

Zionism's Socialist Dilemma: Nationalism, Colonization, and Class Struggle

Introduction

The Zionist cause is, by nature, a colonialist one, aimed at uprooting the indigenous population with the express purpose of populating the land with Jews, who are declared the rightful owners of the land that they were exiled from 2000 years ago. However extravagant such a claim might be, one cannot ignore the fact that it was largely – though perhaps not completely – successful. Zionism owes its success to many factors, historical, ideological, and material. Given the tremendous impact of Zionism in thought and practice on the Middle East, it is important to understand the aspect of it, namely socialism, which played an important role in the shaping of Jewish society in Palestine and the course of its development in the period preceding the founding of the State of Israel.

Thus, in this context one must necessarily ask the question of whether a synthesis of socialism and nationalism was ever achieved, both in thought and in practice. Also relevant is the question of whether there was an intention to establish an alternative to bourgeois society or if socialist thought was merely a tool for mobilizing the Jewish masses in support of the Zionist cause. This paper aims at examining these questions, with emphasis on the writings of two self-identified socialist-Zionists Nahman Syrkin and Ber Borochov.

The paper begins by setting a brief and general theoretical framework for the discussion of nationalism, a concept dominant in the Zionist cause, ideology, and narrative from its inception and throughout its journey to success. The framework will focus largely on Marx's and Marxist understanding of and views on nationalism. This would allow for a discussion and counter-critique of the various criticisms directed at Marxist analyses of the national/ist question –

including what is widely referred to as the “Jewish Question” – in particular from scholars and thinkers who insist on the prioritization of ethnic and national identities over economic emancipation, class struggle, and identities revolving around the means and modes of production. Such criticisms and arguments are in fact in tune with the arguments of socialist-Zionists, which will be thoroughly examined and critically assessed in light of the Marxist framework in the second section of the paper. The rest of the article will discuss the manner in which the political/nationalist clash impacted the prospects for a genuine (cross-national) class movement and struggle in pre-1948 Palestine.

I - The Theoretical Framework

Critics of Marx and Marxist theory often argue that given that Marx’s analysis and predictions concerning ethnic relations are based on 19th century European dynamics rather than phenomena that became especially prevalent in the 20th century, much of the recent past cannot be explained by his writings. The 20th century pattern of genocide and violent nationalism, they argue, has brought to the forefront concepts and issues largely unexplained by Marx and many of his contemporaries. As such, the exclusive attention accorded to economic development and social change is not enough and Marxism fails the test of the century in its failure to place nationalism on a separate platform. A look at Marx’s views on nationalism will thus be undertaken, with the purpose of establishing whether or not Marxism fails to provide an adequate explanation of the problem of nationalism in general and Jewish nationalism and the application thereof (Zionism) in Palestine in particular.

Marx and Nationalism

Shlomo Avineri argues that of all the phenomena discussed by Marx, nationalism has received the least satisfactory treatment.¹ Marx's unsystematic treatment of the nationalist question and his two distinct – pre-1848 and post-1848 – analyses of it, have resulted in much confusion and disarray in the socialist movement, creating a gap where a discussion of the most acute social and political forces should have been.

The two analyses differ significantly, albeit overlapping in many of its central aspects. While the pre-1848 analysis will be touched upon, it is the post-1848 analysis that will be taken into consideration in any further discussions of the question, for it was after 1848 that nationalism appeared as a major force on the political and social stage, and it was then that Marx significantly altered his formulation of the national question within the context of class struggle.

In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx argues that the cosmopolitan character that production and consumption have acquired has rendered the national ground on which industries stood practically non-existent.² Furthermore,

“[n]ational differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding hitherto.”³

¹ Shlomo Avineri, “Marxism and Nationalism.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 26.3/4 (1991), 638.

² Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”. In Steven M. Cahn, *Classics of Moral and Political Philosophy* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 850.

³ *Ibid.*, 858.

The proletarian supremacy and revolution would cause these national differences to vanish further. Indeed, it was this contention that constituted the crux of Marx's argument in favour of internationalism, and which has been integrated into various socialist movements while discarded by others. The internationalist argument has a significant impact on the discussion of socialist Zionism. The post-1848 paradigm, despite presenting a different explanation, preserved the internationalist undertones. Given that it possesses a broader view of the dynamics of nationalism and class relations, and the fact that nationalism has become a problem that cannot be ignored in any discussion of world politics and international relations, this approach will now be examined and adopted in the future as the paradigm by which socialist Zionism's approach to Jewish national self-determination is assessed.

