

Two Jewish Leaders on the Relation Between Israel, Zionism and the Jews of the World—

'Thou Shalt Not Criticize Israel!'

By HAL DRAPER

Two recent episodes have underlined some truths about the dilemmas involved in the relationship between American Jews and the state of Israel—American Jews in particular though to a very large extent the same applies to all other Jewish communities outside of Israel.

The first was the statement made at the World Jewish Congress in Geneva by Dr. Nahum Goldmann, the leading figure in the world Zionist movement (if we except Israeli premier David Ben-Gurion himself).

Goldmann said: "Israel is unique among nations. There is no other state where 90 per cent of its people live outside it."

The Zionist ideology is epitomized in this capsule statement, particularly the Zionist view of what Israel is: the homeland not of its own inhabitants Jewish and Arab, and not even the homeland of its own Jewish inhabitants alone, but of all Jews everywhere in the world, regardless of the latter's own views on the matter.

This view of the state of Israel is the official ideology not only of Zionism but, unfortunately, of the Israeli government itself and of its leading parties and spokesmen. It is the ideology of the "Ingathering of the Exiles" which Ben-Gurion and others have so often enunciated.

"BLOOD" CITIZENSHIP

It is a view which (1) implicitly makes all non-Jews, especially the Arab Israelis, aliens and interlopers in the land, the short- or long-term objective being to drive them out, (2) makes the perspective of Israel expansionist, no matter what diplomatic declarations on that score are put out for occasional world consumption by its leaders, and (3) poses the question of dual national allegiance for all Jews in the world as the Israelis see them, regardless of the fact that only a very small minority of Jews are made happy thereby.

Nahum Goldmann's statement of the theory of citizenship-by-ancestral-"blood" is itself not unique, though the Israeli state is unique today as the one presently existing prominent government which holds and acts on such a theory. It has been seen before in the world, though the most recent historical instance cannot be mentioned without making Zionists froth with anger. His statement of it in such forthright fashion was enough to awake a storm of protest in Jewish circles, even though he was merely reiterating what the Israeli Zionists and other Zionists have said many times before in unmitigable language.

Now one must be clear, we think, on the main reason behind the indignation that Goldmann's statement evoked among most American Jewish organizations. This reason is primarily point No. 3 in the above-listed implications of the Zionist theory of Israel: it comes into conflict with their "Americanism," in some cases with their "American" chauvinism and bourgeois patriotism. Many of these elements have been able to swallow in silence, though perhaps not with equanimity of conscience, the

Israeli anti-Arab policies; but when the same ideology which leads to Israeli discrimination against the Arab people in the land also points to a conclusion touching on their own patriotic allegiance, they rise up in horror.

BEN-GURION'S "VICTORY"

But this only explains why this particular statement of Goldmann's led to such an outcry, as if he had been saying something new or unheard-of, when actually he was merely repeating the heart of the Zionist creed.

For example, the same thought which led to the "scandal" over Goldmann's speech can be found officially embodied in the last Israeli Government Yearbook, in the introduction by Ben-Gurion. Here the premier and Zionist leader wrote (we quote from *Zion*, the monthly published by the World Zionist Organization in Jerusalem, November 1952):

"The establishment of the [Israeli] State did not mean the vision fulfilled. For by far the greater part of the Jewish people is still divided among the nations, and so the State is not yet the consummation of redemption, but only its instrument and principal means. . . ."

Twice Ben-Gurion sets down a curious formulation in writing: "The greatest victory won by the Zionist idea over the Jewish people was the establishment of the State. . . . And again, a few pages later, "I cannot too often declare that the State is the greatest conquest of the idea of Zionism over the Jewish people." He is referring to the fact that before the establishment of the state of Israel, the majority of the Jews of the world were opposed to the Zionist idea.

Has this changed? Indisputably, the overwhelming bulk of Jews are enthusiastic supporters of Israel's healthy development and self-preservation and development as a state; nor are well-wishes for Israel confined, or to be confined, to Jews. But the same question persists, though changed in form.

It is not: For Israel or Against Israel—this is only the way the Zionists inside and outside Israel see it. It is: For or against the Zionist program and ideology for Israel.

DIFFERENT QUESTIONS

And this is a program and an ideology which is harmful and even suicidal for the Israeli people, in the opinion of many, including ourselves as Independent Socialists. At any rate this is how the real question is to be put.

For the Zionists this is not in question. Ben-Gurion writes in the above-mentioned introduction to the Government Yearbook: "The Jewish people is not an abstract notion, or just a collective name for myriads of isolated and scattered individuals in various countries. It is a conglomerate whose actuality, will and common destiny are not open to question." This common destiny, etc., which is not open to question is the expansionist Zionist view of the manifest destiny of Jewry to be ingathered from their "exile." Therefore he writes also: "It is essential for the Zionist movement to . . . comprehend that it, the Jewish people and the State now form together a close-knit and indivisible unity."

The Zionists have been amazingly successful in their obscurantist effort to identify the two problems: (1) For or against Israeli, and (2) For or against the Zionist program and ideology for Israeli. That is, pursuing Ben-Gurion's thought that the establishment of the state is "the greatest victory won by the Zionist idea over the Jewish people," they have sought another "victory over the Jewish people," and this would be a victory indeed: to identify the cause of Israel with the cause of the Zionist ideology, if not the Zionist movement.

CHANIN'S LETTER

How much they have succeeded is indicated by the degree to which they have convinced non-Zionist Jews that all criticism of Israel is "disloyal" to the Jewish people and Israel. In this connection, a document of the greatest interest must be cited.

