



Socialist Fight Pamphlet

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Abram Leon and Zionism: Marxism and the Jewish Question



Ernest Mandel and Abraham Léon

**THE CHIMERA OF
BRITISH ANTI-
SEMITISM, AND
HOW NOT TO
FIGHT IT IF IT
WERE REAL**
**By Norman G.
Finkelstein**

"THE HOLOCAUST HAS PROVEN TO BE AN INDISPENSIBLE IDEOLOGICAL WEAPON. THROUGH ITS DEPLOYMENT, ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST FORMIDABLE MILITARY POWERS, WITH AN HORRENDOUS HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD, HAS CAST ITSELF AS A 'VICTIM' STATE, AND THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ETHNIC GROUP IN THE US HAS LIKEWISE ACQUIRED VICTIM STATUS. CONSIDERABLE DIVIDENDS ACCRUE FROM THIS SPECIOUS VICTIMHOOD - IN PARTICULAR, IMMUNITY TO CRITICISM, HOWEVER JUSTIFIED."



Unity is strength, L'union fait la force, La union hace la fuerza, Η ενότητα είναι δύναμη, اتحاد قدرت است, đoàn kết là sức mạnh, Jedność jest siła, ykseys on kesto, Η ενότητα είναι δύναμη. Midnimo iyo waa awood, hundeb ydy chryfder, Einheit ist Stärke, Воединство прочность, единство наша сила, vienybės jėga, bashkimi ben fuqine, אחדות היא כח, unità è la resistenza, 団結は力だ, A união faz a força, eining er styrkur, De eenheid is de sterkte, الوحدة هو القوة, Ní neart go chur le céile, pagkakaisa ay kalakasan, jednota is síla, 일성은 이다 힘 힘, Workers of the World Unite!

Socialist Fight Where We Stand (extracts)

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 Fight PO Box 59188, London, NW2 9LJ,
 Socialist_Fight@yahoo.co.uk.
<https://socialistfight.com/>
 Communist Workers Front—Brazil
<http://lcligacomunista.blogspot.co.uk/>
 Tendencia Militante Bolchevique, Argentina,
<http://tmb1917.blogspot.co.uk/>
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Introduction

The purpose of this collection is to bring the insights of Abram Leon, one of the most capable theoreticians and activists of the Trotskyist movement before and during Second World War, to a new generation of aspiring Marxists. Equally importantly, it is to update Leon's work, which ceased in 1944 when he was brutally murdered as part of the Nazi genocide, along with millions of other Jews and countless Communists like him, as well as Gypsies, Slavs, gays and lesbians, and others considered *untersmenschen* by the Hitler regime.

Leon's work is important not merely as a matter of historical interest, but because his theory, properly understood and with due allowances for some unavoidable errors of perspective and prediction from his vantage point, provides an important key to understanding the Jewish Question and Zionism today.

What is primary and essential in Leon's work is his characterisation of the Jews in the period since antiquity, and prior to the victory of capitalism over feudalism in Europe, as a mercantile people- class. The theoretical ambiguity in Leon's characterisation of the Jews, whether their oppression prior to WWII was fundamentally rooted in capitalism or its predecessor systems, is addressed in full here.

This creates the basis for a full understanding of the proven capacity of Political Zionism as the movement of a sometimes-oppressed people, to transform itself into a full-blown oppressor-people movement, which neither brooks any quarter, nor deserves any from communists and socialists who aspire to catalyse the liberation all oppressed peoples from oppression.

Political Zionism was and is a successful strategy that enabled Jews to join the dominant peoples under the imperialist order. In that sense, the period of the Jewish diaspora as Leon analysed it is over, insofar as that is identified with the oppression of the Jews. It came to an end with the decisive consolidation of the Zionist state in the Six-Day War of June 1967.

Political Zionism's strategy was to overcome oppression under capitalism by joining the oppressors. That was only possible for Jews because the real roots of their oppression were not systematically in capitalism, but rather conjunctural, in the unevenness of the triumph of capitalism over feudalism, and thus have their origin wholly in pre-capitalist societies.

No other oppressed people had, or have the privilege of overcoming oppression in such a decisive manner under imperialist capitalism. This theorisation explains why; it is rooted in a proper understanding of both Leon's theory itself, and its historical context and therefore limitations. It thus appears to be the only fully-coherent materialist understanding of the nature of Zionism available today.

