

MERIA

THE ROAD TO UTOPIA: THE ORIGINS OF ANTI-ZIONISM ON THE BRITISH LEFT

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The British Left in the twenty-first century has exhibited high levels of ideological antagonism toward Israel per se. The easy-to-hand explanation is that this is a manifestation of “the new antisemitism.” While there is undoubtedly commentary that many would interpret as repeating anti-Jewish stereotypes of the past, this does not explain how the British Left has moved from embracing Israel in 1948 to its present position. It is argued here that this transition began to take place before the settlement drive on the West Bank and Gaza during Britain’s period of decolonization, but the seeds of such an approach were planted by Lenin well over a century ago.

THE OLD LEFT AND THE NEW LEFT

Since the end of the peace process in the 1990s and the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada, an important feature in the debate on the Israel-Palestine imbroglio has been a questioning of the legitimacy of Israel as a nation-state by sections of the political Left and the liberal and cultural intelligentsia in Britain.

Such opinion has broadly moved from passionately supporting the right of the Jews to national self-determination in 1948 by figures such as Aneurin Bevan, Bertrand Russell, and Tony Benn to questioning that right over 60 years later. Israel is often seen as troublesome on a good day and illegitimate on a bad one. Like many Israelis, many on the Left wish to roll the borders back to the 1967 boundaries, but there is also a growing number who wish to continue that process and return to 1948. There is a deepening identification with the Palestinians as the underdog and their depiction as a colonized people strikes a chord deep in the British psyche. The remorse felt after a legacy of slavery, imperial repression, and colonial exploitation is real. However, there is a growing belief that this rollback applies today, not simply to the settlements on the West Bank, but also to Israel as well. No distinction is made between colonialism and colonization.

Yet this disillusionment with Israel, this author would argue, began before 1967, before the conquests of the Six Day War and before the settlement drive on the West Bank.

There is greater identification today with the New Left of the decolonization era of the 1960s than with the Old Left of the post-fascist era after 1945. Whereas the Old Left had fought Mosley’s British Union of Fascists in the East End with the Jews, lived through the Holocaust and the rise of Israel, the New Left came of age during the epoch of decolonization. It was shaped more by Che Guevara’s struggles in Latin America, the fight against apartheid, and opposition to the Vietnam War. While Jews disproportionately participated in those struggles, the Holocaust and the rise of Israel was for many Jews not simply another historical event. Even for those born long after the war, it was understood that all Jews were survivors. This level of consciousness separates the Jewish Left from the broader British Left.

In 2009, the existence of a state with a Jewish majority in the Middle East does not easily fit Marxist doctrine, post-colonial theory, and Islamist belief. As Benedict Anderson remarked in *Imagined Communities*, nationalism is a real problem for Marxists, largely “elided rather than confronted.”¹ It is this inability to define Zionism and to classify the Jews, which has brought together liberals and social democrats, the Trotskyists of the

Social Workers Party (SWP), the Stalinists of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), and the Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood front organizations. Together they reaffirm Clermont-Tonnerre's contention in the French Constituent Assembly in 1789: "Everything must be refused to the Jews as a nation; everything must be granted to them as individuals." Max Nordau understood this well when he remarked at the first Zionist Congress in 1897 that the great men of the French Revolution emancipated the Jews, not through a fraternal feeling for the Jews, but because logic demanded it. There was a difference between theory and practice. It was this realization that propelled Jews in Eastern Europe to the understanding that the forces of revolutionary change were in general unable to emancipate the Jews in real terms, but only through a process of auto-emancipation could this be done. This spawned numerous ideologies promoting Jewish nationalism.

Yet this idea of national assertiveness impinged negatively on the idea that heaven could be created right here on earth. It was not that Jews did not believe in social change or indeed in revolution, it was that they believed that the theory of emancipation did not reflect their own reality. Many regarded themselves as a nation with a culture, a literature, a history, a plethora of languages, and a religion. A majority did not believe in assimilation and conversion. They did not wish to disappear to appease theory. Moses Hess's approach to socialism seemed to reflect this.

Hess had renounced Marx's belief that the actions of humankind could be placed in a scientific framework.