The shift in Marx's formulation of the question of nationalism appeared in terms of the "modern ... expression of the bourgeois need for larger markets and territorial consolidation."⁴ The need for larger markets entailed the need for larger economic entities, which would only be possible through the unification of smaller economic units. Despite the auspices under which such unifications are called for, the core concern of the bourgeoisie is purely economic rather than nationalistic/ideological/romantic in nature. As such, nationalism is merely part of the process of capitalist development and industrialization.⁵ What followed from this analysis was a strategic position that Marx adopted: support for unification where it would lead to the hastening of the development of capitalism and by extension its demise. More importantly, the less

⁴ Avineri, 640.

⁵ Ibid.

developed areas (which also lack bourgeoisie) would have to be integrated into more developed ones, with the purpose of developing an industrial society in the former.

Marx's attitudes on the question of nationalism, as Avineri puts it, "left the socialist movement an ambiguous heritage, in so far as it relied on Marx as a guide to its policies towards the national question."⁶ The existence of two analyses of the national question have resulted in difficulties formulating a coherent theory of nationalism and a socialist policy towards this complex and rapidly intensifying phenomenon. Given that nationalism – contrary to what Marx predicted in the first analysis – has managed to steal the front seat of world politics and international relations, it is the second analysis that can provide an explanation and a guide for the formulation of socialist policy. In this context, the Middle East presents socialists with a complex environment to deal with. On one side is traditional Arab society, and on the other, modern Jewish colonialism. The fundamental clash between traditional modes of production and industrialized, bourgeois society is further complicated by a strong sense of nationalism that pervades all aspects of both societies. Indeed, a central theme in the arguments of many socialist Zionists who defend the colonization of Palestine and advocate the expansion of such colonial projects, is the contention that the colonization of Palestinian Arab society would set the stage for the development of modern forces in the region, setting in motion the wheels necessary for the demise of capitalism and the victory of socialism and proletarian revolution.⁷ Yet such an argument is fallacious, for as Bryan Turner points out Marx did not specifically develop a theory of the economics of colonialism or of the nature of class struggle in colonial societies.⁸

Furthermore, the Zionist enterprise, though being a colonial movement at the onset, rapidly

⁶ Ibid., 643.

⁷ Bryan Turner, "Karl Marx and Oriental Colonization." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6.3 (1977), 170.

⁸ Ibid., 173.

transformed itself into a phenomenon that had as its primary objective the de-population of Palestine of its indigenous Arab population rather than the mere subjection of the local population to Jewish colonial rule. Thus, what socialist Zionists need to grapple with is Jewish nationalism vis-à-vis socialism rather than Jewish colonialism as a means of socialist revolution. A discussion of Marx's views and suggestions on the "Jewish Question" is appropriate here, for it highlights the problems of Jewish existence in Europe, and thus allows for a better understanding of how Zionism has developed in comparison to these suggestions, and to what extent socialist Zionism has filled the gaps where necessary.

Marx and the Jewish Question

Any discussion of Zionism necessitates that due attention be paid to the conditions that have given rise to the Zionist idea and quest for national self-determination. The importance of the "Jewish Question" is emphasized in this paper through a discussion of Marx's presentation of the problem and his recommendations for resolving it. This presentation was in fact in response to and a review of an attempt by another thinker, Bruno Bauer, who placed the Jewish question within a theological-subjective context.⁹ Marx rejected Bauer's theological and spiritual assessment and his analysis of the problem as part of the dynamics of the relationship between religion and the state, which was prevalent at the time. Instead, he argued for a materialistic analysis of the Jewish problem, which he placed in the context of the Jews' "economic role ... in the financial and trading sectors of the societies in which they lived."¹⁰ In fact, as Amor sums it up, "the preservation of Jews in history was a result of their historical mode of economic

⁹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the details of Bruno Bauer's assertions. For a brief overview of these, see Meir Amor, "State Persecution and Vulnerability: A Comparative Historical Analysis of Violent Ethnocentrism." Diss. U of Toronto, 1999, 11-17.

¹⁰ Walid Sharif, "Soviet Marxism and Zionism." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6.3 (1977), 79.

behaviour.”¹¹ Moreover, the behaviour and values of Jews symbolized and reflected the conditions of bourgeois society. In other words, Marx considered Judaism as a “metaphor for bourgeois society.”¹² He saw in this the assimilation of European bourgeois society into Jewry. Given this reality, Marx advocated the emancipation of Jew and non-Jew alike from the bourgeois way of life, which he then translated to the idea of the emancipation of society from Judaism. In this sense, he was critical of those who advocated merely religious and political emancipation for the Jews rather than total human emancipation. Since the position of Jews in society is determined by the economic/material basis of their existence, any emancipation short of addressing the economic role would fail to resolve the Jewish question. He concludes his review by pointing out that the elimination of the “essence of Judaism”¹³ would render the Jew impossible, thereby eliminating the bases for estrangement and alienation. The element most relevant in this text is the distinction Marx places between political and social emancipation, which he discusses at length. Whereas the latter aims at realizing the full potential of human beings, the former merely establishes supposed but not factual equality, “equality” that is determined on the bases of bourgeois rights.¹⁴ As such political emancipation is a limited progress within the framework of the ruling order. Marx’s discussion of bourgeois society as a reflection of Judaism can be further developed in the direction of the economic/class dynamics of the Yishuv and later on Israeli society (especially with regards to the treatment of the Sephardim¹⁵).