As appendices, we include my 2014 *Draft Theses on the Jews and Modern Imperialism*, and a 2018 essay by Norman Finkelstein, titled *Corbyn Mania*, which addresses some matters concerning the material base of Zionist influence in the politics of advanced countries like Britain and the US. These materials respectively theorise and empirically examine the roots of this influence, and therefore provide useful supplementary materials that show the ability of our work to find an echo among the most advanced elements on today's left.

Ian Donovan, September 2018.

Abram Leon and the Jewish Question

First of two Socialist Fight educational discussions

First of all, I would like to ask, why are we addressing this at all? I think the current attack on the Labour Party utilising the Jewish question as a weapon partially answers that.

As well as the involvement of Zionists in a range of major historical events such as the Iraq War; the so-called 'war on terror'; the diversion of the 'Arab Spring' revolutionary upsurge into an imperialist campaign to destroy Israel's most important Arab nationalist opponents in the Middle East: Syria and Libya; the deliberate creation of chaos in the Middle East; the war threats against Iran by Israel and the US.

Zionist involvement in this means that the Israel question has become one of the central, strategic questions of world politics. I wrote something to that effect in the conclusion of my *Draft Theses on the Jews and Modern Imperialism* four years ago, and events since then have borne that out in a big way. When you touch Israel, its nature and origins, you touch the Jewish question.

Abram Leon's book, *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation* is the most important, and most neglected, Marxist study of the Jewish question. Indeed there are no other synthetic Marxist studies of the question.

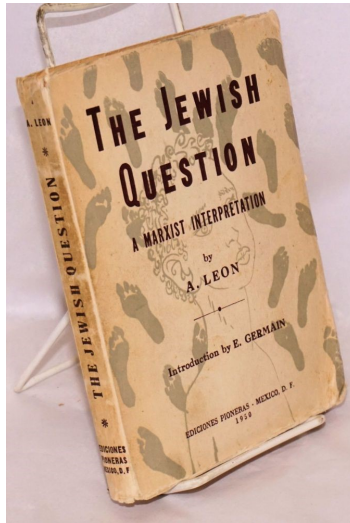
Karl Kautsky wrote his book *Are the Jews a Race?* prior to WWI, but in my view though it implicitly deals with much of the same subject matter and particularly notes the overwhelmingly urban situation and role of the Jews, it does not create a rigorous theoretical framework for understanding the question overall.

Leon's work does contain a coherent framework for understanding the question. I will go into that in some detail. Leon's book was written in a very different period from our own, and it had a twofold purpose.

The first of these was to explain the origin of the Jews as a people or peoples, and as a social formation. This was not an exercise in pure history; it was done so that the present and future situation of the Jews could be explained in order to deal with the oppression that Jews suffered from, the oppression from anti-Semites at the time Leon lived.

It was both a theoretical analysis and a guide to action. As Leon himself said:

"To study the evolution of this question is not exclusively of academic interest. Without a thorough study of Jewish history it is difficult to understand the Jewish Question in modern times. The plight of the Jews in the Twentieth Century is intimately bound up with their historical past.



Every social formation represents a stage in the social process. *Being* is only a moment in the process of *becoming*. In order to undertake an analysis of the Jewish Question in its present phase of development, it is indispensable to be able to know its historical roots " (p72)

This is both the book's strength and its weakness. Don't misunderstand me: I consider this work to be *the* major contribution by Marxists so far in understanding the Jewish question. Any future Marxist work updating it will have to be based on its theoretical framework. There is nothing else to compare with it. However, its weakness is precisely in the sphere of 'becoming'.

In order to make use of his work properly as Marxists, we cannot be sentimental about the author. We have to correct and criticise the errors of perspective in the last couple of chapters of this work. I will begin to address this later on.

But first we must grasp correctly, in order to make proper use of it, the correct core of Leon's understanding, that of the Jews as a people-class as the root of the Jewish question, in our work as Marxists today.

I will go into this concept in some depth in the main section of this talk, and try to give some sort of grounded understanding of Leon's theory itself, which is important to grasp as there is a lot of depth and subtlety to it.

