

THE POLITICAL-PHILOSOPHIC LETTERS OF RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA

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Another Arab-Israeli Conflict, or Shift in Politics Between the Two
Nuclear Superpowers?

BEGIN'S ISRAEL MOVES FURTHER AND FURTHER BACKWARD
TO HIS REACTIONARY, TERRORIST BEGINNINGS

I. Begin Rewrites History

Dear Friends:

No sooner was the world preoccupied with the counter-revolution in Poland on Dec. 13, as the Polish rulers unleashed martial law against the Polish masses, focused on Solidarity, than Begin leaped out of his hospital bed into his wheelchair plus limousine. In six short hours he rammed through the Knesset the approval to annex the Israeli-occupied Syrian territory -- the Golan Heights.

This is not the first time that Israel has taken advantage of the world's preoccupation with an immediate counter-revolution to carry out its counter-revolution in the Middle East. Back in 1956, when Russian tanks had driven into Hungary to destroy that revolution, the Israeli Army, with the connivance of British and French imperialisms, invaded Suez. In 1981, by unilateral action, Israel battered down what had been agreed to by all, including Israel -- the UN Resolution 242.

The haste with which Begin, in 1981, embarked on his headlong aim to "legitimize" the Israeli booty from the 1967 war skipped the six days that had intervened in 1956 between Russian tanks rolling into Hungary and Israel's invasion of the Suez. On the very day that the Polish rulers imposed martial law, Begin (seemingly holtor-skolter, but actually planned long ago) annexed the Syrian Golan Heights.

The violent dash against time was not a mere difference between six hours and six days. No, it was an undermining of any attempt by anyone, including

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its benefactor -- U.S. imperialism -- to pressure Israel to give up any of its war booty, come April when the return of Egypt's Sinai is completed and serious talks on "self-rule"¹ on the West Bank and Gaza Strip are to begin. The fact is that this did indeed throw everyone off balance. Thereupon the amateurish Reagan not only voted for the UN resolution which condemned Israel's unilateral action, declaring the annexation "null and void," but suspended the "historic" Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. and Israel for Strategic Cooperation. Begin hit back by cancelling the statement altogether. Both rulers violated their own statement, (which did indeed mark an imperial, global strategy for war), which stipulated that it could be terminated by either party only after a six-month notification.

Begin's vitriolic statement against Reagan makes it altogether too tempting to dismiss it, as if it were something off the top of his head due to extreme "provocation" at Reagan's suspension of the Memorandum of Understanding. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. The fevered rhetoric, like the helter-skelter appearance of the rush to annex the Golan Heights, was not "provoked." Nor did it suddenly issue off the top of Begin's head. It was a calculated, premeditated, and long-ago planned act. How long ago? More importantly, how far backward does Begin intend taking Israel to its pro-Israel founding?

At that time -- in the 1940s -- Begin worked, not so much against British, much less U.S. imperialism he has since followed, as against the Jewish masses, whether they were fighting for a socialist republic of Arabs and Jews, or Zionists, who were anxious to establish a homeland for the Jews in a part of Palestine. Begin's reactionary, fanatic ideology for "Eretz Israel" (Land of Israel), as biblically interpreted by him, continued to terrorize those Jews. Because that is the issue,² we must probe deeper into that Dec. 20 statement³ read to U.S. Ambassador Samuel W. Lewis.

The scheming and crafty statement begins with a reference to a period of six months during which the U.S. "punished Israel." This, it seems, is the third time since June 6, when the U.S. criticized Israel's bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, and again on July 17 when Israel bombed the heavily populated civilian neighborhood in Beirut. Begin cries a river that he

... "saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of citizens" when, in fact, the bombing in Lebanon killed many innocent men, women and children. Israel's violation of air space over Iraq was an imperialist act that, far from deterring nuclear exploration, has strengthened the Arab drive for an "Islamic bomb."

Begin next rolls history back nearly 4,000 years! "The people of Israel have lived 3,700 years without a memorandum of understanding with America and will continue to live without it another 3,700 years." Not satisfied yet with situating his act, in general, back 3,700 years, i.e. at the beginning of Jewish history, Begin creates still another amalgam. He raises the imperialist annexation of the Golan Heights to the stratospheric level of "not rescinding faith" during the Inquisition, while labelling any opposition to his policies as the anti-Semitism prevalent during the Inquisition. "There are those who say we must rescind the Golan Heights law that was passed in the Knesset. To rescind is a concept from the days of the Inquisition. Our forefathers were burned at the stake and would not rescind their faith." Clearly, Begin has no intention whatsoever of parting with any of the war booty once he has returned the Sinai to Egypt.