¹¹ Amor, 19. This assertion is summed up in the following quotation: “Judaism continues to exist not in spite of history, but owing to history.” In Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question”, 1844.

<<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/index.htm>>.

¹² Sharif, 79.

¹³ Marx, “On the Jewish Question.”

¹⁴ Amor, 30.

¹⁵ For an excellent article on the discrimination and oppressive economic/labour policies against Sephardim in Israel, see Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims.” *Social Text* 19/20 (Autumn 1988), 1-35. Also worth mentioning is the Black Panther movement, which took shape in response to the

Contextualizing the Framework

The important point to clarify is how this discussion pertains not only to Marx's understanding of the national question discussed above, but also to the manner in which socialist-Zionists handled the practical aspects of Jewish existence in their ideological and political writings on Jewish revival. The second is straightforward and requires little elaboration: in so far as the socialist Zionists believed in the ideal of Jewish nationhood and self-determination, their views differed significantly on the solution of the Jewish question; yet one can see in the writings of these thinkers, a fundamental agreement with the core argument put forth by Marx, that the peculiar position of Jews is determined by their economic and class position. This point will be elaborated on in the later sections of the paper, where an analysis of the writings of two significantly differing socialist Zionists will be undertaken.

The first, namely Marx's understanding of nationalism requires a far more complicated analysis. It is necessary to first point out that the Jewish question is discussed in this context only in so far as nationalism was discussed by Marx in relation to bourgeois society. A post-1848 Marxist analysis could have the following implications for the Jewish question:

- 1) The bourgeois need for larger markets and Marx's insistence on satisfying these conditions supports his quest for the emancipation of Jews, which he argued could only be achieved by emancipation from bourgeois society. However, in so far as the adoption of larger markets and unified states is a strategic belief, the implications for European

ethnic and economic discrimination that the Sephardic community encountered in Israel. See Shalom Cohen and Kokhavi Shemesh, "The Origin and Development of the Israeli Black Panther Movement." *MERIP Reports* 49 (July 1976), 19-22.

Jewry, which did not constitute a large in-gathered mass but was rather dispersed throughout, are significant. In fact, Marx's advocacy of such a strategy could have negative implications for Jewry, which would suffer from heightened antagonism due to an even fiercer competition brought about by rapid capitalist development.

- 2) Territorial consolidation and the fact that the Jewish bourgeoisie does not have a territory of its own would greatly enhance the position of the non-Jewish bourgeoisie. In turn, the material undermining of the Jewish middle bourgeoisie and its downward movement to the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie would awaken the need for the enlargement of markets to put an end to Jewish economic isolation. Indeed, as Marx argues, calls for national unification are merely a cover for economic interests.¹⁶

While these scenarios might not be logically continuous nor in fact a historical reality in the context of the course of development and success of Zionism, they are nevertheless valid theoretical/analytical extensions of Marx's views on the question of nationalism and the Jewish problem.

II - Zionism's Socialist Dilemma

The conceptual framework brings us to the central issue that this paper aims to deal with:

whether there was – at any point – a synthesis of socialism and nationalism in Zionist thought, and if so, how this synthesis has manifested itself in Palestine.¹⁷ By a synthesis of socialism and

¹⁶ In fact, in the platform of Po'alei Zion party, Ber Borochov predicts exactly such a scenario. The document will be discussed at some length in the second section of this paper. A third implication, which is a continuation of the second, can also be drawn, and has been discussed by Borochov. It is, namely, the idea of the proletarianization of the Jewish bourgeoisie on the new territory. This, too, will be discussed in the second section of the paper.

¹⁷ The second (practical) aspect will be discussed in the third and final section of the paper, which touches on pre-1948 labour relations and party politics (in particular the Palestine Communist Party).