From Antiquity to Feudalism

Leon's understanding of the Jews as a people-class is an extension of Marx's understanding, in his fragmentary early essay *The Jewish Question*. As Marx wrote: "Let us not look for the secret of the Jew in his religion, but let us look for the secret of his religion in the real Jew". This approach, that material reality is paramount and the ultimate determining factor in the evolution of ideas, is what drove Leon's approach.

Leon began by analysing the Jews in antiquity as one of the key trading peoples of the Mediterranean basin, which then was one of the key centres of emerging human civilisations in the world. Unlike the Phoenicians, who dominated trade in an earlier period, the Jews managed to survive from antiquity into the modern era as a distinct people or group of peoples. Leon sought to explain why.

Contrary to Zionist myth, there was no widespread Jewish exile and dispersion caused by the Romans, even though such things as the suppression of the Bar Kochba revolt and the destruction of the Second Temple are historical events. Their importance is much less than Zionist historians make out.

The Jewish diaspora or exile happened centuries before that, and was a product of what was essentially economic migration, caused by the relatively inhospitable nature of Palestine to a large population, and proselytism to the then-religion of the Hebrews.

Indeed the Hebrews in the diaspora no longer spoke Hebrew in the main; possibly the greatest number of them spoke Greek particularly in the period of the Greek city states and the later Hellenic empires, that preceded the rise of Rome.

The survival of the Jews is basically bound up with the fall of the Roman Empire, and the collapse back into a predominantly natural economy based on agrarian exploitation of an enserfed peasantry, which became the dominant mode of production after antiquity.

The prior dispersal of the Jews, whose dominant ethos had originally been trade given the position of Palestine as a hinterland or buffer country between two great ancient empires, that of Egypt and Assyria (and later Babylonia), provided the impetus for the spread of Christianity.

This was originally a Jewish heresy that gained many converts from the already widely dispersed Jews, and was thus able to gain a ready-made geographical spread that would have been inconceivable without that.

Christianity, though earlier persecuted by pagan Rome, with its 'universalism' was adopted by the Roman rulers themselves in the period of the disintegration of the old unitary empire.

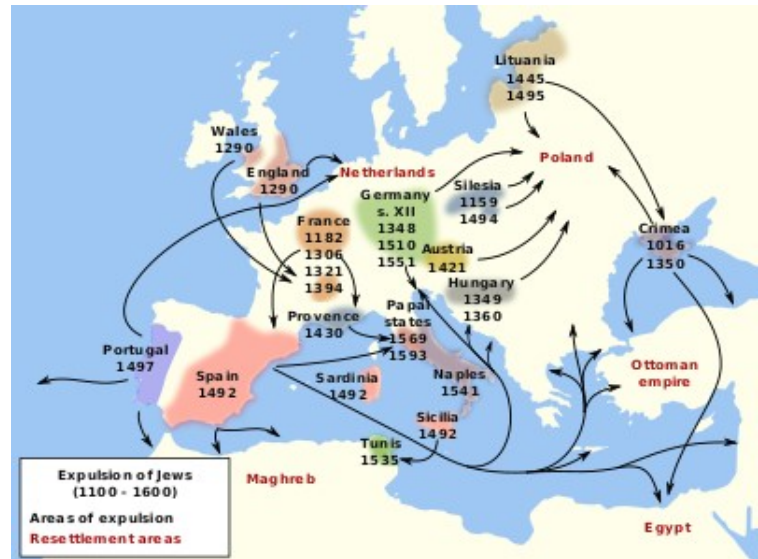
In different forms it became the ideology of both the major components of the Empire as it splintered into Rome and Byzantium, and as the slave-based mode of production was replaced by agrarian feudalism, it became the dominant ideology of the new agrarian ruling classes that came to rule Europe.

Catholicism emerged in the West; Orthodox Christianity from Byzantium in the East, spreading northward in due course into what became Russia, among other places.

The Jews, as a dispersed minority of traders, were in the position of being the embodiment of commodity exchange in economies that were built on agrarian relations to which commodity relations were fundamentally alien.

The mode of exploitation of the serfs in a classical feudal economy was exploitation in kind. The serfs worked for part of their week, as much as half, for the lord on his own land, and for the remainder of the time for themselves on their own plots of land. In return, the lord supposedly supplied the serfs with 'protection' from being plundered by criminals, or other lords, or whoever.

