

PALESTINE AND THE JEWS

A Reply to Comrades Leo Lyons and Dave Jeffries

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Two articles in the SWP Internal Bulletin, October 1946 by Comrades Lyons and Jeffries, on the Jewish Question, reveal a high degree of ideological degeneration and receptivity to the ideas of Zionism. Above all, they strike at important principles of the struggles of colonies and semi-colonies and, if left unanswered, can do our movement considerable harm.

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On Free Immigration

Both Comrades Lyons and Jeffries call for unrestricted immigration into Palestine. (Incidentally the same stand was taken by Shachtman, and criticised in an article of mine reprinted a little while back in an SWP Internal Bulletin. The stand of the Shachtmanites on Zionism is but a facet of its general revisionism.) Now, this slogan might seem to be quite innocent and in order. But we cannot consider the shell of a slogan without its substance. It is possible for one and the same slogan to be progressive under certain conditions and holding a certain meaning, and also to be reactionary under other conditions, implying another meaning.

Marxists have regarded the slogan of free immigration to be progressive for three main reasons.

Firstly, because free immigration helps to break down national boundaries.

Secondly, because free immigration helps to foster internationalism among the workers and to broaden the outlook of the natives of a country when they intermingle and cooperate with the immigrants.

Thirdly, because it provides an asylum for persecuted people and peoples.

If free immigration into a particular country does not have these three effects, if, in fact, it produces directly opposite effects, then it no longer holds a progressive content but becomes a stumbling block in the path of the toilers.

Does unrestricted Jewish immigration into Palestine produce any of the above three results, justifying that it "must be championed by the entire International" (Lyons)?

Far from helping to break down national boundaries and the isolation of one national group of the toilers from another, free immigration into Palestine on the one hand alienates the Arab masses from the Jewish invaders into their home-land; and, on the other, fortifies Jewish chauvinism, isolationism. It tends to set up not a state which can live in harmony with surrounding terri-

tories, but a Jewish state which cannot but be viewed with hostility by the encircling Arab countries, and which cannot but drive the Jews more within themselves. It would be different if the Jews were to enter a free country or even a country where they could integrate themselves with the class and national struggles of the native oppressed toilers. A large number of socialist foreigners entering a bourgeois democracy can infuse their ideas into the struggles and programmes of the workers in the country to which these immigrants have come. Shachtman, in "Labor Action" has used this argument to justify Jewish immigration into Palestine. But this does not happen in most colonial countries. Take South Africa, for example. Any number of "socialist" white workers have come here. Their "socialism" speedily dissolved in the colour bar atmosphere pervading this country. Any number of "advanced" European workers have come here, and ended up in the segregationist Labour Party. White immigration into South Africa is of no assistance whatsoever to the struggles of the Non-European millions, indeed it strengthens the social base of the reaction here. As a result most Non-European organisations and people fear white immigration and regard it as retrogressive. While every foreign immigrant is a distantly potential recruit for the national liberatory movement, he is an immediate recruit for the reaction. It all depends on the forms of oppression prevailing in the given country. Here where the black worker is the slave and the white worker a "boss" -- free immigration must have this reactionary effect. It is piffle to say that the immigrants will bring their socialist ideas into the country. On the contrary, their ideas rapidly evaporate and take the shape, if anything, of "white socialism". In Palestine the situation is not very dissimilar, in this particular regard. There the Arabs are the bulk of the oppressed, driven off their land by the Jews, kept out of Jewish economic units and organisations (including "Labour" organisations). The Jewish immigrant rapidly becomes absorbed into the Jewish economy, becomes isolated from the Arabs, and feels himself bound, in self-defence, to defend "himself" (in reality Zionism).

