Hungary the process was quite different. Here the process was not the democratic assimilation of all peoples and nationalities into one organized nation. What happened in eastern Europe was rather a process

of colonization, that is, the forcible repression of all nationalities by the dominant nationality. In Russia this was known as the policy of Russification. The dominant nation did not attempt to integrate and merge all peoples into a single nation, but rather to subjugate and enslave all peoples under its power. The dominant nation worked to prevent the emergence of a bourgeoisie among the subject nationalities so as to prevent competition. Thus the subject nationalities were forced into the condition of serving as a market for the commodities produced by the bourgeoisie of the dominant nation.

This struggle in its early phases is essentially economic, reflecting the struggle between the ruling class and the bourgeoisie of the dominant nations, on the one hand, and the oppressed nations, on the other. Before very long the struggle inevitably moves from the economic to the political level. "Limitation of freedom of movement, repression of language, limitation of franchise, restriction of schools, religious limitations, and so on are piled on to the head of the 'competitor.' . . . The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation, repressed on every hand, is stirred into movement. It appeals to its 'native folk' and begins to cry out about the 'fatherland,' claiming that its own cause is the cause of the nation as a whole. . . . Nor do the 'folk' always remain unresponsive to its appeals, they rally around its banner: the repression from above affects them also and provokes their discontent."<sup>8</sup>

### ***National Instability***

There is yet another peculiarity in eastern European development. In western Europe migratory movements reached their culmination very early in its development. Furthermore, the fixing of boundary lines and the achievement of geographic and territorial unity had also been achieved soon after the bourgeoisie gained power. The unification of peoples in western Europe despite various differences was not such a difficult process, especially since economic development operated favorably toward unification. In eastern Europe, however, the situation was quite different. Migrations continued right into the twentieth century. Borders continued to shift, thus preventing territorial stability, with the exception of the Soviet Union, up until World War II. Added to this was the fact that economic influences were deliberately exerted to frustrate unification of peoples. It is therefore understandable that the national question became extremely acute in eastern Europe.

Lenin gives us a vivid description of this problem as it existed in Russia. "Russia," he said, "is a state with a single national center—Great Russia. The Great Russians occupy a vast, uninterrupted stretch of territory, and number about 70,000,000. The specific features of this national state are, firstly, that 'alien races' (which, on the whole, form the majority of the entire population—57 per cent) inhabit the border regions. Secondly, the oppression of these alien

<sup>8</sup> Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, p. 15.

racess is much worse than in the neighboring states (and not in the European states alone). Thirdly, in a number of cases the oppressed nationalities inhabiting the border regions have compatriots across the border who enjoy greater national independence (suffice it to mention the Finns, the Swedes, the Poles, the Ukrainians and the Rumanians along the western and southern frontiers of the state). Fourthly, the development of capitalism and the general level of culture are often higher in the border regions inhabited by 'alien races' than in the center. Lastly, it is precisely in the neighboring Asiatic states that we observe incipient bourgeois revolutions and national movements, which partly affect the kindred nationalities within the borders of Russia."<sup>4</sup>

The situation in eastern Europe is thus so different from that of western Europe that one can easily see why the national question in the former should have become so troublesome. The Ukraine in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, for instance, was a feudal domain dominated by Russian princes. In the fourteenth century the country was divided. The western portion fell into the hands of Poland and the eastern part was conquered by Lithuania. Very shortly thereafter Poland and Lithuania merged and the Ukraine was once more reunited, although still a conquered territory. In the seventeenth century the Ukraine was divided again, this time half remaining with Poland and half under Russian domination.

In this case, one can see how acute a national problem would arise from a situation in which one section is cut off from another section of the same nationality. Each section naturally considers itself not as part of the nation that dominates the state within whose boundaries it lives and which constantly seeks to deprive it of its identity, but as part of that group with which it is historically, culturally and linguistically associated and with which it is constantly seeking to become reunited. Multiply this case by the dozens of such nationalities and one begins to get some notion of the tremendous problems that followed the successive annexations and expulsions of various historically developed cultural and linguistic groupings different from the dominant nation.

### ***Oppressed National Minorities***

It was thus inevitable that in the east European countries there should arise the problem of oppressed nations, that is, of peoples having a common territory, economic life, language and culture. Similarly these countries were plagued with the problem of oppressed national minorities, that is, groups of people within the boundary of a given state who are ethnically, culturally and linguistically different from the main national mass of the population.

In the case of the national state, it was the development of the national market where economic, political and strategic considerations operated, that led to the creation of natural boundaries and the delimitation of territories.

Such was not the case with these national minorities. Their territorial delimitation bore no relationship to economic and strategic considerations. The process of annexations and migrations created an ethnic crazy quilt. Peoples were arbitrarily split up, whole groups being separated from each other and very often redistributed in such fashion as to make any natural reunion impossible. Such national minorities were thus scattered islands of people having no independent economic or territorial existence but which were nevertheless separated off from the main national mass by the fact of their own language and national characteristics.

The various national minorities fall into two main categories. There are national minorities that arose as a result of being cut off or separated from their main mass which existed elsewhere in a state form. In other words, this type of national minority is a grouping stemming from a nation. This is not the only type of national minority however. For there is also that type of national minority which has, as a result of historical circumstances, developed its own language and some national characteristics. It may be an individual group having no relationship to and deriving from no other group. Or it may be a group having certain characteristics in common with groupings in other parts of the world. In either case, however, it derives from no group having its own state form.

The former category, that is, those who derive from a national mass having a state form elsewhere, are such groups as the Ukrainians in pre-war Poland or Rumania or the Magyars in Rumania. Examples of the latter type, that is, groups constituting a national minority who do not derive from a mass which has state form elsewhere, are the Catalonians and the Basques in Spain and the Jews in the Pale of tsarist Russia.

No entity, not even the nation, is a static community. And this is certainly true of the national minority, which, owing to the fact that it has but restricted and limited characteristics in common, does not have the stability even of the nation nor very often the objective possibilities and perspectives that the nation enjoys. We must also bear in mind that there are differences in perspective even with regard to the different categories of national minorities that we previously outlined. This aspect of the problem and particularly as it relates to the Jewish people will be discussed in our next article.

*(To be continued)*

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<sup>4</sup> *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, p. 22.