

On the Jewish Question

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The Fight Against Anti-Semitism

In its opening section, the draft resolution on the Jewish question draws attention to the alarming growth of anti-Semitic propaganda and activities in our country, and calls for the mounting of an all-out struggle against this resurgent evil by all progressive and democratic forces. Communists must, of course, be in the forefront of a such a struggle.

The Marxist Approach

It is not enough, however, for Communists to resolve to do battle against anti-Semitism; no less essential is the question of *how* the fight is conducted. Communists are not alone in expressing alarm at the new upsurge of anti-Semitism. Jewish organizations of varying degrees of conservatism have also spoken out on this score, among them the American Jewish Committee, the Zionist Organization of America and the World Jewish Congress. We are for joining in struggle with all such groups. But at the same time, our view (the Marxist view) of the nature and roots of anti-Semitism and of the character of the struggle which must be waged against it is basically different from theirs.

The Marxist approach is found-

ed on recognition of the *class* roots of anti-Semitism. National oppression is an instrument of capitalist exploitation, and national chauvinism is a form of capitalist ideology designed to perpetuate that exploitation. It is a means of dividing workers, of pitting workers of differing race and nationality against one another, not only to maintain the superexploitation of the working people of oppressed nationalities but to increase the exploitation of the workers of the oppressing nation.

This finds expression in the draft resolution in these words:

Anti-Semitism has always been an instrument of reaction, of counter-revolution, of the capitalist exploiters for sowing dissension among the people and dividing the working class. The struggle against anti-Semitism has always been part of the struggle for working-class unity, for democracy, against the class forces of reaction in our society.

The fight against national oppression and discrimination in general, and against anti-Semitism in particular, is thus in essence a fight to unite the workers of *all* nationalities against the common class foe. This is epitom-

GREEK PEOPLE AGAINST U.S. IMPERIALISM

31

ized in Karl Marx's immortal slogan "Workingmen of all countries unite." The basic tie of workers of any nationality is with workers of all other nationalities, and it is from this standpoint that the working class is led to oppose *all* national oppression and discrimination without exception. This is the essence of the working-class ideology of proletarian internationalism.

Jewish Nationalism

Anti-Semitism can also be opposed from another standpoint—that of Jewish nationalism, a specific instance of bourgeois nationalism. Jewish nationalism finds the root of anti-Semitism not in capitalist exploitation but in psychological and emotional factors, and it sees the closest ties of the Jewish workers not with other workers but with other Jews, of whatever class. In part, the community of interest is attributed to a common oppression, but it goes beyond this. Nationalism attributes to Jews a common psychological and emotional makeup—a "Jewishness" — which is not shared by non-Jews, but which is a link between all Jews in all parts of the world. This leads toward concepts of a mystical, insuperable barrier which separates Jew from non-Jew, and of a "world Jewish people" bound together by their "Jewishness" regardless of cultural, ethnic or other differences. And in this view, anti-Semitism is a characteristic not of capitalism but of gentiles.

The effect of such an approach is obviously to divide workers of different nationalities, since it leads the working people of oppressed nationalities to view their oppressors as including all members of the oppressing nation, capitalists and workers alike. It leads them also to see only *their own* oppression, to regard it as an isolated phenomenon, against which they must fight alone, since no other group shares their sense of national community. Thus Stalin, in his polemics against the nationalism of the Jewish Bund in 1913, indicts it on the following grounds:

Social-Democrats strive to secure the right of *all nations* to the use of their own language. But that does not satisfy the Bund; it demands that "the right of the *Jewish* language" be fought for with "particular insistence. . . ."

Not the *general* right of all nations to use their own language, but the *particular* right of the Jewish language, Yiddish! Let the workers of the various nationalities fight *primarily* for their own language: the Jews for Jewish, the Georgians for Georgian, and so forth. (*Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, International Publishers, New York, 1934, p. 41.)

In its more extreme forms, such nationalism leads to national exclusiveness and separatism, on the grounds that national prejudice and chauvinism are inherent in human beings and hence ineradicable. It leads, moreover, to the conclusion that one must fight for one's own national interests in opposition to and even at the

expense of others. Herein lies the seeming paradox that a people which is itself subjected to persecution can in its turn persecute others (as, for example, in the case of oppression by Jews of Arabs in Israel).