This does not mean that the Jews have no right to a territory of their own. I am not contesting the correctness of Comrade Lyons remark that -- "the prolongation of capitalism in its declining stage forces the reconstitution of Jewry upon a territory of its own as a compelling historical tendency". This was Trotsky's own viewpoint. But Comrade Lyons falls into a fatal trap when he assumes with the Zionists, that Palestine must be this territory. Why Palestine? Why a country inhabited for ages by the Arabs, foreign to the tradition of the modern Jew, held dear only by the Biblical Jew? The majority of the Jews are not and never can be held in Palestine. Before the series of emigrations from Europe the bulk of modern Jewry were in Europe, mostly Eastern Europe. Surely any creation of a Jewish State must take place in these areas, if it is to be done? This however, raises a moot point, which it is not necessary to discuss at length here, particularly since it is inextricably linked up with the triumph of the European revolution which will solve this, and many other, national problems of this epoch, considering not only the national desires of the Jews, but the feelings of other affected national groups in these regions.

The demand for a Jewish State can only have a progressive meaning if it forms part and parcel of the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe. Otherwise it is thoroughly reactionary, the more so when attention is focussed on Palestine as the way out. To raise this demand, under capitalist conditions, with "free immigration" as the spring-board, is not only utopian but reactionary. Free immigration, with such a content, does not help to overcome national boundaries, but to create new and reactionary boundaries. It does not help to bring about internationalist cooperation between Arab and Jew but to drive Arab and Jew apart, to isolate the Jew and provoke the wrath of the Arab -- a justifiable wrath, let it be said.

The last line of defence for the slogan of free immigration into Palestine is that, at least it provides an asylum for the Jews. Comrade Lyons quotes Trotsky (quite irrelevantly) when it suits him, but conveniently forgets Trotsky's remark that Palestine is a "death-trap" for the Jews. From concentration camp into a death-trap! Is this all that Comrades Lyons and Jeffries can suggest for the Jews who went through hell under Hitler? Yet Comrade Jeffries can write:

"The Jewish worker reading our press can justifiably say: 'Well, the Zionist programme may be difficult to realize, but it is better than nothing, and that is what you have to offer.'"

This thinly veneered apology for Zionism cannot hide the facts of the hopelessness of the Jews' position in Palestine, so long as they line up behind Zionism; cannot hide the double fear of the Jews in Palestine -- of Britain and of the Arab masses, cannot hide the fact that the Jews are a mere plaything in the hands of British Imperialism, especially, a useful prop to be stiffened and knocked down as the occasion demands. Rather than go to Palestine to aid Imperialism and to instil anti-Semitism among the Arabs, it would be far better to remain in Europe and integrate themselves with the struggles of the workers of European countries. Are Cyprus and disease-infected ships, terror and martial law so much better than Europe today as to call for free immigration, even from a purely Jewish-humanitarian viewpoint?

There is no Marxist justification for the slogan of free immigration into Palestine under conditions of imperialist domination of the Middle East. It is a deceitful slogan, as far as the Jews are concerned. It shelves the demand, or obscures the demand, for opening the gates of the major powers to Jewish refugees. Any attempt to make out that Palestine is the key to the solution of the Jewish problem, any attempt to focus attention on Palestine as any kind of solution at all, is a blow at the real solution, immediate (integration with the workers where the Jews are; opening the gates of the big countries) and final (the socialist overthrow opening up opportunities for the creation, for those Jews who desire it, of a Jewish State) for the Jews themselves. Further it is a blow at the slogan of self-determination for the Arabs, and for the colonially oppressed in general.

On Self Determination

For a colonial country the struggle for self-determination is a vital one. It must not alone receive priority over the slogan of free immigration, but can even preclude this latter slogan and be damaged by it.