The interest which attached to it proceeds from the fact that in no other place we know of is the conception written down with such frankness that Israel must be considered immune from criticism by Jews because it is "ours." It is a letter sent by the general secretary of

the Workman's Circle, Nahum Chanin, to the periodical *Jewish Newsletter* edited by William Zukerman (August 17 issue). Here Chanin puts into words what few others would be willing to say openly though it is common indeed.

"I want to write to you about a painful subject which agitates Jewish life at present," begins Chanin. He introduces his remarks by explaining that he is "a friend" of the *Jewish Newsletter*, which is an outstanding liberal foe of Zionism among Jewish periodicals. He explains further, by way of preface:

"I am not a Zionist. I have been a Bundist (a Jewish socialist) all my life. I cannot accept the Zionist philosophy of life particularly in its application to Jewish culture and Jewish life in the Diaspora. . . . Zionism, which preaches the liquidation of Jewish life everywhere outside of Israel, will never strike a responding chord in my heart. . . . Thus my entire approach to Jewish life is in contradiction to that of Zionism and I cannot be considered a Zionist."

And indeed the rest of this revealing letter has its point just because of this avowal of (at least) non-Zionism. (We note in passing Chanin's reluctance to call himself an anti-Zionist, even though his statement of views add up to this: this is an example of a small-scale "victory won by the Zionist idea over the Jewish people.")

"YOU FIND FAULT"

"But, at the same time," Chanin's letter says as it comes to the point, "I believe that Israel will soon become an important factor in Jewish life and we have to help with everything in our power to put it on its feet. Your publication [the *Jewish Newsletter*] takes an opposite view. For instance, you frequently take the part of the wronged Arabs. I admit that great injustices have been committed against the Arabs. But to re-admit the Arabs to Israel now would mean a tragedy for the Jewish state. At the present moment, I dare to say that every Arab admitted to Israel would be a member of the Fifth Column for the state. Those Arabs who are in the country should, of course, remain. But to admit those who escaped would be a very grave mistake. I believe that the Arabs should receive compensation and reparation in money, but they should not be admitted to the country.

"There are black spots on the sky of Israel, but they are natural in a country which has just begun to reconstruct itself. And where reconstruction is going on under conditions worse than that of any other new state. It would be a terrible catastrophe for the Jewish people if the state of Israel were to disappear. The difference between my position and yours is that I say without hesitation that we must do everything possible to avert such a catastrophe and to help and strengthen Israel, while you say: We are for the state of Israel; we wish her success, but you proceed to find fault with it."

There it is in all its naiveté, set down no doubt with "painful" frankness by a prominent figure in non-Zionist Jewish circles. The key, of course, is the last sentence: "The difference between my position and yours" is that you criticize the policies and acts of the Israeli leaders.

EVASION

That is what speaks eloquently about this non-Zionist frame of mind, though we have quoted the whole of the passage for its interest as a specimen in political psychology. Its lack of logic and internal contradiction only manifest the split-thinking which has gone into it. Chanin,

for example, starts off by saying "Your publication takes an opposite view" when he seems to be talking about the desire "to help Israel with everything in our power to put it on its feet." He does not mean, of course, that the publication is opposed to helping Israel; on the contrary, he says in the next paragraph that it too agrees "We are for the state of Israel; we wish her success"—only . . . only it still insists on "finding fault," criticizing.

His discussion of the Arab question in Israel is purely evasive, at the best. The biggest problem is the policy of the Israeli government toward the Arabs now within its borders; but while the government has lately struck new blows at these its own Arab citizens, Chanin talks as if the only problem for a non-Zionist well-wisher of Israel is the readmission of those Arabs who fled. But it would be a digression, however tempting, to discuss these remarks on the Arabs. Chanin's intention is not to whitewash the Israeli Arab policy. He is saying: If we publicly "find fault" with what they are doing, this will weaken Israel.

ANALOGUE

To socialists the pattern is a familiar one. It is the pattern of the best-intentioned apologists for Stalinism, more familiar some time ago than today, it is true, but familiar nonetheless. Chanin's letter is written in the same accents, with the same confused groping, the same combination of heart-burning and reservations, as characterized so many people who so long continued to denounce all criticism of Russia as "anti-Soviet" and "reactionary" at the same time that they muttered and protested and criticized privately or secretly. What we have here is an analogue of the frame of mind of certain American liberals who, although never Stalinists, long persisted in avoiding any criticism of Russia for fear of harming a noble experiment—and to some extent still so persist.

Chanin cannot understand that liberal Jewish leaders like himself (he calls himself a "socialist" but we can ignore this little concession to nostalgia) can best serve the interests of the Israeli people by refusing to whitewash the deeds and policies which put the Jewish people in jeopardy in their little island-state in the midst of an Arab world. He cannot understand that loyal criticism is often necessary to loyal support.

"FRIENDS OF ISRAEL"

But there is very little to be said about this that has not long been said about the similar state of mind of non-Stalinist apologists for Stalinist Russia, and the rest of the argument will be well known to LABOR ACTION readers. For a long time during the period of degeneration of revolutionary Russia under the aegis of Stalinism, this same type of liberal used to call the press of our own movement "anti-Soviet" because it devoted its columns to signaling the crimes of the Stalinist leadership, instead of joining in the paeans of praise to the "great accomplishments" of the Kremlin.

Indeed, the Chanin-type is a victim of the Zionist euphoria which the establishment of the state of Israel caused. It is not unknown even among socialists, and LABOR ACTION's own criticisms of Israeli policies have met with reactions which stemmed from the same roots.

Such "friends of Israel" are no friends of Israel, we know from long similar experience with "friends of the Soviet Union," despite their excellent intentions. And the truth has to be said. Chanin has perhaps unwittingly done a valuable service in putting the question so clearly.

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Bogdan Denitch

Member, YPSL, NEC, and N. Y. District Secretary

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