nationalism is meant the combination of the particularistic aspects of nationalism with the universal values of socialism. However, this is not equivalent to asking the question of whether socialism has had any real impact on Zionism. The latter (including the question of socialism as a mobilizing myth) is a separate question, one that will briefly be touched upon in the final analysis. The emphasis here will be placed on the concept of the nation and its primacy, the relationship between nation and class, and the position of socialism vis-à-vis the nation (i.e. means vs. ends) in socialist-Zionist thinking. Aaron David Gordon, one of the earliest to have formulated a national outlook on which to base the Zionist enterprise, argued that the true enemy of nationalism and Jewish national aspirations was socialism. As such, “if one pairs socialism with nationalism, one is pairing one kind with another, and the pairing cannot be successful.”¹⁸ Others, like Syrkin, Borochoy, and ideologists of the labor movement answered the question of synthesis in the affirmative. Yet in so far as Jewish nationalism had developed in the absence of a territorial base, its driving force was necessarily attached to nationalism rather than socialism. The primacy of the nation was the defining characteristic of Zionism in all its forms, for in the subjugation of nationhood to any other entity lay its death. While this might appear to be a straightforward and simple answer to the synthesis question, it is nevertheless important to examine the manner in which Zionism has proposed to deal and has dealt with the challenges of the economic and class position of Jews. It is also worth noting that the answer is not quite simple, for it has been argued that a Jewish socialist revolution can take place only when the Jews are located on an ancestral soil and in control of rather than subjection to the means of

¹⁸ Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel*. Trans. David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 60. Sternhell’s book provides by far the most comprehensive discussion of the peculiar position of socialism vis-à-vis nationalism in Zionist ideology and practice.

production. Indeed, this is the major point that raises the question of the mobilizing myth¹⁹: has such an argument been promoted with the purpose of setting the stage for a genuine proletarian revolution, or has it merely served as a facade for the achievement of nationalist ends? Moreover, albeit outside the time-frame within which this paper operates, to what extent has socialism – though not a genuine proletarian revolution – become incorporated into the economic and social structure of the Jewish state?²⁰

The Judaization of the Socialist Protest: Nahman Syrkin

In *The Jewish Problem and the Socialist-Jewish State*²¹, Syrkin argues – loosely echoing Marx – that anti-Semitism pervades society because it is a product of the class structure. He also points out that anti-Semitism reaches its peak in declining classes, the middle class and the peasant class; the middle class suffers most from Jewish competition. Furthermore, the hostility of these classes is not based on national or religious lines but on “egotism, the lust for Jewish money, the desire to undermine the Jewish competitor and expel him from the land.”²²

Syrkin insists that a “classless society and national sovereignty are the only means of solving the Jewish problem completely.”²³ He argues that such social revolution and cessation of class struggle would normalize the relationship of Jews and their environment. As such, Jews should

¹⁹ Bringing up the question of mobilizing myth does not necessarily imply that there has been no socialist element in the writings of these thinkers; rather, it aims at analyzing their intentions based on the comparative importance accorded to nationalism and socialism, and the manner in which the relationship between the two has been formulated.

²⁰ This question deserves a separate study; for an insightful albeit relatively outdated study see Amir Ben-Porat, “Class Structure in Israel: From Statehood to the 1980s.” *The British Journal of Sociology* 43.2 (June 1992), 225-237. Also relevant are the economic conditions of Sephardim; see Shohat (1998).

²¹ Arthur Hertzberg, ed. *The Zionist idea: a historical analysis and reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 333-350.

²² *Ibid.*, 339.

²³ *Ibid.*, 340.

join the proletariat. Yet here he strongly condemns Jewish socialists in Western Europe who have accepted assimilation. Socialism will, moreover, eliminate the possibility of oppression of one nation by another. Here he insists that socialism is the “opponent of all those conspiring to suppress or destroy the national character of a people. The socialist movement ... supports all attempts of suppressed peoples to free themselves.”²⁴ Thus socialists are the bearers of the idea of national emancipation. It is important to point out here that from a Marxist point of view nationalism, which is the mouthpiece of national emancipation and unification, is tolerable only in so far as it hides behind its economic interests, growth and rapid development of which would result in the demise of bourgeois society and by extension the slogans under which it operates.

But for Jews, he points out, this has not been the case, as Jewish socialists have accepted assimilation. This he criticizes, by saying: “If Jewish socialism ... wants to rise to the level of real moral protest, then it must acknowledge and proclaim in public that the Jewish protest is its basic motif.”²⁵ This could be understood as a call for the “nationalization”/“Judaization” of the socialist cause.

In a manner that can be considered to be self-contradictory, Syrkin argues that “Jewish socialism should be placed on the same level with proletarian socialism.”²⁶ Yet such an enormous argument is left unelaborated. The placement of Jewish socialism – with the Jewish protest occupying its center – on par with proletarian socialism contains the tacit implication that the former is defined in distinction from rather than as belonging to the latter. Furthermore, the insistence on the specifically Jewish (i.e. spiritual/religious/national) element renders Syrkin a

²⁴ Ibid., 342.

²⁵ Ibid., 344.