If anyone thought that the identification of the Knesset vote for annexing the Golan Heights with burning at the stake rather than "rescind the faith" was stratospheric enough, that reactionary ideologue -- Menachem Begin -- is bent on not leaving it at any Biblical stage. Evidently insofar as he's concerned, higher still is his specific ideology of the 1940s. There the re-writing of history was clearly not so much against U.S. or British imperialism, as against the Jewish people who escaped the Holocaust. The diversity of the views⁴ of those masses, ranging from wanting a secular state to a socialist republic, and including the various tendencies within the Zionists, so that a leader like Ben Gurion did want and did establish a theocratic state, were focused at the time on one thing, and one thing only -- the UN Resolution that would recognize a part of Palestine as the State of Israel.

When the UN was debating the right for the establishment of Israel, all the Jews in Palestine were for the acceptance of the territory designated for

the State of Israel. Whereupon that reactionary underground terrorist, Menachem Begin, as head of the Irgun, together with the Stern Gang, bombed the King David Hotel without any regard as to which Jews would be killed, and with but one aim, and that was to undermine this move. Ben-Gurion and the other leaders of the movement worked hard to not only disassociate themselves from these gangs but finally to convince the UN that indeed a majority of Jews would accept the UN recognition of the territory they would assign to Israel.

[I was in Paris and London in 1947 when I met quite a few German Jews who had escaped the Holocaust, were happy to reach Palestine, only to find conditions there -- both the hostility of Arabs and of religious Zionists -- unbearable. The stories they told were not only about the bombing of the King David Hotel, but Irgun terrorist acts against individual Jews who were struggling to found a socialist republic, as well as pressures exerted also against moderate Zionists -- and the young left Polazionists -- for attempting to work also with the Arabs, pressures which were unbelievable. It isn't that either the Arabs accepted those Jews who were trying to establish a secular state for Jews and Arabs, or that the religious Jews accepted them. Walking around with a Bible in their hands, the religious Zionists were speaking of "Eretz Israel," not as the reality showed Palestine to be, a land where Arabs lived. Instead, they spoke of it as if it were "assigned to the Jews by God." Since the comrades found it impossible to work for a socialist republic, or even for a secular state, they were driven to become exiles again, this time from Israel.]

Here, however, is how Begin is rewriting history: "In 1946 an English general named Barker lived in this house. Now I live here. When we fought him, you called that terrorism." It wasn't Reagan who called the Irgun and Stern Gang terrorists. The Jews of Palestine called them that. It is they who suffered from those terrorist acts.

Lies never bothered Begin, and he certainly isn't letting them stand in his way now when he is attempting, at one and the same time, to create a new myth of his past and to transform that reactionary ideology into present state policy of the State of Israel.

Begin is bent on accusing anyone who disagrees with him of anti-Semitism. In the Dec. 20 statement, he was thinking about the debate over AWACs. He was anxious to stress the "ugly anti-Semitic campaign" during the debate on the sales of the AWACs to Saudi Arabia. This came to a climax at the moment when Reagan said that the Fahd plan offered a basis for discussion. From the immediacy of the response of Begin, that under no circumstances would he do anything but reject outright any idea of discussion, it has been clear that Begin would do everything in his power to see that not only the Fahd plan does not become a basis for discussion, but any attempt by any power to do anything about any part of the territory occupied since the 1967 war.

Even now it must be stressed that Begin does not represent the majority of the Israelis. His party is a minority, and the unholy alliance with the religious groups, which gives it a majority in the Parliament, does not make it a majority. Quite the contrary. Not only are there a great diversity of Jewish views in Israel, and a mass peace movement, but even Zionists are emigrating from Israel as they find the religious fanaticism unbearable. As Gershon Schocken put it in his article (see footnote 5), "The hostility of the Chief Rabbinate toward the conservative and liberal denominations in Israel shows how a religious establishment operates when in control."

II. Focus: Counter-Revolution/Revolution

No doubt what Begin saw in the AWACs sale was so great a tilt towards Saudi Arabia that it assumed the form of a global shift in U.S. policy. That that had an element of truth in it was clear from the fact that U.S. imperialism had indeed other interests in the Middle East than defense of Israel "in and for itself." What is pivotal for U.S. imperialism is, first, the struggle with Russia for single monopoly control of the world and, above that, anti-revolution.⁶

Heretofore, Israel had no doubt that because it was the most industrialized, militarized nation in the Middle East, and was anti-Russia besides, U.S. imperialism considered it the strategic kingpin in the Middle East. With the AWACs sale, the Fahd plan, and possible secret courting of the PLO,⁷

Begin's Israel considered U.S. imperialism so arrogant and conceited as to think it could carry on a war against Russia in the Middle East, so long as it had bases, and they may have entertained illusions that Saudi Arabia was not only as good as Israel for U.S. bases, but they would have the advantage of someone more pliant than Begin.

