

# On the Jewish Question

## On the Discussion and Conference

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The decision of the 18th National Convention to hold a discussion and a national conference on work among the Jewish people and the fight against anti-Semitism was motivated both by the need of a full examination of the Party's work in these areas and by the existence of differing views on a number of important questions which needed to be threshed out thoroughly. At the time it was anticipated that the discussion could be completed within the prescribed period of approximately four months, and the conference was tentatively scheduled to take place in November 1966. As the discussion got under way, however, it became clear that much more time would be required; hence it was found necessary first to consider postponing the conference to January, then to suspend judgment on a date altogether until certain points could be clarified. We believe that it is now possible to look toward further steps leading to the holding of the conference within the next few months.

The discussion has brought to the surface the main ideological differences on the Jewish question and has made evident the sharpness of the divergences on these points. In these respects we feel that it has performed a positive function. It has, however, also had negative aspects.

In the heat of the debate, tendencies toward excesses in language and toward political labelling of comrades have appeared. Such tendencies are regrettable and should be corrected. We do not believe it is proper to characterize any of the comrades involved in the debate as "bourgeois nationalists," "national chauvinists," or "anti-Soviet" on the one hand, or as "national nihilists" or "sectarians" on the other. Nor should any comrade be labelled "irresponsible." A number of problems and misunderstandings arose also from failure to give sufficient consideration to the content of the draft resolution before releasing it for discussion.

Most serious, however, is the fact that the discussion, in its concentration on the points of difference, drew attention away from those cardinal points on which there is unanimity. Among these are the alarming growth of anti-Semitism in the United States,

coupled with the upsurge of neo-Nazism and revanchism in West Germany, and the need to mount an all-out struggle against these threats to the Jewish people and to peace and democracy generally. Among these, too, is the need to combat the cold-war campaign against alleged "Soviet anti-Semitism," inspired by the State Department and Right-wing reaction. The focus of the discussion on general ideological questions has likewise served to divert us from proper consideration of the concrete problems of day-to-day work among the Jewish people and the building of progressive influence within the Jewish mass movements.

The discussion will continue, but we feel it is necessary at this point to direct our main attention to these questions, which are the key questions for development of the Party's work in this field. It is necessary to create conditions for concentrating the deliberations of the conference on the practical problems of furthering the work of the Party in the Jewish field, on elaborating the Party's position and tasks in the vital area of general agreement, and on resolving those ideological differences which prove capable of resolution, leaving those which do not for further discussion after the conference.

We believe that local meetings and discussions should be organized with this aim in view, and that on the basis of such preparations it will be possible within the next few months to hold a fruitful conference which will help ultimately to resolve ideological questions in the way in which they can best be resolved—in the course of struggle against anti-Semitism and among the masses of the Jewish people.

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A. B.

## Proposals For Improvement

The draft resolution on the Jewish question, in the writer's opinion, represents a big step forward in clarifying the Party's position on this important matter. The recognition of the significant role the Jewish community plays in many parts of the country, including practically all major centers; the positive statement on the right of Israel to exist and the recognition of the legitimate interest of American Jewry in Israel; the recognition of the existence of many problems in relation to the life of Jews in the Soviet Union—all of these are important elements in establishing a well-founded approach to the Jewish question. If accepted

and translated into daily political activity, they can go a long way toward enabling the Party to achieve a greater degree of influence.

The writer believes that the following changes and modifications would strengthen the resolution.

1. Section I (on anti-Semitism) and Section II (analysis of the American Jewish community) should be interchanged. Our approach to the Jewish question should be based on a Marxist analysis of that question and on a concrete examination of the U.S.A. Jewish community as it exists. Putting the section on anti-Semitism first feeds the attitude that the struggle against anti-Semitism is the only aspect of the Jewish question.

2. Section II does not come to grips with putting the Jewish question within the Marxist analysis of the national question. The use of the phrase "Jewish community" avoids defining the relationship between the Jews in the U.S.A. and the rest of the world. Marxists do not accept the Zionist definition of the Jews as a "world nation." However, we do recognize the existence of various ties of historical, cultural, religious and psychological nature among Jews of various countries. The strength of these ties varies in different historical periods and

from country to country. The writer believes that the use of the term "peoplehood" as used in Jewish Marxist and secularist circles comes closest to describing the status of the Jews in the world.

3. The paragraphs discussing the interlinking of the struggle against anti-Semitism with the Negro people's freedom struggle should include the need for combatting the growth of anti-Semitism among the Negroes.

4. The writer would like to propose to delete the words "in order to mislead many honest people, even some leading figures in the civil rights and peace movements" from Section IV on Soviet Jews (*Political Affairs*, August 1966, p. 32). The participation of people like Bertrand Russell in protests directed at the Soviet Union is not based on being "misled." It is based on the very real shortcomings and errors still present in the Soviet policy toward Jews, which are recognized and listed in the draft resolution.

5. Referring to Premier Kosygin's speech of August 1965 and the *Pravda* editorial of September 5, 1965 the resolution states: "These are welcome beginnings of a campaign against remnants of anti-Semitism." The writer believes that this should be revised since no campaign has developed to date (14 months later).

## Some Criticisms

I welcome the decisions of the 18th National Convention regarding the holding of a conference on work among the Jewish people and the fight against anti-Semitism, on having a pre-conference discussion, and preparing a draft resolution.

I have read the draft and I am in general agreement with it. I have several criticisms:

1) The liberal American Jewish Congress should be included in the description of important national Jewish organizations.

2) Jews are sensitive to an attack on Zionism because the attack frequently cloaks an anti-Israel or anti-Semitic attitude, or both. Within the Jewish community the most vitriolic attacker of Zionism and Israel is the American Council for Judaism, which is composed of wealthy, assimilationist Jews who are outside the mainstream of Jewish life. Hence a Jew, irrespective of his ideological position on Zionism, is generally unsympathetic to critics of Zionism.

I fear that the resolution's discussions of Communist differences with the Zionist movement on the issue of Zionism will serve only to alienate the majority of Jews—Zionist and non-Zionist alike—who agree with us on the more fundamental issues of peace, civil

rights, and the fight against anti-Semitism.

It is true that on pages 30-31 the resolution describes objectively the trends within Zionism and the possibility of our cooperation with certain Zionist leaders, individuals and groups. But unfortunately the earlier initial approach is the hostile one of linking and opposing Zionists, sections of the upper middle class, the big bourgeoisie, and Right-wing-Social-Democrats.

Must we concern ourselves with combating American Zionism at this time? As the resolution points out, American Jewish concern for Israel should not be equated with acceptance of the Zionist belief in the "ingathering of all Jews in the homeland of Israel." Zionist organizations in the United States have declined drastically in membership and influence since the establishment of the State of Israel. This has occurred because Jews generally regard the Zionist movement here as having made a notable contribution to the creation of the State of Israel, and once having done so, having lost its reason for being. Why then should we continue or resume a debate on Zionism in America that is really irrelevant to the major issues of the day, and will serve only to disunite the Jewish people and reopen old wounds of battle