

ments abroad, it needs to be stressed that to advocate internationalism means not only to combat chauvinism but also to reject the old cosmopolitanism and the old national nihilism that have too often en-crusted themselves on the concept of internationalism, to its detriment.

Continuing American ethnicity, in this light, can no longer be regarded as an obstreperous anachronism that refuses nostalgically to bow to objective Marxist "laws" of rapid assimilation but has to be accepted as a given fact, essentially democratic in its resistance to ruling class melting-pot programs. American ethnicity can neither be ignored, flouted nor left to reaction if socialists are serious about winning the American working class and its allies for socialism. Socialists there-fore should strive to harness ethnicity to the struggle against im-perialism, racism, anti-Semitism and poverty, and for a socialist per-spective. And socialist scholars need to study American ethnicity from this affirmative point of view.

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Lenin and the Jewish Question

By BEN JOSEPH

ON a bright Saturday morning in Sept., 1968 I walked up the narrow little street in Zurich called Spiegelgasse and stopped outside the three-story building that was No. 14. There, above a ground-floor restaurant called Jakob's Brunnen (Jacob's Well), was a plaque in German: "Here lived from 21 February 1916 till 2 April 1917 Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution."

I went into the restaurant and talked to the owner, a short blondish man. Yes, Lenin lived on the third floor. And the restaurant was here under the same name? "Yes it was. He used to sit over there," and the owner pointed to a table near the door. I assumed this last bit of information was apocryphal. For that matter, the restaurant's exis-tence in Lenin's day may have no greater historicity. His widow, Nadezhda K. Krupskaya, in her *Reminiscences of Lenin*, speaks of the room they rented on Spiegelgasse in the home of a shoemaker named Kammerer and refers to "a smelly courtyard" (p. 318) which was next door to a sausage factory, but makes no mention of a restaurant.

Be that as it may, this was the house in which Lenin wrote the greater part of his classic, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. And it was there too that some of his most trenchant essays on the right of nations to self-determination were written.

By coincidence, the Saturday on which I visited the house on Spiegelgasse happened to be the first day of Rosh Hashona. It set me thinking about Lenin's relation to Jews and the Jewish question. Others too have been giving this subject some thought. The London *Jewish Chronicle* of April 17 published an article by Chimen Abramsky of University College, London, "Lenin and the Jews," which led to an exchange of several published letters between the author and Dr. S. Levenberg, in which they hotly debated whether or not "the compact mass of the Jews, living predominantly in the Pale of Settlement, remained unknown" to Lenin. While this has some minor historic interest, the real point is: what was Lenin's approach to the Jewish question and what is its relevance today?

Lenin did not make a systematic exposition of the Jewish question,

but dealt with it on an ad hoc basis, whether to denounce anti-Semitic outrages by the Tsarist Black Hundreds, or to castigate leaders of the Bund, pioneer socialist organization of Jewish workers, for nationalistic departures from Marxism, or to condemn proposals for schools divided along national lines. Theoretically Lenin drew on classic Marxist views and leaned heavily on the writings about the Jewish question of his contemporary, the leading German Marxist, Karl Kautsky—the same whom he was in later years to brand a renegade because of his equivocal position on World War I and his hostility to the Bolshevik Revolution.

For Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks the Jewish question was a facet of the larger national question, but with its own peculiarities. And the national question, while subordinate to the working-class struggle for socialism, was a key element in that struggle. This was true not only because Tsarist Russia was a multi-national state but also because imperialism, defined by Lenin as a new stage of capitalism in which all reactionary tendencies are magnified, had made national and colonial liberation struggles crucial for its overthrow and replacement on a world scale by socialism.

Marx and Engels had developed the thought that no nation that oppresses another can be free and that the English workers had a direct stake in the liberation of Ireland. An international Socialist congress in 1896 had endorsed the right of nations to self-determination, and this was embodied in 1903 in the first program of the party of Russian Marxism, the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, of which Lenin was one of the principal leaders. But what had been a minor and often neglected tenet was raised by Lenin after the 1905 revolution and during the First World War into a major question for the working class of Russia and the world both before and after the socialist revolution. He did not achieve this without strenuous battles against opponents from the right and left. And he fought with the drive, tenacity and intellectual force that were so characteristic of him and with an extraordinary sensitivity to the feelings of the oppressed nationalities of Tsarist-capitalist Russia.