²⁶ Ibid.

supporter of, at best, socialist Judaism (as opposed to socialism endorsed by the Jewish masses). Socialism is thus considered to be the variable rather than the constant, and the position of the constant is occupied by Judaism and Jewish consciousness and struggle. Further complicating the nation-class dynamic, Syrkin insists that socialism can become the possession of all Jews of all classes, since Jewish suffering affects every class of Jewry. Such an argument is not accurate; it assumes that Jewish suffering – even if genuinely impacting all classes of Jewry – elicits similar reactions and leads all classes to follow one movement or support one ideology. This is not true for upper-classes, which despite observing the suffering of lower-class Jews with concern (due to the threat it poses to their own position in society), do not endorse a proletarian revolution; nor is it true for the middle bourgeoisie, who despite a constant loss in their economic and social standing attempt to hold on to the last vestiges of their previous state.

Moreover, after insisting that Jewish socialist struggle is the only salvation of Jewry, Syrkin argues that the situation of Jewry at present cannot be improved through the socialist struggle. Such struggle would not help the Jewish middle class at all, and would not help the Jewish proletariat as much as it would help the general proletariat. It appears that Syrkin makes such statements with the purpose of validating the claim that the peculiar Jewish position determines the outcome of any struggle, and as such a specifically Jewish protest and struggle must be undertaken, even if under the auspices of the socialist movement.

Finally, non-Zionist attempts to solve the Jewish problem are utopian. Indeed, this is the first time in his article that Syrkin mentions the issue of Zionism and its compatibility with class struggle. He refers to arguments that dismiss the compatibility of these two as “foolish”, arguing

that the Jewish proletariat has no reason to reject Zionism merely because other classes of Jewry have accepted it for national and ideological reasons. Such an assertion only confirms Syrkin's prioritization of the national cause over the socialist struggle. Indeed, Syrkin's language – for example references to the “outside enemy” – is reminiscent of ultra-nationalism rather than socialist Zionism. As Marx argued, given the economic determinants of Jews' position in their societies, any solution must address the economic aspects first and foremost. The fundamental contradiction in Syrkin's perspective is, on the one hand his insistence that the Jews' economic position gives rise to anti-Semitism, and on the other, his willingness to second class struggle to the national struggle. He concludes the article by pointing out that a Jewish state based on capitalism should and would be opposed by the Jewish proletariat. Such a claim is moot for the simple fact that if facing the “outside enemy” is to take priority over (cross-ethnic) class struggle, capitalism could be established under the pretext of and utilizing the situational factors of a looming conflict. Indeed, it is under similar slogans that bourgeois society seeks to acquire larger markets and consolidate its grip on territories.

Normalization versus Revolution: Ber Borochov

Two pieces of work produced by this socialist-Zionist thinker will be examined; the first is dated 1905, while the second a year later. Although brief, these two pieces provide the raw material for an in-depth discussion of the manner in which the national and class struggles are allegedly intertwined. It is worth pointing out that, unlike Syrkin, Borochov's analysis resembles to a large extent – though not fully – Marx's views on the national question and its role in a proletarian revolution. Moreover, its content reflects a deeper understanding of the implications of a socialist

struggle, while its style is one of referral to rather than distancing from and ignorance of Marx's writings.

In *The National Question and the Class Struggle*²⁷ Borochoy argues that that national struggle – like class struggle – is waged for the means of production as well as the conditions of production, rather than for the preservation of cultural values. This struggle, though often conducted under the banner of spiritual slogans, is nevertheless purely economic in its interests. Every nationality has a number of tools fashioned in order to serve the purpose of the preservation of its resources. Hence it is false to assume that the proletariat has no relation to the national wealth and has no national feelings and interests. Moreover, the territory is of great value for the proletariat – as it is for the bourgeoisie in search of larger markets – in that it is a place in which to work. Without a place to work, there can be no class struggle. This then is the central theme in the discussion of Jewish socialism, which is nevertheless not undertaken in this piece.

Borochoy continues by arguing that for oppressed nationalities (and one can only assume that he considered Jews an oppressed nationality) the system of production is subject to abnormal conditions, such as deprivation of territory and organs of national preservation. Such conditions harmonize the interests of the members of the nation (this implies that according to him Zionism is merely the logical extension of the economic concerns of the deprived Jews of Europe, a claim that is, however, unsubstantiated, given the strictly bourgeois character of Zionism and its treatment of the working masses as merely tools for the establishment of a bourgeois state in

²⁷ Hertzberg, 355-360.