If the emphasis is placed on free immigration into Palestine and not on self-determination, it means that the emphasis is placed on the Jews in Palestine as the main social lever for revolutionary progress and not on the Arabs. Jewish immigration into Palestine cannot bring "socialist" or any other kind of "enlightenment" to the "backward" Arab masses, but only more suffering, humiliation, degradation -- apart from provoking anti-Semitism, apart from its boomerang character. But the Jews are not the main social force of the struggle in Palestine. The main force is the Arab, who, even in Palestine is more than twice as numerous as the Jew and who is thrice oppressed: by British Imperialism, by Zionism and by the Arab capitalists and landowners. And the main struggle in Palestine is not between Jew and British Imperialism, but between the trebly oppressed Arabs and their oppressors. The Jewish "national" (Zionist) movement is completely retrogressive as a whole (and not only a part of it as Comrade Jeffries would have us believe); the Arab national movement is fundamentally progressive and will become a revolutionary factor of great weight when the Arab proletariat, aided by the Jewish workers (on what basis we shall discuss later), leads the Arab peasants and poor in general and solves the national problem. Down with Imperialism! For self-determination! For a Constituent Assembly! These, and not free immigration are the major slogans to advance the national liberatory movement in Palestine. To the extent to which the Arab is the major social force of the Arab revolutionary national and class movement, and Zionism a major obstacle in the way of this movement, to the same extent does the slogan of self-determination exclude the slogan of free immigration.

On Zionist "Left" and "Right"

Comrade Jeffries writes:

"the Zionist IDEOLOGY can never be anti-imperialist, but . . . out of the Zionist movement, and even temporarily under Zionist leadership, there can emerge an anti-imperialist force" (This is supposed to be an attack on the sound articles of Comrade Cliff).

and Comrade Lyons says:

"The Jewish Resistance" (Haganah, according to Comrade Lyons) "represents a progressive force against British Imperialism. As such it merits revolutionary support."

and disagrees with Comrade Cliff's proposition, which Lyons words as:

"That since Zionism is an agent of British Imperialism, the Jewish national movement is essentially a force designed to oppose the Arab movement for national liberation. Therefore the Zionist movement is reactionary in its entirety."

Comrade Lyons maintains that the Zionist movement is not reactionary "in its entirety". It has, therefore, a progressive wing. For one who is close to Shachtman this is uncomfortably close to Stalinist ideas of the Zionists. This would be comical, if dialectics were not so serious.

The entire Zionist movement is reactionary -- from the Irgun Nvai Leumi and the Stern Gang to the Hashomair Hatzair. It is a reactionary ideology, and every wing, every facet of it is reactionary. The ideology, the programme, is decisive. To be sure the Hashomair Hatzair Zionists are easier converts to socialism than the fascist-Zionists. But that does not mean that they are not adherents to a reactionary movement and have to break totally with it before becoming socialists. They are a useful left-cover for the Jewish Agency and the Zionist Organisation as a whole. There is no left or right in the Zionist movement, but only a Right.

The entire Zionist movement is reactionary because it is an agency of Imperialism, and indeed would cease existing without British Imperialism. It is not made progressive by the fact that any of the Irgun, Stern or Haganah groups are waging a war of terror against the British. To take a South African example: a military war by the Nationalists, backed up by the 1½ million Afrikaner workers, against Britain, would not be progressive, because the Nationalists (White) are a reactionary force inside South Africa. Zionism, in this connection, is on a par with the Nationalism of the Afrikaners in South Afrikaner. The only usefulness of such a struggle between the Nationalists and the British would be to utilize the differences, wherever possible to press forward the struggle of the Non-Europeans, but not to support the Nationalists against the British.

The whole Zionist movement is reactionary, further, because its ideology. Because every Zionist grouping, from "right" to "left" supports and fights for the idea of a JEWISH NATIONAL HOME IN PALESTINE. And this idea is a reactionary utopia. Those Zionists who want a Jewish State in Palestine hold to this idea.

Those Zionists who call for a Jewish-Arab State (bi-Nationalism, which Comrade Lyons says we must support) hold to this idea of a Jewish State in Palestine. And those Zionists who want a Jewish State within an Arab State are also wedded to this basic tenet of Zionism. In whatever form the demand for a Jewish State in Palestine is put forward, whether exclusively Jewish, or Jewish-Arab, it remains the demand for a Jewish State in Palestine. And this demand is reactionary. Since it is held by all Zionist groupings, the whole Zionist movement is reactionary.

The reactionary nature of this demand for a Jewish State in Palestine is due to its coming into conflict with the demand and necessity for free Arab States, with self-determination and

independence; and because it serves as the main lever of British rule in Palestine. Without Zionism the divide and rule policy of Britain in Palestine would be impossible, and at any rate on the scale and with the ferocity with which it is practised today.