Opposing nationalism, especially of the bourgeois type, as tending to blunt the class struggle, divide the workers into separate national groups and unite them with “their own” capitalists, Lenin at the same time believed that consistent internationalism was impossible without active support of the truly national: the struggle for equality and against alien privilege and oppression, and above all, for the right of every nation to determine its own destiny. Being anything but an abstract thinker, he also drew a distinction between two types of

nationalism. “The bourgeois nationalism of every oppressed nation,” he wrote in 1913, “has a general democratic content which is directed against oppression, and it is this content that we support unconditionally, while strictly distinguishing it from the tendency towards national exceptionalism, while fighting against the tendency of the Polish bourgeois to oppress the Jews, etc. etc.” (*Critical Remarks on the National Question*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954, pages 90-91. All emphases in original unless otherwise indicated.)

Lenin also sought to outline the long-range dynamics of the national question. “Developing capitalism knows two historical tendencies on the national question. First: the awakening of national life and national movements, struggle against all national oppression, creation of national states. Second: development and intensification of all kinds of intercourse between nations, breakdown of national barriers, creation of the international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science, etc.” (Work cited, p. 21.) Elsewhere he wrote: “The aim of socialism is not only to abolish the division of mankind into small states and all segregation of nations, not only to draw the nations together, but to merge them.” (*The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954, p. 169.)

But he viewed this union and merging as a dialectic process, the eventual consequence of the *liberation of nations*. And he made it clear three years after the victory of socialism in Russia that fusion of nations was music of the distant future, that national and state differences “will continue to exist for a very long time, even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale. . . .” (*“Left-Wing” Communism, An Infantile Disorder, Selected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 135.)

Lenin’s polemics on self-determination were directed at both those who over-emphasized the national aspect at the expense of working-class interests and those who, in the name of working-class interests, underrated or cast aside the national. One of his principal targets was the Bund, with whose leaders sharp differences developed over organizational questions as well as ideology. Perhaps it was no coincidence that in the same year, 1903, in which the historic split in the RSDLP between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks took place, the Bund, an autonomous affiliate of the party, decided to break away because of the refusal to recognize it as the exclusive representative of the Jewish workers. Arguing against the Bund’s separatism, Lenin, in an article, “Does the Jewish Proletariat Need an ‘Independent Political Party?’” quoted with approval a manifesto addressed to the Jewish Workers of Ekaterinoslav by the RSDLP’s committee in that city: “. . . the man-

ifesto treats the sentiments, moods and desires of the Jewish workers so considerately, with such comradely consideration that it specially refers to and emphasizes the necessity of fighting under the banner of the RSDLP 'even for the preservation and further development of your national culture,' 'even from the standpoint of purely national interests' (underlined and italicised in the manifesto itself)." (*Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Vol. 6, p. 331.)

The Bund, moving to the right, eventually joined with the Mensheviks, and it became the chief, though by no means sole, proponent within the Russian revolutionary movement of "cultural national autonomy." This proposal particularly concerned schools and provided that children of each nationality, regardless of how dispersed they were in various parts of Russia, be educated in separate national schools under the aegis of national associations. In a number of articles and in a lengthy essay, "Critical Remarks on the National Question," written in Oct.-Dec. 1913, Lenin condemned "cultural national autonomy" as divisive and contrary to the interests of democracy in general and the working class in particular. To emphasize the proposal's reactionary character he pointed to the fact that the Tsarist government itself had been considering a plan for segregated Jewish schools. And he also cited the "separate but equal" schools in the American South, with flourishing illiteracy and brutal mistreatment of Negroes, as "the only case of 'nationalization' of schools in actual practice." (*Critical Remarks on the National Question*, pages 37-38.) Stalin, in his *Marxism and the National Question*, also written in 1913 under Lenin's influence, took the same position.