In the case of the fight against anti-Semitism, Jewish nationalism leads on the one hand to regarding it as a struggle of the Jewish people alone and on the other to isolating it from all other struggles for peace and social progress. In its more extreme forms it leads to a preoccupation solely with Jewish problems and, in the form of Zionism, to the belief that anti-Semitism is eternal and that there is no escape from it other than a homeland in which Jews can live by themselves.

To be sure, bourgeois nationalism in an oppressed people (unlike the national chauvinism of their oppressors) is a two-sided phenomenon. Lenin states: "The bourgeois nationalism of every oppressed nation has a general democratic content which is directed *against* oppression, and it is this content that we *absolutely* support, strictly distinguishing it from the tendency towards one's own national exclusiveness. . . ." ("On the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," *Selected Works*, Vol. IV, pp. 266-267.)

In other words, since national oppression and discrimination are visited in one form or another on *all* classes of the oppressed nation, its bourgeoisie is also capable of fighting against it, in defense of its own interests and on the basis

of its own ideology. The fight for national freedom and full equality is thus an *all-class* struggle. However, it is one within which the class interests and ideologies of capitalists and workers come into conflict, within which the working class, as it develops, fights for its own leadership of the struggle based on its own ideology of proletarian internationalism. And while they may ally themselves with other classes in a national movement, they do not thereby adopt the ideology of these classes.

There are not two kinds of nationalism, "good" and "bad." There is only one kind, and though it may in the case of an oppressed people possess two *aspects*, it remains a *bourgeois* ideology. Lenin makes this quite plain when he says:

Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the "most just," "purest," most refined and civilized brand. In place of all forms of nationalism Marxism advances internationalism, the amalgamation of all nations in the higher unity, a unity that is growing before our eyes. . . .

The principle of nationality is historically inevitable in bourgeois society, and taking this society into account, the Marxist fully recognizes the historical legitimacy of national movements. But to prevent this recognition from becoming an apologia of nationalism, it must be strictly limited to what is progressive in such movements in order that this recognition may not lead to bourgeois ideology obscuring proletarian consciousness. ("Critical Remarks on the National Question," *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 34.)

All this, it may be said, is elementary. But it is necessary to restate it, for the struggle for an internationalist approach and against the encroachment of the ideology of bourgeois nationalism in our ranks is a never-ending one. It is especially necessary to raise these questions today because the influence of Jewish nationalism among American Jews has grown considerably since World War II, and has made marked inroads among Jewish workers. This has found expression also in progressive Jewish circles and even in the ranks of the Party itself, and is reflected in a number of ways in the text of the draft resolution.

To fight for an internationalist approach means in the first place that we must strive to base the struggle against anti-Semitism on the Jewish workers. It means, secondly, that the struggle must be one which seeks to unite the working class, Jewish and non-Jewish, Negro and white. The fight against anti-Semitism is not that of Jews alone but of *all* working people.

Of crucial importance is Jewish-Negro unity. In this connection, it is essential to understand correctly the relationship of the fight against anti-Semitism to the fight for Negro freedom. The latter is the center of all democratic struggles in our country today. on its success hinges that of all other struggles against national oppression and national discrimination, as well as the basic advancement of the interests of the working class as a whole.

To fight against anti-Semitism is to fight against the Jim Crow oppression of the Negro people. It is to fight against racism among Jews and for their far more active and wholehearted participation of Jews in the civil rights struggle. Only thus can the inroads which the purveyors of anti-Semitism have made among the Negro people be overcome. These successes are contributed to in no small measure by the prominence of Jews among the merchants and landlords who gouge the residents of Negro ghettos, by the wholesale migration of Jews to lily-white suburban communities (including a very large proportion of progressive Jews), and by the participation of Jews in organized resistance to desegregation of schools in New York and other cities.

Jewish Communists must lead in the fight among the Jewish people against price-gouging, for open occupancy in their own neighborhoods, for desegregation of schools, and against all other forms of Jim Crow. This is the true meaning of internationalism, as it applies to the struggle within our country. We shall deal later with its meaning in the struggle on a world scale.