Palestine²⁸). In such a case the influence of conditions and relations of production, as well as class struggle, is lessened. Thus the members of the nation become interested in national self-determination. It is in this struggle that the class structure manifests itself. Nationalism does not obscure class consciousness. Rather, genuine nationalism of the revolutionary proletariat strives to acquire normal conditions of production for the nation, and a normal labor and class struggle base for the proletariat. It is interesting to note that the quest for revolution (proletarian class struggle) has, in the socialist-Zionist context, always clashed with the quest for normalcy (represented²⁸ by the nation-state), culminating in the victory of the latter over the former and the necessity of the “reification of Labor Zionism.”²⁹ Ben-Gurion expressed the view that class interests are identical with national interests³⁰, yet this similarity was only observed in so far as “the way to achieve national unity is via class warfare”³¹ rather than the other way around, namely the utilization of national existence for the achievement of a socialist revolution. In this, Ben-Gurion, one of the prominent figures in the history of Zionism, opposed Borochof. Indeed, the rejection of Borochof and the decline and disappearance of the Po’alei Zion movement/party³² stemmed from a conscious ideological decision, whereby “[t]he founders

²⁸ While it would be wrong to generalize about Zionist's intentions based on the writings of a few (although the course of the development of the enterprise and the economic/class structure it set up for the Jewish state certainly demonstrates bourgeois intentions), nevertheless it is worth mentioning Ze'ev Jabotinsky's view of socialism; for Jabotinsky, a socialist order would result in a halt in social reforms, a cessation of man's struggle for betterment and improvement. Moreover, he emphasizes the importance of the individual and individualism, which are the basis of human aspirations and the utilization of talents for the purposes of progress. Humanity, he believed, was not marching towards socialism but rather in the opposite direction. He points out that “if there is a class bearing the destiny of the future (an assumption that we the bourgeoisie, who deplore class ideology, do not believe in, for we believe in a nation above classes, and in mankind above classes); if there is such a class, it is we the bourgeoisie ... the standard-bearers of individualism.” See Mordechai Sarig, ed, *The Political and Social Philosophy of Ze'ev Jabotinsky: Selected Writings*. Trans. Shimshon Feder (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1999), 85. For more on Jabotinsky's views of socialism, see Sarig, 78-79, 142-144. Also notable is the response of Ben-Gurion to Jabotinsky's criticism, a formulation that places Zionism before class politics. See Mitchel Cohen, “Between Revolution and Normalcy: Social Class in Zionist Political Thinking,” *Modern Judaism* 12.3 (October 1992), 261.

²⁹ Cohen, 267.

³⁰ Ben-Gurion's view was that a synthesis of Zionism and socialism was possible, but only in Eretz Israel, where foreign influences would not pose any limitations. See Sternhell, 92-93.

³¹ Sternhell, 225.

³² For a discussion and analysis of the causes of the elimination of Po'alei Zion, see Sternhell, 92-106.

realized at an early stage that there was a contradiction between socialism and nationalism, and since the first meaning of Zionism was the building of the nation, one had to make a decision.”³³

As Lockman points out,

“those parties which adhered to Zionism ... were compelled, by the logic of their very presence and goals in Palestine, to compromise their socialist principles one by one when they came into conflict with the demands of Zionist colonization ... those parties which refused any compromise with Zionism found themselves relatively isolated, cut off from the majority of the Jews of the *Yishuv*, and later the state, and this of course severely limited the possibilities of playing a prominent role in the class struggle.”³⁴

Poa’lei Zion cannot be considered to have been within the ranks of the rejectionists referred to by Lockman, although the complexity of ideological and strategic clashes resulted in its isolation. For example, Lockman refers to Borochoy’s reasoning in supporting class solidarity between Jewish and Arab workers, which has as its end the strengthening of Hebrew labour in Palestine.³⁵ An examination of the platform of the Poa’lei Zion party (*Our Platform*³⁶), which Borochoy wrote only a year after his *The National Question and the Class Struggle*, would provide more insight into the reasoning put forth by Borochoy, especially in what pertains to the proletarianization of Zionism.

³³ Ibid., 89.

³⁴ Zachary Lockman, “The Left in Israel: Zionism vs. Socialism.” *MERIP Reports* 49 (July 1976), 3. Also see Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz, “Nationalism and Jewish Socialism: The Early Years.” *Modern Judaism*, 8.3 (October 1988), 243.

³⁵ Ibid., 4.

³⁶ Hertzberg, 360-366.

Borochof argues that every class has national interests differing from the national interests of other classes. National movements do not transcend class divisions. This assertion not only stands firmly against Syrkin's all-encompassing view of socialism and nationalism (i.e. the argument that socialism can become the possession of Jews of all classes), it also contradicts Borochof's assertion only a year before that the conditions in which oppressed nationalities live force the harmonization of national interests for all classes of Jewry. In this piece, a more realistic and socialist explanation is presented, whereby the lumping-together of all classes under the national umbrella is abandoned. This is in tune with Marxist analyses, which see in nationalism a slogan that reflects bourgeois interests rather than the interests and support of all classes of a nation.