In place of "cultural national autonomy," Lenin proposed wide regional autonomy with democratic local self-government. At the same time he was sensitive to the desire of various nationalities for inclusion in the school curricula of material that would reflect specific national concerns: ". . . if the state constitution contained a fundamental law that rendered null and void every measure that infringed the rights of a minority, every citizen would be able to demand the rescinding of orders that would, for example, prohibit the hiring at state expense of special teachers of the Jewish language, Jewish history and so forth, or the provision of state-owned premises for lectures for Jewish, Armenian or Romanian children. . ." (Cited Work, p. 49.)

Among some left-wingers there is a disposition to believe that the Soviet government reversed the opposition to "cultural national autonomy" when it established Jewish schools in the late 1920s. They also cite Yiddish newspapers, theaters and other cultural institutions set up under Soviet rule as evidence that theory was one thing and practice another. I believe these left-wingers are mistaken.

Reference to a Yiddish press, theater, etc. are beside the point and have nothing to do with "cultural national autonomy" as the term was used in pre-revolutionary Russia. Certainly Lenin and his co-workers always favored a press and cultural expression in all the languages of Russia, including Yiddish. As for Jewish schools, segregating children by nationality under the Tsarist autocracy, cannot be equated with separate schools designed to help integrate into socialist society the children of Jews whose petty-bourgeois social structure had been disrupted by war, revolution and civil war. Moreover, these schools were, with few exceptions, established in areas where a large Jewish population was concentrated, especially in the Ukraine and Byelo-Russia. They therefore conformed to the principle of regional autonomy.

In dealing with the opposite tendency on self-determination—what in effect was national nihilism—Lenin, the Great-Russian, by one of history's minor ironies found himself pitted against Rosa Luxemburg, who as a Pole and a Jew was a member of a doubly oppressed national minority. She rejected the right of national self-determination as a "bourgeois" idea that was obsolete or impossible under capitalism and superfluous under socialism. Against the flaming Rosa and her Polish comrades Lenin directed sharp fire, accusing them of objectively aiding Great-Russian chauvinism. At the same time he expressed his high regard for them as revolutionary Marxists whose aberration on this point he explained as due to fear of seeming to support the rampant nationalism of the Polish bourgeoisie.

As for the "impossibility" of achieving the right to national self-determination under imperialism, Lenin argued that, like all fundamental democratic demands, this one could be won under capitalist conditions only incompletely and as a rare exception. And he cited such a rare exception: Norway's secession from Sweden in 1905. The workers of the oppressing countries, he insisted, should demand the right of the oppressed to secede, but this did not necessarily mean that the workers of oppressed nations should opt for political independence. That would depend on circumstances. And so, rejecting both the Scylla of nationalism and the Charybdis of national nihilism, Lenin gave to the concept of the right of nations to self-determination a singular strength, suppleness and clarity.

Where did the Jews fit into this national self-determination framework? They didn't. Lenin held with Kautsky—rightly in my opinion—that lacking a territorial base, the Jews were not a nation. But equality of nations and languages also included guaranteeing the rights of national minorities. Recognizing the Jews as the most oppressed and persecuted of all, the Bolsheviki members of the Duma (parli-

ament) under Lenin's leadership introduced a bill "to remove all limitations of rights placed upon the Jews, and all limitations whatsoever connected with descent from or membership of any particular nationality." (*Lenin on the Jewish Question*, International Publishers, N.Y., 1934, p. 7.)

And equality of rights meant not only removal of legal or extralegal disabilities, but, as we have seen above, employment in the public schools of teachers of Yiddish, Jewish history, etc., as well as of the languages and cultures of other national minorities.

Here we encounter a paradox. While arguing for a proposal that in effect would nourish Jewish ethnic identity, Lenin maintained that, once the barbarous conditions under which Jews lived were eliminated, their future was assimilation. The paradox was more apparent than real. Just as the road to the eventual amalgamation of nations would lead through their liberation, so he believed that assimilation—a form of amalgamation—of the Jewish national minority would be facilitated by achieving for them equal rights' including the right to develop their own language and cultural interests. And since he viewed assimilation as voluntary and gradual, Soviet practice in encouraging Jewish culture during the first 30 years after the revolution was not a reversal of Leninist theory, but was in my opinion entirely in accord with it.