Current Expressions of Nationalism

The encroachments of Jewish nationalism among Jewish progressives and Communists are manifested in a number of ways. Chief among these are the following:

1. An undifferentiated, non-class approach to the Jewish people. This finds expression in a concept of "Jewish community" as a basically homogeneous body possessing certain all-embracing features. The draft resolution reflects this when it says: "The Jewish community plays a noteworthy role in the fight for peace and progress." The resolution goes on to say: "There exists among the Jewish people a strong tradition of the struggle for democracy and progress which goes far back into the history of our country and continues to manifest itself today—a tradition whose roots lie primarily in the masses of the Jewish working people."

To be sure, the Jewish workers have an outstanding history of struggle for progress and socialism. But this is an attribute of Jewish workers, not of Jews as distinct from non-Jews. The Jewish people as a whole are no more progressive (or reactionary) than any other section of the American people. The Jewish community includes workers on the one hand (in the garment industry, the building trades, aircraft and other industries, retail trade, etc.), and capitalists on the other, some within top monopoly circles. There is nothing "progressive" about revivals of religious medievalism, about the reactionary position of major sections of the Jewish big bourgeoisie on U.S. foreign policy and on U.S.-Israeli relations, about the intense hostility to the Soviet Union which is all too

widely prevalent, or about the special venomousness of Jewish social-democracy. To conceive of a Jewish "community" as endowed with a special "progressiveness" is a nationalist, not a Marxist approach.

True, the resolution speaks of the class differentiation within the Jewish community and of the need to base oneself on the working class. But it also attributes to American Jews as a whole an exceptional degree of participation in the struggles for progress.

2. A concern with "Jewish identity" as something progressive in and of itself, and with its perpetuation as an end in itself. Associated with this is a rejection of the process of assimilation as something to be resisted. There are, I believe, implications of this in the draft resolution, particularly in a tendency to place emphasis on "national nihilism" as the main ideological problem rather than the upsurge of nationalism which has so clearly taken place among the Jewish people generally—not excluding the Left. In the writings of Comrade Paul Novick, including his contribution to this discussion, this emphasis is quite explicit and very sharp.

I do not propose to repeat here what I have previously written on the subject of assimilation.* I wish only to make one specific point.

*"Soviet Anti-Semitism": *A Cold-War Myth*, Political Affairs Publishers, October, 1964; "Marxism and Assimilation," *Political Affairs*, January 1965.

In his discussion article ("Nihilism, Bourgeois Nationalism and Assimilation," *Political Affairs*, October 1966) Comrade Novick says the following:

... I wish to make it clear, that I have in mind assimilation as a *trend*, not as a *policy*. There is a big difference between the two.

When Lenin was chiding the leaders of the Bund for their fear of assimilation, he meant—fear of a *trend*. The *policy* he pursued was—full equality, all guarantees for the development of national cultures at the expense of the government. . . . And he was fighting the "premature amalgamationists" or policy-assimilationists, as seen from his "*Left-Wing Communism*."

I know of no Marxist party having a clause in its program calling for the dissolution of nationalities, or for assimilation. . . .

A *policy* of assimilation already smacks of *forced* assimilation. . . .

To begin with, assimilation is not a "trend." It is an objective historical process. Just as the amalgamation of smaller economic units to form nations is characteristic of the development of capitalism from feudalism, so the amalgamation of nations and the fusion of national cultures (and with this the assimilation of national minorities) is characteristic of the evolution of a world economy and becomes increasingly pronounced in the later stages of capitalism. This is the *direction* of social development which reaches its ultimate fulfillment not under capitalism but in communist society.

If this is the case, one can no

more be "for" or "against" assimilation than one can be "for" or "against" the class struggle. One may attempt to *obstruct* the process through the promotion of national exclusiveness and isolation. Or one may seek to *force* the absorption of a national minority by deliberately depriving it of the use of its own language, abolition of its cultural institutions, etc. But this is not a policy of assimilation; it is a policy of national oppression. A "policy" of assimilation as Novick uses the term can have no other meaning than this.

But this expresses only one side of the question. If the natural course of objective development is toward the amalgamation of nations and the ultimate formation of a world community of man, it follows that to build socialism, and ultimately a communist society, is to work not only for the abolition of class distinctions but in the end also national distinctions. That Communists, in fighting for national liberation, do so not to perpetuate national distinctness but to make possible and promote the voluntary union of nations and nationalities, Lenin never tired of pointing out.