Over the lords there were the kings, who themselves received tributes from the lords supposedly in return for the same kind of 'protection' from greater plunderers. I suppose you can say that feudalism was a kind of glorified protection racket, but that would be ahistorical and judging a



very different society by today's norms.

Obviously the generation and distribution of the normal means of life were the preserve of feudalism and the natural economy. But the ruling classes themselves, as is always the case, desired luxury goods.

This was the starting-point of the Jews as a people class. Such luxury goods, spices, silks, and also very importantly slaves, as a subsidiary luxury for kings and lords, were the preserve of a special class of merchants whose trade in commodities was a different ethos to the natural domestic economy.

In addition to this, there was the trade in money itself, through loans at interest, which was always present and implicit in this situation; the Jews were a money reserve for the aristocracy to turn to when they needed it. This later acquired a special significance.

"People-Class"

As Leon puts it:

"Above all the Jews constitute historically a social group with a specific economic function. They are a class, or more precisely, a people class" (P79-80)

Far from being an oppressed minority throughout history, in the early medieval period, which in the West lasted from the fall of Rome through the period of the consolidation of feudalism under Charlemagne, who was the archetype of feudal kingship in the West, through to the 12th Century, the Jews were a highly privileged population, considered an indispensable supplement to feudalism by the ruling classes.

This was true until the 12th Century in the West. It was true for much longer in the East; it did not even begin to change there until the 17th Century and even then it took until the 19th Century for change to get properly underway. It is arguable that it never ceased to be true in many Middle Eastern countries, where Jews played a broadly similar role, until the mid-20th century.

By the 12th Century in the West we saw the beginning of

commodity production, and hence the beginning of the emergence of native traders and merchants who traded in early handicraft goods, woollens, woven cloths, mined metals, salt even. These were produced or extracted domestically and thereby provided an opportunity for home-grown traders. This new breed of traders immediately came into conflict with the Jews who had previously held a monopoly of commodity trading.

As commodity production advanced in the West, there was major social, political and ideological change. Such things as the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation were the product of this change and they meant that home-grown trade, linked to commodity production, destroyed the Jews' monopoly of trade and basically drove them out of the mercantile field.

As Leon commented about these ideological changes in the West:

"Whereas Catholicism represents the interests of the landed nobility and the feudal order, while Calvinism (or Puritanism) represents those of the bourgeoisie or capitalism, Judaism mirrors the interests of a pre-capitalist mercantile class

"What primarily distinguishes Jewish 'capitalism' from genuine capitalism is that, by contrast with the latter, it is not the bearer of a new mode of production. 'Here we have commercial capital in its pure form, quite separate from the extremes, the spheres of production, between which it mediates' (Marx, Capital)" (82)

The consequence of this is that Jews were driven out of a number of Western countries, including Britain and France, and usury became the dominant economic activity of the people-class, as they had been driven out the trade in goods. Leon characterised the process thus:

"But now Jewish capital, primarily commercial in the preceding period, becomes almost exclusively usurious. It is no longer the Jew who supplies the lord with Oriental goods but for a certain time it is still he who lends him money for his expenses. If during the preceding period 'Jew' was synonymous with merchant, it now begins increasingly to be identified with 'usurer'

"It is self-evident that to claim, as do most historians, that the Jews began to engage in lending only after their elimination from trade, is a vulgar error. Usurious capital is the brother of commercial capital.... In reality the eviction of the Jews from commerce had as a consequence their entrenchment in one of the professions which they had practiced previously" (p139-140)

In fact, as feudalism went into deeper and deeper decline, and commodity production gained more and more leverage *within* feudal states, the more untenable and contradictory the Jews' position, as a class of money traders and usurers, became.

An epiphenomenon of feudalism, not capitalism

This is a crucial point that needs to be understood theoretically. Jewish commodity exchange in the medieval world

was not capitalism. There is a work called "The Jews and Modern Capitalism" by a would-be Marxist (at one point), Werner Sombart, that basically tries to say that the Jews were the bringers of capitalism. But he is simply wrong.

For commercial capital in the form that the Jews were bearers-of depends on the absence of productive capital, of commodity *production*. The mode of commodity circulation the Jews were central to is an epiphenomenon of the feudal mode of production, and nothing to do with the capitalist mode of production.