As Isaiah Berlin commented:

Hess believed that social equality was desirable because it was just, not because it was inevitable; nor was justice to be identified with whatever was bound, in any case, to emerge from the womb of time. All kinds of bad and irrational conditions had been produced before now, and persisted. Nothing was to be accepted merely because it had occurred--but solely because it was objectively good.²

THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

Much of current progressive thinking can be traced back to the success of the October Revolution in 1917. Lenin, of course, would have no truck with Jewish nationalism and was careful to airbrush out of existence any mention of his Jewish antecedent, Moshko Blank.³ In 1903, in a dispute with the Bund, he labeled the idea of a separate Jewish people as "utterly untenable scientifically" and "reactionary in its political implication."⁴ In Lenin's eyes, it would divert Jewish workers from the primary task of class struggle.⁵ He recommended the choice of assimilation for the Jewish future. Yet ten years later, Lenin recognized in part the national character of the Jews in his *Critical Remarks on the National Question*.⁶

Fred Halliday has pointed out that Lenin had quite clearly shifted his position. In 1903, assimilation was the solution. By 1913, the Jews were depicted as a nationality. The Jews, according to Lenin, had skipped the national stage in their historical development. The Jews, therefore, became the pioneers of socialism and moved directly onto assimilation. The dichotomy was that on the one hand the Jews were a national minority in the transitional process of assimilating who deserved protection against antisemitism, on the other they had to be denied the right to national recognition.

Moreover Lenin's occasional writings on the Jews were written during periods when the question of Jewish nationality was related to larger issues confronting the Russian workers' movement. Significantly, the great majority of his writings on the Jews were written in those two years, 1903 and 1913. Lenin quoted Karl Kautsky's earlier works in 1903, which were predicated on the pioneers of the first aliyah and Baron de Rothschild's munificence and not on the Marxist Zionism of figures such as Ben-Gurion, Ben-Zvi, and Tabenkin of the second aliyah. Lenin's analysis of Zionism was selective, partial, and outdated. Kautsky, unlike Lenin, analyzed Zionism and the

Jewish settlement after World War I. Lenin never produced a general analysis of the Jewish question and never discussed the question of the socialist Zionist experiment in Palestine. His works were targeted on the wider issue of the national question in Russia.

Lenin clearly knew little about Jews, Jewishness, and the travails of Jewish history. Most of the Jews with whom he was acquainted in the revolutionary movement were assimilated, acculturated, and Russified. Their Jewishness was often defined by transcending Jewishness. Unlike Nordau, Lenin believed that the emancipation of the Jews was, by and large, successful. In his writings, Lenin was therefore careful to quote Jews such as Alfred Naquet whose Jewishness was peripheral to their existence. Zionism, Lenin believed, derived its authority from the Jewish bourgeoisie and from Judaism. He did not understand that it was in part a rebellion against rabbinical authority and acquiescent Jewish leadership. The Jews, he believed, had only survived due to the scourge of antisemitism. The workers' movement, he argued, in capitalist Europe would defend the Jews against antisemitism. He also believed that after a socialist revolution, workers' states would automatically eradicate all forms of national prejudice including antisemitism. As history has demonstrated, on both counts, Lenin was wrong. Leninist theory did not reflect the reality in which the Jews found themselves.

Like Lenin, Stalin advocated the progressive assimilation of individual nationalities as part and parcel of "the general process of development of nations."⁷ He, too, formally condemned antisemitism,⁸ yet as Simon Sebag-Montefiore has recently demonstrated, he possessed a history of antisemitic outbursts going back to 1905.⁹ The Jews did not fit any theoretical framework. For Stalin, they were no more than a paper nation.

THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF ENGLISH SOCIALISM—AND ANTISEMITISM

Although the UK was deeply welcoming to the Jews, following their readmission during Cromwell's English republic, the antisemitic stereotype, contrary to conventional belief, was no stranger to the founding fathers of the great English socialist tradition. Lenin was a great admirer of J.A. Hobson, the well-known liberal economist. Hobson argued that the Boer War had been instigated by international Jewish bankers and East End Jews made good such as Barney Barnato.¹⁰ Hobson associated imperialism with Jewish conspiracy and Victorian capitalism. He believed that Jews hiding behind English names were the true manipulators of the Boer War.¹¹ Hobson's articles convinced figures such as Keir Hardie to find scapegoats in Jewish financiers. The non-Jewish Cecil Rhodes became "Rhodesstein." The revered founder of the Social Democratic Federation, H.M. Hyndman, held Jewish capitalists responsible for the Vienna riots of 1885 and the Panama Canal scandal of 1892, which implicated many French politicians.¹² Hyndman grafted the cutting of anti-imperialism onto the tree of antisemitism. He spoke of an "Imperialist Judaism in Africa"¹³ and the formation of an "Anglo-Hebraic Empire" in the continent.¹⁴ Significantly, the civilizations of the Zulus, Basutos, and Matabele were spoken of in glowing terms while the Jews were all merely greedy capitalists. The Jews were implicitly accused of the corruption of the innocent, a desecration of an unblemished utopia. The impoverished Jewish masses of Eastern Europe were invisible.