For Lenin assimilation was part of a universal historic process, and far from it being a curse word, it was a consummation devoutly to be wished for by all genuine socialists. However, while he foresaw national assimilation or fusion as the distant destiny of all mankind, in the case of the Jews he considered it far advanced in the West and its completion relatively imminent. In this too he followed the lead of Kautsky. "All over Europe," wrote Lenin in 1903, "the decline of medievalism and the development of political liberty went hand in hand with the political emancipation of the Jews, their abandonment of Yiddish for the language of the people among whom they lived, and in general, *their undeniable progressive assimilation with the surrounding population.*" ("The Position of the Bund in the Party," *Collected Works*, Vol. 7, p. 100. Emphasis mine.)

By this time Kautsky had published several articles on the Jewish question, and in 1914 appeared his *Rasse und Judentum* (Race and Jewry), which came to be regarded as the standard Marxist work on the subject. Its revised second edition was further updated and published in English translation by International Publishers in 1926 under the title *Are the Jews a Race?* Although by that time Kautsky's views on most other subjects had been discredited in the international Communist movement, on the Jewish question he was still considered an authority.

Kautsky's motives in writing the book were unimpeachable: to

combat racist theories about the Jews. Unfortunately he ended by giving the racists and anti-Semites the consolation they needed: the Jew is about to disappear. Kautsky expressed the belief that emancipation "will extend into the east of Europe the assimilation of the Jews that has been going on in the west for some time" (p. 216), although "the process of the disintegration of Judaism will proceed more slowly in Eastern Europe than in America" (p. 242). And he saw the persistence of the Jewish people through the centuries as due solely to anti-Semitism. "When the Jews shall have ceased to be persecuted and outlawed, the Jews themselves will cease to exist" (p. 244). Which Kautsky believed would be a good thing for everybody, not least for the Jews. (For a further discussion of this question, I refer the reader to the penetrating article by Morris U. Schappes, "The Jewish Question and the Left—Old and New," in the June issue of *JEWISH CURRENTS*, also reprinted as a pamphlet. Also reprinted in this book, below.)

Lenin accepted this basic approach, which stemmed from Marx himself and for which there seemed to be considerable circumstantial evidence. Moreover, the Russified Jews whom Lenin knew best—men like Zinoviev, Trotsky, Martov and Kamenev—must have seemed to him prototypes of every Russian Jew in the near future.

A trend toward assimilation in countries where Jews lived a more or less normal life was undoubtedly a fact when Kautsky and Lenin wrote, although more true of the wealthy than of the mass of Jewish workers and small business men, and more marked in pre-Hitler Germany, where Kautsky lived, than elsewhere. Kautsky, however, exaggerated this phenomenon and assumed that linguistic assimilation—he described Yiddish as "a mutilated German" (Cited Work, p. 208)—and the adoption of the vocations, dress, manners and customs of the non-Jewish majority were necessarily evidence that complete assimilation, the extinction of the Jew *qua* Jew, was around the corner of the next generation or two.

The root mistake, and Lenin shared it, was to regard the persistence of Jewish ethnic identity and the awakening of national consciousness as solely a product of anti-Semitism and enforced segregation. While anti-Semitic persecution has undoubtedly been the most powerful cementing force, the explanation of Jewish survival needs to be sought in other factors as well: religious, historic and cultural.

When Lenin in 1903 posed the Jewish problem in terms of assimilation or isolation, he did not foresee that history would provide a third alternative: integration. This has been most clearly demonstrated in the United States, a multi-ethnic country whose components have failed to melt into the single homogeneous—or homogenized—

whole as predicted years ago. The fact that so many national minorities—including the earliest immigrant group, the Irish—continue to maintain in varying degree and form their cohesiveness indicates that the process of assimilation is much more gradual and the tendency to maintain national identity much stronger than had been assumed.