Nor did this end with Lenin. The *Program of the CPSU* (International Publishers, New York, 1963) projects a conscious policy of fostering such voluntary union. Indeed, it devotes an entire section to this question (pp. 115-119), which we can quote only in small part. After speaking of the growing intercourse between na-

tions in the USSR and of the establishment of their full equality, the Program goes on to say:

Full-scale communist construction constitutes a new stage in the development of national relations in the USSR in which the nations will draw still closer together until complete unity is achieved. The building of the material and technical basis of communism leads to still greater unity of the Soviet peoples. The exchange of material and spiritual values between nations becomes more and more intensive, and the contribution of each republic to the cause of communist construction increases. Obliteration of distinctions between classes and the development of communist social relations make for a greater social homogeneity of nations and contribute to the development of common communist traits in their culture, morals and way of living, to a further strengthening of their mutual trust and friendship.

With the victory of communism in the USSR, the nations will draw still closer together, their economic and ideological unity will increase, and the communist traits common to their spiritual make-up will develop. However, the obliteration of national distinctions, and especially of language distinctions, is a considerably longer process than the obliteration of class distinctions.

The Party approaches all questions of class relationships arising in the course of communist construction from the standpoint of proletarian internationalism and firm pursuance of the Leninist nationalities policy. The Party neither ignores nor over-accentuates national characteristics.

Thus, the CPSU clearly looks toward the disappearance of na-

tional differences as a necessary feature of developed communist society, and orients itself toward that goal—not by the forcible abolition of national cultures, to be sure, but by fostering and encouraging their coming together. Such a policy—an internationalist policy—is the very opposite of the nationalist approach which views the perpetual maintenance of national distinctions as the goal and which sees in the process of assimilation only a “trend.”

Nor is the tendency toward amalgamation a matter only of the remote future. The growing economic pressures drawing nations together are today evident on all sides. In Africa, for example, they appear with the very emergence of a growing group of newly-independent nations. Charles P. Howard, writing in *The Afro-American* (December 3, 1966), comes to the following conclusion: “Africa has one solution of its problems, economic, political or otherwise, and that is Unity Government. Little countries piddling around by themselves trying to go it all alone are daily getting their brains batted out as conditions in their countries deteriorate day by day.” And with the process of political and economic unification there goes inevitably a process of language and cultural integration and amalgamation.

3. A tendency to equate anti-Semitism with the oppression of the Negro people. Thus, manifestations of anti-Semitism among Negroes are placed on a par with

racism among Jews. Both are equally evil; both must equally be fought.

There is, of course, a measure of truth in this. But it also embodies a fundamental fallacy. The *basic* evil of national oppression in our society, as we have noted above, is the oppression of the Negro people, perpetuated through the ideology of white supremacy. And among their white oppressors are Jews. Nationalism among Negroes, including anti-Semitism, is a reaction to their inhuman oppression—a reaction born of bitter frustration, contributed to in no small degree by white middle-class liberals (including Jews) who participate in the civil rights struggle not by fighting white supremacism in their own lily-white communities and organizations but by supporting Negro civil rights organization and dictating the terms of that support. Jewish nationalism, which places anti-Semitism as the central problem, leads in practice not toward placing the onus of responsibility where it belongs—on white Americans and specifically on Jewish Americans—but to

expressions of alarm about anti-Semitism among Negroes and the emergence of concepts of “black power,” and even to intimations of Negro ingratitude for the exceptional services to the cause of civil rights presumably rendered by the “progressive” Jewish community. And such expressions of white chauvinism are to be found also among Jewish Communists and progressives.

The resolution needs, I think, to give much more emphasis to the struggle against racism among Jews, to the struggle against manifestations of white chauvinism within our own ranks, and especially to the task of building unity between Jewish and Negro workers.

Such, I believe, are some of the chief manifestations of nationalism in relation to the struggle against anti-Semitism in our country and their reflections in the draft resolution. We come next to the question of nationalism as it relates to the struggle in the world arena. With this I propose to deal in the second part of this article, to appear in the next issue of this magazine.

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On the Draft Resolution

The draft resolution on Jewish problems, which was prepared by the National Jewish Commission of the Communist Party and appeared in the August *Political Affairs*, is a timely document of historic significance. We know of no other example of such seri-

ous evaluation and deep analysis of the “Jewish question” and its surrounding objective realities, on the part of any other political and social movement of the Left or the Right, as the critical and self-critical examination contained in this document.