This cocktail of the conspiratorial nature of Jewish capitalism, its construction of a Jewish imperialism designed to exploit, the legacy of left wing antisemitism, the rise of Jewish nationalism, and the inability of both Marxists and liberals to explain the existence of the Jews according to the reality in which the Jews found themselves—all this contributed to the mindset of the British Left following the October Revolution in 1917.

JEWISH FAITH IN RED OCTOBER

This imagery was further embellished by Jews who wished to demonstrate that their prime allegiance was to the cause of the revolution.

The October Revolution and the Balfour Declaration--which offered the Jews a national home within Palestine--in late 1917 occurred within days of each other. One offered Jews the possibility of repairing the world, of eradicating all injustice, of building Jerusalem in Moscow. The other path offered a Jewish national entity in Palestine where the Jews would forge their own destiny. The former appealed to the universalist and indeed messianic tendencies within Judaism while the latter appealed to particularism and a national self-interest.

Many Jews fervently embraced the possibilities of destroying the old and building the new in Russia. They could escape antisemitism and the burden of Jewishness in an unsympathetic world. Moreover, many of those who worked for world revolution were former socialist Zionists who now looked upon the Zionist experiment as distant and utopian compared to the here and now of the success of the Bolsheviks.

While there was a disproportionate number of assimilated Jews in the upper echelons of the Bolshevik party, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Sverdlov, the Jewish masses while welcoming the overthrow of autocracy and a workers' state, initially did not support the party in any great measure. This soon faded away. The passion with which multitudes of Jews entered the portals of Bolshevism was characterized in unusual ways. Celebrating Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, in October was replaced by commemorating the anniversary of the Russian revolution also in October. The traditional *challot*, the two loaves of bread to welcome in the Jewish Sabbath, were still displayed in Jewish Bolshevik homes, except that they were in the shape now of a hammer and sickle. Shmuel Agursky, an emigre trade unionist, who once lived in London's East End, welcomed the revolution with messianic fervour. He like many other Jews bestowed this belief on their

offspring. His son, Mikhail Agursky, both a dissident and refusenik in the 1960s, was in fact named Melik. Why? Marx, Engels, Lenin, International Communism.

The ideological contribution of the Jewish Communists thus became a major factor in Bolshevik decisionmaking on Zionism. They were, for example, the central movers in the banning of the Hebrew language by Lunacharsky in 1919. On his appointment on January 18, 1918, the new Commissar for Jewish Affairs, Semyon Diamanshtein, formerly an adherent of the Lubavitcher Hasidim, immediately proclaimed his opposition to the Balfour Declaration.

The Jewish section of the party began to play on the ignorance, suspicion, and confusion about Zionism within the Bolshevik party. It argued that Zionism was one of the branches of the imperialist counter-revolution, that it was linked to the Entente and to White counter-revolutionaries. The Zionists, it was pointed out, were present at the Versailles conference when imperialism remade the world in their own image. The existence of Jabotinsky's Jewish Legion in the British army, composed mainly of Russian Jewish émigrés, domiciled in London, was further proof.

SAFEGUARDING THE REVOLUTION

The Bolsheviks profoundly believed in world revolution--and its success was predicated on revolution in the industrialized countries of the West. Yet this socialist internationalism was balanced by an opposing, almost nationalist aim. The Bolshevik primary interest in late 1917 and for many years to come was to stabilize the Soviet regime and to ensure that the new order survived. Extending the appeal of revolution beyond Russia's borders would therefore create domestic problems for the imperialists and divert political and military attention away from Russia. The Kremlin in particular wished to attack the colonial underbelly of imperialist nations since countries such as Britain were dependent on raw materials from the developing world. Trotsky pointed out that the

path to London and Paris lay through their colonies.