The platform is an interesting piece on the dynamics of Jewish life and economic conditions outside Palestine, and the scheme with which Jewish life would operate in the context of the colonization of "undeveloped countries". The first has already been discussed as part of the process of contextualizing the framework of analysis. The second is discussed briefly by Borochof. The first point that is emphasized is the emigration of the petty bourgeoisie, who become proletarianized in the land of their settlement/colonization. Such a process would be activated thanks to the restriction of immigration to the chosen territory only for Jews, and the irrelevance of big capital given the undeveloped (or at best underdeveloped) conditions. Such conditions would provide a satisfactory market for Jewish petty and middle capital, which would then be utilized to move from an urban to an agricultural economy. The second point is the concentration of Jewish immigration; this is necessary in so far as its absence is a hindrance to the colonization of the undeveloped country of settlement. The third point is the organization and

regulation of immigration, which would be carried out by the Jewish proletariat. Finally, the success of Zionism depends on the success of proletarian Zionism, and the success of the latter is “also a step toward socialism.”³⁷ These three points, while setting the broad lines of the strategy proposed, do not provide much insight into the manner (i.e. steps, policies, etc.) in which it would come into being. Moreover, in so far as it ignores political, social, and economic realities³⁸ (and the presence of an indigenous population on the chosen land, which cannot be considered to have been undeveloped) and the strategic importance of Palestine for rival empires, it is a utopian piece.

The Synthesis: An Assessment

This section, while not touching on the broader lines of the place of socialism in Zionist thought, has nevertheless presented two distinct (one anti-Marxist and the other Marxist) Zionist perspectives, which while not necessarily being representative of Jewish leftist/socialist thought of the period, nevertheless combine elements that formed the core of both Jewish nationalism and (internationalist) socialism. The attempt at merging these two diverging concepts necessarily implies that no complete adoption of socialism would be possible; nationalism, on the other hand, provides more opportunities for the incorporation of ideologies such as socialism within it, without losing any of its defining characteristics. The question of whether there can ever be a true synthesis of nationalism and socialism whereby the latter preserves its defining characteristics (rather than being transformed into what is commonly referred to as “national/ist socialism”) would have to be answered in the negative, especially if one is to consider the

³⁷ Ibid., 366.

³⁸ For an excellent study on the process of immigration, proletarianization, and subsequent deproletarianization of the Jewish working class in Palestine, which differs from the large-scale proletarianization predicted and recommended by Borochof, see Amir Ben-Porat, “Immigration, Proletarianization, and Deproletarianization: A Case Study of the Jewish Working Class in Palestine, 1882-1914”. *Theory and Society* 20.2 (April 1991), 233-258.

practical aspects of the two. Nationalism and socialism might co-exist in thought/ideology only as much as one is the function of the other (i.e. nationalism explained in terms of socialism, means and conditions of production, and industrialization / socialism as a tool for the advancement of nationalist agendas or changes in the social/economic division of labour). Here it is important to point out that the complexity of the synthesis question/dilemma stems mainly from the customization of the definition of socialism, which indeed makes the synthesis question irrelevant to begin with. Indeed, Katznelson's argument against the mechanical adoption of socialism and nationalism is a perfect example of this.³⁹ It is safe to conclude that if one is to take into account the ideological clash, no genuine synthesis between the two (and in particular Zionism and socialism) has been achieved. Furthermore, to answer the question of whether socialism was merely a mobilizing myth requires further in-depth analysis. It is necessary to point out, however, that some intellectuals and leaders were indeed convinced socialists (though the brand of socialism they believed in might not have coincided with the Marxist perspective). Yet one can argue that the impact of the colonization of Palestine by Jewish finance capital (led by the Rothschilds), which was taking place just as some of these thinkers were writing pieces on the role of socialism (and the process of proletarianization) in the Jewish struggle for statehood, was ignored.⁴⁰ It would be difficult to dismiss this as merely an innocent failure, given the

³⁹ In fact, Katznelson refused to even attempt to provide a definition of Zionism and socialism (see Sternhell, 154). Thus, his position was one of adoption of custom (but not properly defined) concepts (and passing them off as socialism, nationalism, etc.) and the arrival to "universal" conclusions based on these. Such fallacious and unsound thinking characterizes much of the socialist-Zionist intellectual sphere.

⁴⁰ For more details on Labour's (and leftists thinkers') reactions to Zionist colonization, see Stephen Halbrook, "The Class Origins of Zionist Ideology." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2.1 (Autumn 1972), 104-106. Also worth noting is the fact that, as Avni-Segre points out, for some time – until the birth of the kibbutz movement – the settlements financed by the Rothschilds relied on Arab labor. Dan Avni-Segre, "Israel: A Society in Transition." *World Politics* 21.3 (April 1969), 349-350. For more on Labour Zionism in general, see Lilly Weissbrod, "From Labour Zionism to New Zionism: Ideological Change in Israel." *Theory and Society* 10.6 (November 1981), 777-803.

implications this would have not in terms of socialism as an ideology per se, but in terms of the welfare of the Jewish proletariat, which the socialist-Zionists claimed to be concerned with.