Although only a small minority of the 6,000,000 American Jews speak or understand Yiddish, the overwhelming majority are neither assimilated nor isolated. They are integrated into the economic, social, political and cultural life of the country despite the fact that anti-Semitism, open or covert, makes the integration incomplete. This American Jewish entity is of course a mixed bag of chauvinism as well as of democratic aspiration and struggle. And the class tensions and conflicts that agitate the American people as a whole are rife among Jews as well.

At the same time the American Jewish community is one of the most highly organized in the country, and most individual Jews continue to maintain their ethnic identity in one form or another, even if only as a personal consciousness. And though there has been linguistic assimilation, there is also cultural cross-fertilization: for example, Yiddish expressions in English and the many Jewish themes in contemporary American literature and the theatre.

Two other factors, which Lenin could not have foreseen, have also had an enormous impact on the Jews of this and other countries: the Nazi extermination of 6,000,000 Jews and the creation of the State of Israel. The Nazi experience altered the self-image and perspective not only of those who escaped or survived but of every Jew who has spiritually been in Auschwitz.

The second factor—establishment of Israel—may be considered largely a consequence of the first. The Zionist experiment in Palestine was a failure, attracting only a handful of Jewish immigrants until Hitler made it a success by driving hundreds of thousands of non-Zionist Jews to seek refuge there. This community became for the first time in the modern sense a nation, and nationhood gave birth to the struggle for independence from British imperialism, which was won with the help of Lenin's successor.

Lenin was a genius, but he did not believe in the myth of his infallibility. He told Clara Zetkin in 1920 that he had been wrong and Karl Radek right about the Red Army's advance to Warsaw where hope of a revolution in Poland proved a miscalculation and the Soviet soldiers suffered a defeat. (*Reminiscences of Lenin*, International Publishers, 1934, p. 18.) On other occasions too he admitted personal errors. Had he lived beyond his 53 incredibly strenuous, enormously

productive years, there is reason to believe he would have modified his views on Jewish assimilation in the light of reality.

The heroic period of the Revolution and the civil war saw heroic efforts under Lenin's leadership to create equality in life as well as in law for some 170 formerly oppressed nationalities. In regard to the Jews, a determined public struggle against anti-Semitism and counter-revolutionary pogromists was combined with measures to effect the social transformation of the 3,000,000 Russian Jews: to provide new occupations and draw into the mainstream of productive work a people that consisted predominantly of small tradesmen, artisans, members of religious professions and not a few *Luftmenschen*. A Commissariat for Jewish affairs was created, vocational schools were opened for Jewish youth, land was set aside in the Crimea, where thousands of Jewish families were helped to root themselves in agriculture, Jewish newspapers, publishing houses, theatres were established—all designed to help the Jews obtain the rights and opportunities so long denied.

After Lenin's death this policy was further expanded with the creation in the late 1920s of five Jewish national districts in the Ukraine and the Crimea, with their own Yiddish-language soviets, courts and schools. It was in this period too that the first efforts were made to provide Soviet Jews with a national base, Birobidjan in Eastern Siberia, which in 1934 was proclaimed the Jewish Autonomous Region. Although there is nothing in Lenin's writings that specifically suggests this kind of nation-building under socialism, there is nothing that excludes it. And it appears that in personal conversation some years before the Revolution with Shimen Dimanshtein, who later headed the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, Lenin did look favorably, according to Dimanshtein's memoirs, on the idea of "one area or several areas" that a socialist government would assign for Jews who wished to develop a common national life. (*Morning Freiheit*, Sept. 30, 1970.)

Considerable light on later Soviet policy, culminating with the extinction in 1948-49 of all Jewish cultural institutions (except in Birobidjan) and the imprisonment or execution of many leading Jewish writers, may be found in certain remarkable notes that Lenin dictated toward the end of his life. In a fascinating book, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, which is strongly sympathetic to the Soviet leader, Moshe Lewin, drawing on documents published in the Soviet Union in recent years, gives a vivid account of how the stricken Lenin strove desperately to reverse certain dangerous tendencies, among them proliferating bureaucracy, growing concentration of power in Stalin's hands, and distortions on the national question redolent of Great-Russian chauvinism.