Moreover, the conquest of Palestine by General Allenby in 1917 brought the British closer to Russia's frontiers. The desire of Britain and France to control the Middle East was epitomized by the secret Sykes-Picot agreement of June 1916. The text was published in both *Pravda* and in *Izvestia* two weeks after the October Revolution.¹⁵ The propagation of "perfidious Albion" was designed to raise embarrassing questions for the British among its subject peoples. The Bolsheviks feared that the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire by the imperial powers would prove to be the precursor to the dismemberment of Russia.

The British also had their national interests. They erroneously believed that the Balfour Declaration would influence the Jews in the Bolshevik party such as Leon Trotsky. In particular, they wanted to disrupt any German-Russian rapprochement before the build-up of American troops on the western front. Significantly, Trotsky made his famous comment, "I am not a Jew, I am an internationalist" to the Chief Rabbi of Petrograd just a few days after the Balfour Declaration.¹⁶

The utilization of the Arab world's resentment at the British therefore assisted the early Bolshevik state in its war of survival. The desire to awaken Arab opposition was enhanced by the emergence of this growing body of Jewish Communists.

THE COMINTERN'S EMBRACE OF ARAB NATIONALISM

In Palestine, the magnetism of the Bolsheviks caused a schism on the Zionist Left to establish the MOPS (Mifleget Poalim Socialistim), the Socialist Workers Party--which dreamed that the Red Army would cross the Caucasus and create a Soviet Palestine.¹⁷ This represented the birth of a Jewish anti-Zionist Left in Palestine.

The Comintern and its Eastern Department in Moscow, however, did not view the

building of socialism in Palestine in the same way as did the Jewish Communists in Palestine. The Comintern, which contained a disproportionate number of Jews, some of whom were former Zionists, regarded the presence of Jews per se in Palestine, regardless of whether they were Zionist or not, as counter-productive in spreading the revolution to the East. The future, they believed, lay with Arab nationalism rather than with Marxist Jews in Palestine.

Thus in 1926, the coming to power of Ibn Saud and Wahhabi Islam in Saudi Arabia was welcomed by the Kremlin and seen as liberating and progressive.¹⁸

In 1924, the first Arab member of the Palestine Communist Party (PCP) had joined,¹⁹ followed by another eight the year after. Although the PCP supported the demonstrations and municipal electoral campaigns of Haj Amin al-Husseini,²⁰ the Mufti of Jerusalem, there was in reality a critical lack of progress on Arabization. In order to attract nationalist support in the Arab world, the Comintern argued for an "anti-colonial front." Zionism was projected as reactionary, counter-revolutionary, and in league with British imperialism.

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 easily accepted Stalin's new direction of socialism in one country, but it also emphasized turning its attention to the colonized East in the hope of exploiting emerging economic problems. There was a revitalized propaganda assault against Zionism. In line with its new policy toward social democrats, the Comintern labeled Ben-Gurion's Mapai "a social fascist party." The Histadrut became the "Nazi Histadrut." Later Zionism and Nazism were accused of collaborating to produce a mass hysteria, which would catalyze a mass immigration of Jews to Palestine. The killing of Jews by Arabs--mainly the anti-Zionist ultra-orthodox who lived in unfortified exposed areas--during the disturbances of 1929 became a test case for the new Comintern line. The killings recalled the terror of the Russian pogroms for many Palestinian Jews at that time. The Comintern

saw things differently in Moscow. Georgi Safarov, the head of the Comintern's Eastern department, understood the tales of massacres of Jews in Hebron and Safed only in terms of being undiluted imperialist propaganda.

Other Communist parties took its line from Moscow and portrayed the riots as an uprising of the Arab masses against British imperialism. Its anti-Jewish reflection was portrayed as a natural consequence. The PCP then put out a pamphlet entitled "The Mufti, Mattathias, and the Great Peasant Uprising 2000 years ago," which drew a parallel between the Hannukah story and the 1929 killings, with the Mufti's supporters playing the part of the Jewish rebels of Hasmonean times of the second century BCE.²¹

The Jews had effectively established the PCP and thus were ditched by Moscow ten years later in the hope of cultivating Arab nationalism. The Jews were allowed to advance in all the Communist parties of the world, but were denied this in Palestine. Jews were subsequently purged from the PCP. Some were offered posts as assistants to the new Arab leaders. Many Jews left the PCP and joined Zionist parties. The leadership returned or was recalled to the USSR, only to perish in the Gulag several years later. Others left the country. In the United States, Jews left the Communist party in protest.