What happened to "inspire" Reagan-Haig-Weinberger's new outlook on the Middle East -- that they could well do without Begin who never did follow the Reagan preoccupation with Russia as Enemy No. 1 -- led to a rather mild flirtation with the Arab lands, especially with Saudi Arabia and Fahd's plan. The truth, however, is that neither the Arab lands, nor Israel, are as preoccupied with Russia as they are with each other. The slight tilt towards "the moderate Arab lands" was based on the alleged fact that the Fahd plan included a recognition of Israel's right to exist. Though there was no such expression in the plan, the Reagan-Haig-Weinberger triumvirate felt that they could both make others believe that's what was meant, and thus turn foreign policy around even as they had initiated retrogressionism at home, and continue that policy for their "sphere of influence" -- the propping up of El Salvador's genocidal war against its own people.

No doubt, there will be some modification of Begin's statement and a much greater retreat on the part of Reagan so that once again some deal or double cross can be worked out as to Israel's predominance in the Middle East. But that is hardly the question for Marxist-Humanists. What is the issue is that, on one side, with the 1979 revolution in Iran, the whole Middle Eastern question turned from one totally immersed in the Arab-Israeli conflict and, of course, Oil, to that of revolution. With the current counter-revolutionary turn in Iran, however, what we saw arising everywhere is national fanaticism instead of national liberation, and that so-called "fundamentalism" was further tainted with religious bigotry. Whether it's Khomeini's Shi'ite religion, or Begin's unholy alliance with the Rabbinate (not to mention his praise of Falwell and by Falwell); whether it's Reagan leaning on Falwell's Moral Majority, or the Catholic Church in Poland -- all of these manifestations of the sudden "re-birth" of religion are signs of the degeneracy of the capitalist imperialist nuclear stage of world development. It is putting a question mark over the

very survival of civilization as we have known it.

Take the question of the Iranian Revolution at its present counter-revolutionary turn. The 1979 Revolution which first appeared as the breath of fresh air was so not only because it threw out the exploitative, corrupt Shah without separating U.S. imperialism from his totalitarian rule. It also meant, and that above all, that a totally new phenomenon was born in the Middle East. Where it had heretofore been first, Oil, and then Arab-Israeli conflict, and once again, Oil, it was now revolution, and not only for Iran but the whole of the Middle East.

In 1979 the revolution was the determinant (and Women's Liberation was integral to it). The imperialists were totally shaken up in the Arab kingdoms as well, especially when the Mosque in Mecca was occupied. Clearly, because the Shi'ites were the underprivileged, the poor, the masses, religion itself was mistakenly disregarded by the Left, as if it were simply a subordinate matter that would soon be overcome by the revolutionary drive itself.

Instead, it was religion in its most retrogressive, fundamentalist form, with the Imam, the Ayatollah Khomeini, at the head, who conquered total power, turned to destroying the revolution, and, far from becoming a beacon light for the whole Middle East, has become one more prop in the U.S.-Russia rivalry for single world domination.*

* * *

Ever since Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal, we have focused on the contradictions in nationalisms. Thus, though in 1948 we were for the establishment of Israel and have continued to be for its right to exist, we

* At the moment when all eyes are on Russia's counter-revolutionary pressures in Poland which brought on martial law, Russia is gaining a foothold in Iran. KGB agents who speak perfect Farsi are training recruits, including former members of the Shah's hated SAVAK, for Khomeini's secret police. The Russian advisors have installed their training center in Saltanatabad, outside Tehran, in the former headquarters of SAVAK. See Time, Nov. 23, 1981.

most sharply opposed Israel's invasion of the Suez. As News & Letters expressed it in its lead article, Jan. 8, 1957, "Preparation for War?", we stressed that the struggle now must be not only against the major imperialists, but that "not much more can be said for the Israeli government. Internally, despite all the publicized democratic institutions, the prominence of union leaders in the government, the social reforms and the overpublicized social experiments in collectives, Israel is a sick society. It is sick not primarily because of outside factors, but its basic economy is established on the capitalist principle of growth; demanding ever more sweat and production from its workers in return for less."

Despite the fact that at that moment Eisenhower was opposing British imperialism, we pointed to the fact that this was not for any purposes of national liberation for the newly liberated state, but for the U.S.'s own imperialist interests, and along with it, against all proletarian revolutions. We therefore ended the lead by saying that "at this particular stage it [U.S.] had much to gain from Russia's brutal suppression of the Hungarian Revolution."⁸

The same thing is true all over again today with the focal point being in Jaruzelski's Poland, on the one hand, and Begin's Israel on the other. It is all the more disturbing to see Fred Halliday, who is certainly a knowledgeable revolutionary, yet is so immersed in geopolitics instead of philosophy of revolution that he sinks into their ground for argument. I am referring to what Brzezinski has called the "Arc of Crisis."⁹ It is this which Reagan-Haig are trying to execute in the Gulf region which they hold as stretching from Turkey to Afghanistan, and including the whole of the Arab world.¹⁰

Halliday very nearly forgets the revolution, and certainly Women's Liberation, and thereby limits himself to exposing how alarmist is U.S. and Western imperialism. This only results in Halliday holding the year 1978, or rather, Cuban and Soviet help to Ethiopia, as the turning point in world politics instead of 1979 and the Iranian Revolution.