By his efforts Lenin succeeded in blocking Stalin's "autonomization plan" for the affiliation of the five other Soviet republics then in existence to the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, and insisted on the creation of a "Federation of republics with equal rights." (Quoted in Lewin, cited work, Pantheon Books, N.Y. 1968, p. 148.)

The passion with which Lenin fought the infection of Great-Russian chauvinism among his colleagues is indicated by a note he sent to Kamenev, acting chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the government, in which he said: "I declare war to the death on dominant nation chauvinism. I shall eat it with all my healthy teeth as soon as I get rid of this accursed bad tooth." (*Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 372.)

Perhaps even more revealing are the notes on the national question and autonomization that Lenin dictated on Dec. 30 and 31, 1922, intended as part of proposals for the next Party congress that have come to be known as his "testament." In these notes he lashed out at the efforts to impose Stalin's autonomization plan on the republic of Georgia and accused Stalin, himself a Georgian, of Great-Russian chauvinism. Perhaps there is some connection between these notes and the fact that four days later Lenin added a final section to his "testament" calling for the removal of Stalin as general secretary.

What has all this to do with the Jewish question? One must assume that the harmful tendencies on the national question that alarmed Lenin in 1922 did not disappear with his death. One ought also to assume that these tendencies manifested themselves not only in relation to Georgia but to other national groups, including the Jewish. It is true that Stalin, in his report to the 16th Party congress, singled out Great-Russian chauvinism as the "chief danger in the Party in the sphere of the national question" (*Collected Works*, Vol. 12, p. 382, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1955). By the next congress in 1934, "local nationalism," as it came to be called, was equated as a menace with Great-Russian nationalism (Vol. 13, p. 369).

Thereafter concern about the latter virtually disappeared from public statements, while denunciations, arrests and executions were directed at Ukrainian, Georgian and other varieties of non-Great-Russian nationalists. Undoubtedly in the 1920s and 1930s there were such nationalists actively seeking, sometimes with foreign aid, to overthrow the Soviet regime. But this campaign increasingly began to center on Communist Party leaders and became part of the general purge of Stalin's opponents.

It was in this context that the first attack on Jewish culture took place:

the closing of most Jewish schools and of several Yiddish publications in 1937. If it is argued that a majority of Jewish youth had by that time become Russian- or Ukrainian-speaking, these actions by official fiat nevertheless showed a disregard of national sensibilities and exerted pressure toward assimilation.

There was of course much worse to come. Khrushchev, in his secret speech at the 20th Party congress in 1956, referred to "the mass deportations from their native places of whole nations" during the war and to a frameup in 1951-52 concerning a non-existent nationalist organization in Georgia, as a result of which "thousands of innocent people fell victim to willfulness and lawlessness." (*The Anti-Stalin Campaign and International Communism: A Selection of Documents*, ed. by the Russian Institute, Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1956, pages 57, 61.) Khrushchev also cited the extension of this repressive chauvinist approach to the international sphere, specifically to the conflict with another socialist country, Yugoslavia. Today, although Stalin is gone, one must unfortunately add Czechoslovakia.

Khrushchev failed to mention—why?—the destruction of Jewish culture in 1948-49 and the execution of Itsik Feffer, Peretz Markish and other distinguished Yiddish writers. His own government was exceedingly slow in permitting a partial revival of Jewish cultural expression.

In discussing these tragedies that befell Soviet Jewry and other peoples of the USSR, I am speaking of what began as errors committed by dedicated Communists in applying a truly progressive, liberating nationalities policy—errors that alarmed Lenin nearly five decades ago and that in time, as Stalin grew increasingly despotic and suspicious, were transmuted into horrible crimes.

These deformations on the national question, as on other aspects of Soviet policy, were determined by three factors: Russia's heritage of backwardness and repressive autocracy, the extraordinary internal and external difficulties the first socialist state faced for so many years, and the imposition after Lenin's death of the authoritarian Stalinist system, itself partly a product of the first two.