BRITISH COMMUNISTS AND ZIONISM

By 1924, the Comintern was placing greater emphasis on the defense of Soviet Russia and less openly on international revolution. Many foreign Communist parties found it difficult to make a distinction. For most, the two were one and the same. Indeed, enlistment in the struggle for international socialism was followed in other ways. The recruitment of Kim Philby, the Soviet master spy, at Cambridge was carried out by the Czech Jewish Communist, Arnold Deutsch whose cover was that of an orthodox Jew.

What about Communist attitudes in Britain toward Zionism? The Communist Party of Great Britain was, in Lenin's eyes, one of the most important CPs. It could promote the anti-

imperialist struggle from the heart of the empire. It could assist the Soviet Union in its struggle to survive by undermining Britain, the leading force in the array of anti-Soviet states.

Lenin's dream attracted many from the colonies and especially from the Indian subcontinent-- those who hated British imperialism and wished to see an independent, free, and socialist India. Like many British Jews, they found in the Communist party, a home free of racism and colonial paternalism. Indeed, it was the white workers of Battersea who elected Shapurji Saklatvala, scion of the well-to-do Tata family of Bombay, to Parliament as a Communist MP in 1924.

Britain became the location where many of the Empire's elite came to receive their education. Moshe Sharett, Israel's first Foreign Minister studied at the London School of Economics (LSE) while Jawaharlal Nehru went to Harrow and to Trinity College, Cambridge, and then studied law at the Inner Temple in London. Many forged contacts with the early Labour party and after World War I, with the embryonic Communist Party.

Rajani Palme Dutt and his elder brother Clemens were the sons of a middle class Indian doctor and a Swedish mother who had defiantly challenged the racial prejudice of late Victorian society. Palme Dutt was born into a privileged household, went to public school and Oxford. During World War I, he opposed the conflict and was imprisoned for being a conscientious objector. Thus the October Revolution and the triumph of Bolshevism had great meaning for him. He and his brother joined the newly founded Communist Party of Great Britain, and he was regarded as the foremost ideologist of the party for the next half century. In 1921, he established his journal, *Labour Monthly*, almost certainly funded by the Comintern. The journal became a vehicle to influence generations of the British Left, regardless of whether or not they were affiliated to the Communist Party.²²

Dutt, like many early Communists, regarded the centrality and survival of the USSR as paramount. This sense of defending the USSR publicly allowed him never to dissent from the official view of the Kremlin.

It became an article of faith even within the internal discussions of the central committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). He was the greatest defender of Stalin during his lifetime and even in his twilight years was prepared to criticize any opposition to the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. He was regarded by the Kremlin as the safest pair of hands in Britain.

In addition, Dutt genuinely believed that the USSR had solved the problem of national minorities including that of the Jews. He could claim with some justification and with few exceptions that only British Communists took an unequivocal stand for Indians, Blacks, and other colonized peoples against the institutionalized racism of early twentieth century Britain.

Dutt was the party's foremost expert on India and on the colonial question. All CPGB members deferred to him. Dutt's view of Jewish nationalism was conditioned primarily by the vested interests of the Soviet Union. Zionism, moreover, was fitted into the conventional perception of anti-colonialism. It was examined in the context of the Indian struggle. It was seen as Eurocentric and sponsored by imperialism in the form of the British Mandate. Zionism was regarded as wrong and not as different. Marxist Zionist efforts in establishing the kibbutz collective and forging a command economy, based on the Soviet model, were glossed over. Jewish Communists had no real place in Palestine except in arousing the Arab masses.

However, the rise of Hitler to power in January 1933 and the threatening presence of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists introduced a new ingredient into the Communist Party of Great Britain's (CPGB) approach. The CPGB wanted a solid base within a working class community--the Jews offered this because they appreciated the Communists' principled stand against antisemitism and were deeply drawn to the idea of creating a better world. Like many Jews, they were attracted by the ideals of the October Revolution and the determination of the Bolsheviks to change the modus operandi of British society. For some, it offered the

opportunity to escape their Jewishness; for others to reaffirm it by fighting Hitler in Republican Spain and within the anti-fascist struggle in general. The CPGB in the mid-1930s offered the possibility of escaping anti-Jewish racism, embracing Anglicization, socializing with non-Jews, and gaining access to education and intellectual discussion. Many Jews regarded the CPGB as the university that their impoverished parents were unable to send them to. The advent of Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club in May 1936 introduced many socialist writers and intellectuals such as George Orwell to Jewish members of the Communist Party.