Not a Jewish State in Palestine. Not a Bi-National State. But a free Palestine, as part of a Federation of Free Arab Republics, with full, equal rights for minorities, including the Jews; i.e., the struggle is for independence from imperialism and not for a Jewish Home. Again, the backbone of the struggle is the Arab national movement, which only the Arab proletariat, supported by the Jewish workers, can solve.

On Arab Nationalism

Comrade Lyons uses a queer argument. He says:

"It is oversimplification to state that Jewish immigration is a force 'oppressing the Arab movement for national liberation'. As a matter of fact, Zionism was the very factor that developed Arab nationalism in Palestine. This is easy to demonstrate."

This is really ridiculous, if it is not a joke. Zionism "developed" Arab nationalism precisely because it is a "force oppressing the Arab movement for national liberation." Without it, Arab nationalism, as it exists today, would not exist. One might as well thank the capitalists for producing the proletariat. As a matter of fact Comrade Lyons turns the joke on himself when he writes a little further on:

"The development of the productive forces in Palestine by Jewish and Arab capitalists produced the phenomenon of Arab trade unions."

While both these statements are true, what point is Comrade Lyons trying to prove with them? Must we thank the Zionists for developing the Arab national movement? Must we congratulate the capitalists for producing the proletariat? What has this to do with the issue, or with anything? If it establishes anything, then it establishes the very opposite of what Comrade Lyons suggests. It shows that Zionism oppresses the Arabs and that the Arabs have reacted, *inter alia*, by means of an increased influx into Palestine (which Comrade Lyons shows with figures), and that therefore the position of the Jews has become even more untenable. The more Jews come into Palestine the more Arabs come in, and the struggle is increased in scope. Otherwise this funny argumentation proves nothing.

What is more serious and important is Comrade Lyons' patronizing, Zionist-like attitude to the Arabs. He wants to win, not the Jews to the Arab struggle, the main struggle; he wants to win the Arabs to -- Zionism, their accursed enemy! He is going to bring about Arab-Jewish unity by bribing the Arabs to accept free immigration. And the bribe is. . . the Constituent Assembly! Comrade

Lyons transforms a vital slogan into a sugar-coating for a bitter pill. But let him speak for himself:

"This slogan (Constituent Assembly) would be a powerful lever with which to win over the Arab masses (to whom? Obviously to the Zionists). . . The slogan, if adopted by the Jewish labor movement, would not only have a tremendous effect in winning over the Arab masses TO SUPPORT OF JEWISH IMMIGRATION, but. . . ." (My emphasis).

Never mind the "buts." This is a contemptible trick, to use a progressive slogan as bait for. . . "free immigration", i.e., for Zionist ambitions. The best effect of such a device would be to make still more difficult Jewish-Arab unity.

The Basis of Arab-Jewish Unity

The only basis of Arab-Jewish unity is the joint fight against imperialism. This means first of all a JOINT fight against Zionism. This means the rejection of Zionism, lock, stock and barrel by the Jewish masses. This is the main basis of the fight against imperialism. If the Jewish labour movement were to propose to the Arabs a joint struggle against Zionism, the Middle-east would flare up in revolt against imperialism. This must be the main plank on which unity can be founded. Otherwise it is impossible. The struggle against the Arab effendis is necessary to such a unity programme, but not the fundamental plank.

DOWN WITH IMPERIALISM!

DOWN WITH ZIONISM!

DOWN WITH THE LANDOWNERS!

FOR A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO CREATE A FREE PALESTINE AS PART OF A FEDERATION OF FREE ARAB REPUBLICS!

These are the slogans around which the Arab national movement will surge forward, and around which Jewish-Arab unity will be built. The question of free immigration is a Zionist red herring to lead the people away from the path of progressive struggle. It is a question which cannot be solved now, but only by a free Palestine. As a matter of fact, to raise it at this stage does incalculable damage to the cause of the Arabs, of the Jews and of Arab-Jewish unity.

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