At the same time it would be unjust and a colossal historic distortion to paint Soviet national policy exclusively or primarily in the dark hues I have had to use in depicting certain negative phenomena. The "ethnic democracy" that Henry Wallace once hailed has been largely realized despite gross violations under Stalin and shortcomings under his successors. The economic, social and cultural achievements of the non-Russian republics and peoples persist in not conforming to the image of "Soviet colonialism" fashioned by certain Kremlinologists. Particularly conspicuous are these achievements in the Caucasian and

Central Asian republics, where they contrast so sharply with the poverty and oppression of non-socialist Asia.

In a book generally critical of the Soviet Union, the late Maurice Hindus wrote: "Soviet Azerbaijan. . . with a population of over 4,500,000 is, in its internal development, culturally, industrially, and scientifically ages in advance of Iranian Azerbaijan with a population of some 3,000,000. . ." And ". . . there is not a country on the Asian continent that can compare with Uzbekistan in internal development." (*The Kremlin's Human Dilemma: Russia After Half a Century of Revolution*, Doubleday, N.Y. 1967, pages 257-58.)

In regard to the Jews, the balance also needs to be redressed. It was under Stalin that the unprecedented flowering of Yiddish literature and culture in the 1920s and 1930s took place. It was at Stalin's orders that two and a half million Soviet and Polish Jews were evacuated to distant places and saved from Nazi annihilation. It was Stalin's policy that was decisive in passage of the United Nations partition resolution in 1947, which brought to birth the State of Israel. And ironically, at the very time in 1948 that Stalin was destroying Jewish culture in the Soviet Union, he was providing the political, military and moral assistance that enabled Israel to achieve victory in its liberation war.

Today there appears no doubt that a substantial proportion—perhaps a majority—of the 3,000,000 Soviet Jews have been or are becoming assimilated, though this process has by no means been entirely voluntary. But has there not also been among some a strengthening of Jewish consciousness, as witness the tens of thousands, including young people, who participate in public *Simhas Torah* celebrations?

For those, whatever their numbers, who still wish cultural expression in Yiddish, or facilities for religious worship, or ties with Jews in other countries, or who desire to emigrate to Israel, there ought to be a more enlightened policy, free of Stalinist vestiges.

With all due respect I commend to Soviet leaders—to those who deny any trace of discrimination against the Jewish national minority; to those who encourage frenetic anti-Zionist propaganda that, besides inaccuracies and exaggerations, often contains anti-Semitic overtones; to those who chided Yevgeny Yevtushenko because he spoke of the Nazi mass slaughter of Jews in his poem "Babi Yar" and did not mention non-Jewish victims; to those who compare Israeli mistreatment of Arabs with the Hitler atrocities—I commend to them in this year of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the greatest leader, thinker and humanist of socialism in this century a rereading of those almost last words from his notes on the national question:

" . . . internationalism on the side of the oppressing or so-called

'great' nation (although great only in its violence, great only in the sense of brutality) must consist not only in observing the formal equality of nations, but also in such inequality as will make up on the side of the oppressing nation, the big nation, for the inequality which in fact arises in life. . . nothing blocks the development and strengthening of proletarian class solidarity as much as national injustice, and to nothing are national 'feelings' so sensitive as to the infringement of national equality, even though due to carelessness, even though in the nature of a joke, and especially to the infringement of national equality by one's proletarian comrades. That is why in the present instance it is better to overdo it on the side of a willingness to make concessions and mild treatment of the national minority than not to go far enough." (This is published in Vol. 45 of Lenin's *Collected Works*, not yet available in English in this country. I have used the translation in the U.S. Communist monthly, *Political Affairs*, Nov., 1956, pages 11-12.)

These words are relevant not only for the Soviet Union. They are much more relevant for the United States, whose imperialist rulers forcibly suppress the right to self-determination of the nations of Southeast Asia and deny this right to Puerto Rico and other colonial provinces. These words also bear directly on the situation within our country, where blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and Indians are treated as subhumans. And Lenin's words are not without relevance in respect to the Jewish, Polish, Italian and other ethnic minorities. The national question is part of American reality too.

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