If we were only on the ground of geopolitics, and of course wish to expose

imperialism's global reach and how crucial the Middle East is, we could prove it in 1947 with the Truman Doctrine, and stretch the Middle East to Greece; and then in 1957 with Eisenhower, who looked practically "revolutionary" as he stopped the British-French-Israeli attack on the Suez Canal -- and nearly forget what was going on then in Hungary, and what Reagan is doing now in Poland: letting them hang.

No, the world changed in 1979. The Iranian Revolution did that, though it itself is now in the grip of counter-revolution, initiating the retrogressive movement from within. Indubitably, the greatest enemy is at home, always at home. That is why the class struggle is so decisive. Extended, that is what revolution is. Because that is hardly the goal of world imperialism, beginning and ending with the two nuclear titans -- the U.S. and Russia -- it is trying to make the unthinkable -- nuclear war -- thinkable. There can be no resolution to any of these conflicts other than by a total social revolution.

Raya Dunayovskaya
Detroit, Michigan

Notes:

¹From the start -- the Camp David agreement -- we pointed to the fact that Carter was so "flexible" on "self-rule" that he found it even "under Israeli guns" in the "continued military occupation" both of the West Bank of Jordan (which Begin persisted in calling Judea and Samaria) and the Egyptian Gaza Strip." See "Shifting Alliances in the Middle East," News & Letters, January-February 1978.

²The whole "Jewish Question" changed radically with the Nazi conquest of power. On the one hand, such terrorists as Begin emerged. On the other side there were such great revolutionaries as Trotsky. As he himself expressed it, "The Jewish question has never occupied the center of my attention. But that does not mean that I have the right to be blind to the Jewish problem which exists and demands a solution...Decaying capitalism has everywhere swung over to an exacerbated nationalism, one part of which is anti-Semitism..." He opposed Zionism but not national liberation.

³The statement was published with a Dec. 20 dateline from Jerusalem in the New York Times, Dec. 21, 1981.

⁴ See the special issue of The Nation, Dec. 5, 1981, devoted to the Middle East. See also Noam Chomsky (whose Peace in the Middle East? Reflections on Justice and Nationhood should also be consulted) who quotes a 1907 view of Zionism which held that it was necessary "to avoid a narrow, limited nationalism which would see no further than itself" (Aharon Cohen, Israel and the Arab World).

⁵ See "Revisiting Zionism" by Gershom Schocken, in New York Review of Books, May 28, 1981. In it, Schocken, Editor of the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, does a valuable job in tracing the changes in the Zionist ideology, from its founding by Herzl during the anti-Semitic pogroms in Russia and East Europe in the 1880s, to what it is in the present theocratic state of Israel. What has a direct relationship to our focus presently is his view that "Israel pays a very high price for the concordat with the religious -- in money as well as in other values. And the price to Israel of the unholy combination of religious extremism and nationalist fanaticism which doesn't really figure in any Zionist doctrine, cannot yet be assessed."

⁶ This is seen even more starkly in the current attitude to Poland. See the lead article on "Poland: Revolution and Counter-Revolution" in News & Letters, January-February 1982.

⁷ See Business Week, Nov. 30, 1981.

⁸ See my analyses which trace through these developments from "The Arab-Israeli Collision," June 1967, through "Anti-Semitism, Anti-Revolution, Anti-Philosophy: U.S. and Russia Enter the Middle East Cockpit," in February 1969; and again in "The Middle East Erupts" in war, November 1973, and the shift in global politics that followed, in December 1973. On a new level, this Marxist-Humanist analysis begins again in 1976 with both the "UN Resolution on Zionism--and Ideological Obfuscation Also on the Left," and "Lebanon: The Test Not Only of the P.L.O. but the Whole Left," ending with two articles on the "Camp David Summit: Peace in the Middle East--or Extension of U.S. Imperialism?", January-February and October 1978.

⁹ The special tenth anniversary issue of MERIP Reports, October-December 1981, carries two particularly important articles. One is the "Arc of Crisis and the New Cold War" by Fred Halliday, and the other is a review of Edward W. Said's The Question of Palestine, by Beshara Doumani, titled "Contesting Zionism: Two Views of Said's Question of Palestine."

¹⁰ See The Arab World and Israel by Ahmad El Kodsy and Eli Lobel, and The Arabs by Maximo Rodinson. See also The Arab Left by Tariq Y. Ismael.