By 1936, the Comintern had decided upon a volte-face and embarked on a Popular Front strategy to confront the spread of fascism. Social democrats were no longer social fascists. The Labour party once more became touchable. The influx of Jews into the party created a situation whereby Jews were now disproportionately represented, particularly in the party's hierarchy and leadership. Indeed, party membership trebled between 1930 and 1935.²³

THE FIGHT AGAINST FASCISM

With the onset of the Arab revolt in the spring of 1936, the CPGB demanded a halt to Jewish immigration from Nazi Germany, cessation of land purchases, and a constitution for a legislative assembly.²⁴

However, many Jewish members of the CPGB, while often not identifying with Zionism per se, understood the attacks against Jews in Palestine in the context of attacks against Jews in Britain and in Europe generally. It raised the question of differentiating between Jewish national interests and the Comintern line. Why should attacks on Jews be fought in England but not in Palestine? The simplistic party line that Arab and Jewish workers should fight Zionism, Arab feudalism, and British imperialism did not reflect the global reality as a number of Jewish Communists understood it in 1936.

The CPGB's fight against fascism and antisemitism in Britain thereby clashed with

the Comintern's anti-Zionist policy. The CPGB's loyalty to the Comintern had to be squared with its interest in maintaining and expanding its political base within the Jewish community.

The Peel Commission report in 1937, which advocated a two-state solution and a partition of Palestine was rejected by the party. The party's line was that only a single Arab state should exist in Palestine with full citizenship rights for Jews.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact and the CPGB

The Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939 was a bombshell for all members of the Communist Party of Great Britain. For its Jewish members, it was a numbing experience, a challenge to their faith in the cause of revolution.

Did Stalin sign to buy time? Was the annexation of the Baltic states and half of Poland a means to construct a buffer territory against a future German invasion? Did Stalin, on the other hand, believe that this conflict between imperialist rivals--Germany on one side, Britain and France on the other--would end in mutually assured destruction such that the hitherto neutral USSR could then fulfill Lenin's dream by advancing into Western Europe and imposing Communism?

Large amounts of war materiel were shipped to Germany from the USSR and according to the Mitrokin archive, sabotage was conducted against British defense factories. There was much anti-British propaganda in the Soviet press during the Battle of Britain and Stalin congratulated Hitler on entering Paris. Given the USSR's pro-Nazi stance, were British Jews who followed the Communist party line expected to back a policy that would sacrifice themselves in the cause of the greater revolutionary good?

Some Jewish members of the CPGB in 1940 such as Eric Hobsbawm went along with the party line and endorsed the Nazi-Soviet pact. Yet Hobsbawm did not know that there was a secret clause in the Nazi-Soviet pact whereby German Communists who had sought refuge in the USSR would be handed back in

exchange for Nazi Germany handing back Soviet agents. Indeed on February 8, 1940, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, NKVD, led 30 German Communists including several Jews across the bridge crossing the River Bug into the hands of the Gestapo.²⁵

In the Labour party rank and file and within the unions, there was a real anti-war sentiment, a stop the war sentiment. There was a deep fear of a repetition of the carnage of World War I when ordinary people perished in their millions in a futile war between empires. The Communist Party's stand attracted the attention of many on the British Left when no one else was opposing the war. It is significant that the number of CPGB members increased by over 30 percent with the onset of war. The circulation of the *Daily Worker* increased and that of *Labour Monthly* trebled in the year after the outbreak of war.

Yet the CPGB had to perform political somersaults. In early September 1939, the CPGB argued that a war against Hitler was indeed a just war. By early October 1939, this line had reversed itself 180 degrees when the Comintern instructed it to oppose it as a war between two groups of imperialist countries for world domination.

The Poland of the Colonels, it was argued, could easily be depicted as a semi-fascist country. Some CPGB leaders could thereby justify their stand in that it would not be a terrible thing if Poland were to disappear from the map of Europe.²⁶

The war also pitched Rajani Palme Dutt against Harry Pollitt, the party's secretary-general. Indeed, Pollitt had originally published a pamphlet "How to Win the War," only for it to be replaced by Dutt's "Why this War?" Dutt inevitably followed the Comintern line in abandoning the Popular Front strategy and argued that this was another imperialist war just as in World War I.

In addition, this line of argument opened the way to the belief that there could be an "understanding" for national liberation movements in the developing world in approaching both Germany and Italy, that there was now no bar to working with the Nazis if it provided a method for ousting the

British imperialists and securing independence. After all, “the enemy of my enemy” is my friend.