III – Concluding Remarks: Labour Relations in Pre-1948 Palestine

This section will deal briefly with the practical aspects of the clash between nationalism (both Jewish and Palestinian Arab) with a general overview of Jewish-Arab labour relations. It will provide a final assessment of whether there could have been, at any stage prior to 1948 a real possibility for joint class struggle.

Three themes dominate the Zionist struggle: conquest of the land, conquest of labour, and produce of the land.⁴¹ The three are intricately related. The first provides not only a living space and a territory for organized Jewish life, but also Jewish labour and possession of the resources and means of production. The second relates to the attempt to create a Jewish working class by means of forcing Jewish employers to hire Jewish rather than cheaper Arab labour. The third relates to the boycott of Arab goods for the stimulation of Jewish agriculture and industry. Of the three, the theme that is most relevant to this discussion is the conquest of labour. This policy, despite being in contradiction to the principles of class struggle generally espoused by the left, was nevertheless wholeheartedly adopted for the simple reason that it was in the national (Jewish) interest to do so.⁴² Indeed, this was to be a recursive self-destructive loop, whereby the tenser the situation became the more difficult – predictably so – the possibilities for any meaningful

⁴¹ Lockman, 5.

⁴² A key argument was that the Jewish people needed to achieve normalization. This could only be done by stimulating productivity, which in turn could be achieved by the transformation of the Jew into a peasant (namely, the idea of proletarianization). Both land (land acquisitions) and labour (growth of Jewish proletariat through preferential employment practices) were crucial in the successful implementation of this objective. See Joel Beinen, “The Palestine Communist Party 1919-1948.” *MERIP Reports* 55 (March 1977), 4.

cooperation between Jewish and Arab workers. The fact that there were two national claims to the same land, and that these national claims were manipulated by the elites to preclude any such cooperation (let alone organized joint class struggle) sealed the fate of a socialist revolution in Palestine. The working class in the country split in two, competing for control over the material conditions, which would enhance its position vis-à-vis the other.

Of all the parties in pre-1948 Palestine, the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP) was the most likely candidate for providing the bases for and leading the socialist struggle. Despite the fact that there was no lack of Jewish socialist (to varying degrees on the ideological scale) parties, these were nevertheless Zionist at the core (as mentioned before) and in membership. The PCP, on the other hand, was unique, for it was, throughout the period that witnessed an increase in nationalist rhetoric and strife and the diminishing of the importance accorded to a proletarian revolution in socialist intellectual and leadership circles, the only party whose membership extended to and was sought by Jews and Arabs alike. Yet the PCP faced an uphill struggle, not only in maintaining its detachment from the reactionary nationalist strife being shaped, but also in gaining the sympathy and support of Jewish immigrants, for the abandonment of Zionism by these would have meant the elimination of their reason for being in Palestine.⁴³ A discussion of the internal politics and external relations of the PCP is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important to note the two major incidents that fundamentally altered the position and efficacy of the PCP. While distrust was quickly making it into the ranks of the PCP, it was the Arab revolt of 1936-1939 that dealt the biggest blow to the PCP and by extension the future of socialism in Palestine. The party's involvement in the revolt, however justified it might have been from an ideological viewpoint, nevertheless had practical repercussions, resulting in the

⁴³ Ibid., 7.

further deterioration of relations between Arabs and Jews, the effective destruction of party unity, and the division (though not split) of the party into national blocs. Contrary to the role that the party's position on the revolt had played in the estrangement of its Jewish leadership and membership, such a position in fact boosted the party's standing in the Arab community. The development of the Palestine problem only spelled more trouble for the PCP, which despite preserving itself in the aftermath of the revolt, had nevertheless become irrelevant. The internal division along national lines merely reinforced the identification of each side with its respective national movement and aspirations.⁴⁴ The damages of the split in the revolt period would prove to be irreversible, both for the PCP and for socialist aspirations for a genuine, non-nationalist proletarian revolution. The inability of the PCP to bring about any real change stemmed from a number of factors: internal organizational failures, situational factors (i.e. domestic and imperial politics), and structural complexities and complications (i.e. the relations of production in both Jewish and Arab communities, especially the latter). Had the timing of the ripening of Arab class consciousness coincided with Jewish skepticism and aloofness at the idea of Zionism, there could have been a much larger probability of the success of a joint class movement. Yet of all the factors involved in eliminating the possibility of the success of such a scenario, nationalism has been the most destructive. Palestine has provided the grounds for the testing of the compatibility and synthesis of nationalism and socialism. The results have been nothing short of explosive. Nationalism has not only confined each group to its side, but its combination with and alleged attempts at the implementation of socialist ideals have been a remarkable failure.

⁴⁴ Musa Budeiri, *The Palestine communist party: Arab and Jew in the struggle for internationalism* (London: Ithaca, 1979), 154.

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