The former president of the Indian National Congress, Subhas Chandra Bose, arrived in Berlin in March 1941, because he believed that the Nazis could assist in removing the British from India. He opposed the non-violent strategy of Gandhi and enlisted German assistance in training an Indian military force, which he believed would accompany a German attack on India once the USSR had been defeated. These Indian soldiers swore an oath to both Bose and Hitler and fought British troops in Italy.²⁷

If Italy’s forces had been successful in September 1940 and entered Cairo, they would have been welcomed as liberators by the Egyptians. Anwar Sadat, later the President of Egypt, wrote, “except for ill-luck, we would have joined forces with the Axis, struck a quick blow at the British, and perhaps won the war.”²⁸

Indeed, many leaders of national liberation movements in the Arab world including the mainstream Palestinian one spent the war years in Berlin. Had it not been for the victory at El Alamein, SS Obersturmbannführer Walter Rauff would have ordered his Einsatzkommando to liquidate the Jews of Palestine. Moreover, as in Eastern Europe, the Nazis expected local participation in their actions.

There was, therefore, a profound difference of choice for Jews and for anti-colonial freedom fighters. In both cases, vested interest overcame other considerations. For the Jews, it was often a matter of life and death, an escape from systematic extermination.

For many Jews, there was a difference between Comintern theory and policy and the reality in which European Jewry found itself. There was a precedent for this moral dilemma. In 1881, following the outbreak of a rash of pogroms in Tsarist Russia, revolutionary movements such as the Narodnaya Volya refused to condemn the mobs, which slaughtered Jews. Its leadership surely opposed antisemitism, but it attempted to broaden the violence to focus instead on the

authorities. Many of its Jewish members went along with this, others left the revolutionary movement and reinvented themselves as the first Zionists.

WHAT ABOUT TROTSKY?

Trotsky, himself, had become sensitized to the prevalence and use of antisemitism in the USSR when he lost the power struggle to Stalin and his supporters in the mid-1920s. Jews were depicted as being more involved in the Left Opposition than in either of Stalin’s, or Bukharin’s, factions. The use of antisemitic innuendo was initiated as a weapon to be used against highly assimilated Jews within the Bolshevik leadership who had previously given little thought to their Jewishness. Bolshevik Jews, no matter how distant from their Jewishness, were not Russians--and therefore not qualified to lead Russia, not even a socialist Russia. Karl Radek, a strong supporter of Trotsky who was expelled from the party asked “What’s the difference between Moses and Stalin? Moses took the Jews out of Egypt; Stalin takes them out of the Communist Party.”²⁹

In the 1930s, rising antisemitism in Europe caused Trotsky to revise his attitude that assimilation was the answer to the Jewish problem. Yet he related the problems of German Jewry to the belief that such difficulties could only be overcome by dispensing with the capitalist system.

Trotsky had attempted throughout his life to rationalize human conduct and to insert reason into its deliberations. This governed his decision not to investigate his Jewishness. Yet throughout the 1930s, Trotsky became acutely aware of the Zionist answer to the Jewish problem. Trotsky had also taken to using the term “Jewish nation” and did not appear ideologically opposed to the Jews moving en masse to Palestine once the victory of socialism had been achieved.

While Trotsky had predicted the Nazi-Soviet pact and powerfully condemned fascism, he also understood Stalin’s rationale for keeping the USSR out of any conflict for as long as possible. Defending the Soviet Union, in his

eyes, did not mean a rapprochement with the Kremlin bureaucracy. Moreover, he was pleased with Stalin's conquest of Eastern Poland in 1939 and incorporation of 16 million Poles since its territory had now passed from private into public hands. He too saw the war as a continuation of World War I--a conflict between rival imperialisms. Trotsky reasoned that: "Differences between decaying democracy and barbarian fascism disappear in the face of the collapse of the entire capitalist system. As victors, Britain and France would be no less fearful for the fate of mankind than Hitler and Mussolini."³⁰

Supporting democracy over fascism would therefore be a lamentable lapse into "social patriotism." At the end of the day, there was little to choose in 1940 between the views of the Stalinist ideologue Rajani Palme Dutt and the sophisticated intellectual Leon Trotsky. This was the political dysfunction on the Left, which faced the Jews on the eve of their greatest tragedy.

In the West, saving the Jews came to be seen as a consequence of winning the war. The question--what happens if there were no more Jews to save--was addressed only marginally. In the East, saving the Soviet Union and exporting the revolution was paramount. Moreover, the international proletariat did not rise up against their masters. The circle of abandonment of the Jews was complete.

THE ROAD TO UTOPIA

Soviet national interests ultimately trumped all other concerns including the meaning of socialism. It can be argued that Stalin's desire to oust the British from the Middle East and to secure a Soviet presence there was a deciding factor in the Kremlin's espousal of a Jewish state in part of Palestine in the spring of 1947. Indeed without Stalin's support, it is doubtful whether the UN would have voted by the mandatory two-thirds majority for a two-state solution in November 1947. It is doubtful whether without Stalin Israel would have come into existence in May 1948.

Yet Soviet Jews who applied to immigrate to Israel were quickly arrested and

incarcerated for long years in the Gulag. The USSR's external policy in Palestine dovetailed with Zionist interests. Its internal policies did not.

As Churchill remarked about the unpredictability of the Kremlin's policies: "It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. But perhaps, there is a key. That key is the Russian national interest."³¹

The "Road to Utopia" is paved with good intentions, but is accompanied by unexpected consequences. Today the Soviet Union no longer exists, consumed by its own contradictions. Yet its legacy about Zionism lives on. These errors of history are carried on high while marching valiantly toward the new dawn of humanity. While the Politics of Virtue still attract, many Jews remain, as President Kennedy put it, idealists without illusions. It is this contradiction that both draws them near to and at the same time distances them from the British Left. Yet this is no mere ideological dithering. One hundred years ago, the Zionist philosopher Ahad Ha'am wrote that "the Jew is both optimist and pessimist; but his pessimism has reference to the present, his optimism to the future."³² "The Road to Utopia" remains open, everyone wishes to move forward, but the twentieth century has taught that we do not all face in the same direction.

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NOTES

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³ Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (London: Pan Books, 2000), pp. 16-19.

⁴ V.I. Lenin, *The Position of the Bund in the Party*, October 22, 1903, Vol. 7 (Moscow: 1961).

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-103.

⁶ Hyman Lumer (ed.), *Lenin on the Jewish Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1974), p. 107.

⁷ J.V. Stalin, *The Political Tasks of the University of the Toilers of the East*, Vol. 7 (Moscow: 1954), pp. 135-54.

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¹⁰ Benita Parry, *Post-Colonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 153.

¹¹ Bernard Porter, "Correspondence of J.A. Hobson to C. P. Scott 2 September 1900," in *Critics of Empire* (London: MacMillan, 1968), pp. 210-12.

¹² Claire Hirshfeld, "The British Left and the 'Jewish Conspiracy': A Case Study of Modern Anti-Semitism," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (1981), p. 97.

¹³ H.M. Hyndman, *Justice*, April 25, 1896.

¹⁴ H.M. Hyndman, *Justice*, October 7, 1899.

¹⁵ *Guardian*, November 26, 1917.

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¹⁷ Walter Z. Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East* (London: Kessinger, 1956), p. 75.

¹⁸ E.H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1978), p. 655.

¹⁹ Fred Halliday, "Review of Mario Offenberg's *Kommunismus in Palastina: Nation und Klasse in der Antikolonialen Revolution*," *MERIP Reports*, No. 56 (April 1977).

²⁰ Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism*, p. 79.

²¹ G.Z. Israeli (Walter Laqueur), *MOPS-PCP-MAKI* (Tel Aviv: Am-Oved, 1953).

²² Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party* (London: Merlin Press, 1995), p. 31.

²³ Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920-1943* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), Appendix 2.

²⁴ *World Views and News*, June 20, 1936.

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²⁶ Beckett, *Enemy Within*, p. 92.

²⁷ Hugh Toye, *The Springing Tiger* (Bombay: Jaico, 1959), p. 63.

²⁸ Anwar Sadat, *Revolt on the Nile* (London: Allen Wingate, 1957), p. 8.

²⁹ Joseph Nedava, *Trotsky and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Random House, 1972), p. 268.

³⁰ Leon Trotsky, "Imperialist War and the World Proletarian Revolution, Manifesto of the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International," May 1940, in Will Reissner (ed.), *Documents of the Fourth International: The Formative Years 1933-40* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973).

³¹ Winston Spencer Churchill, radio speech, October 1, 1941.

³² Ahad Ha'am, *Moses* (Odessa: 1904).