It is because it appears in some ways alien to the dominant feudal mode of production that commodity exchange under feudalism tends to be done by those seen as foreigners, or with a 'foreign' religion.

The Jews' religion, and its preservation, can be explained through this social role. Those who ceased to regard themselves as Jews tended to drop away from this social role. On the other hand, there were cases of conversion to Judaism in order to partake of what was at times a privileged position.

Similar, though not identical, phenomena have occurred in other parts of the world, not involving Jews, such as overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, etc. A 'foreign' layer becomes the commodity-trading class in a pre-capitalist, natural economy.

Once commodity production began to develop, a different group, part of a nascent capitalist class, of merchants who sell the products of capitalist commodity production, arose, and these were not seen as 'foreign' but organic to the society. They rapidly pushed aside the Jews wherever this development took place.

It was common practice for royal powers in Europe to use the Jews to rob particularly the nobility. Put simply, the Jews would take as collateral for loans important assets of lords, and even the Church, and then appropriate them when the debt was defaulted.

It was common for Jews to act as tax farmers, either directly, taking over functions that used to be those of the royal power or the nobility simply by virtue of having land and other assets that had been surrendered to them by defaulters

But then the royal power would first expel the Jews, then 'relent' on surrender of assets to the king by the Jews. This was a repeated pattern in France, for instance. So in effect the royal power would allow the Jews to rob the nobility, then the kings would rob the Jews.

Indirectly, then, the royal power would rob the nobility using the Jews as instruments.

As feudal Europe became more and more commodified, Jews even found their position as usurers to the nobility undermined. Increasingly we had the phenomenon of ghettoization, with distinct living areas, from which Jews lent money to the poor peasants, with collateral such as tools and other essential items, to meet the exactions of decaying feudalism.

Meanwhile the nobility in particular were quite prepared to incite the rural population in general against the Jews, in

part as a diversion from their own depredations, but these diversions had a real social basis, as the Jews as usurers were intimately and closely involved with those at the bottom of society who they were instrumental in driving into penury.

A Dialectic of Separation

There is a complex dialectic to this in the two halves of Europe. Whereas the decay of European feudalism dates in effect from the 11th or 12th Centuries; in Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania and the big one, Russia, it really lagged behind by centuries. From the 12th Century onwards numerous Jews fled from the West of the continent, where the people-class was becoming redundant due to the rise of capitalist trade proper, to Eastern Europe.

Particularly Poland and Lithuania, which had a huge Jewish population, to the extent that some historians contend that the Poland-Lithuania Commonwealth was home to three quarters of the world's Jews in the 16th century.

The expulsion and/or ghettoization of the Jews in the West was ended by the bourgeois revolutions. Cromwell, for instance, re-admitted the Jews to England centuries after they were expelled under Edward I at the end of the 13th Century.

Earlier the Dutch bourgeois revolution gave refuge to thousands of Sephardic Jews fleeing from the post-Reconquista Spain of the Inquisition. The French revolution was the big one of course, declaring full equality for the Jews; even in degenerated form under Napoleon, the French armies played a liberating role as they marched across Europe, abolishing ghettos and restrictions on Jews wherever they went.

The Napoleonic wars also played a huge role in accelerating the belated decline of feudalism in the East. What was to happen in the East in the 19th Century was somewhat prefigured at the same time as Cromwell's ascent to power in England. In Polish Ukraine in 1648, where the social hostility to the Jews' role as usurers to the peasantry ignited a huge uprising of the Cossack peasantry, in which tens of thousands of Jews were massacred.

In general terms Leon gives the context of this when he writes :

"Feudalism progressively gives way to a regime of exchange. As a consequence, the field of activity of Jewish usury is constantly contracting. *It becomes more and more unbearable because it is less and less necessary*" (p153)

And on the Ukrainian events in particular:

"The Little Russian peasant bore a deep hatred for the Polish landed proprietor, in his double role as foreigner and noble. But he hated even more, perhaps, the Jewish steward with whom he was in continuous contact and in whom he saw at one and the same time the detestable representative of the lord and a 'non-Christian' who was foreign to him both by his religion and his way of life" (Quoting Graetz, p 189)

"The tremendous Cossack revolt of Chmielnicki in 1648 results in completely erasing seven hundred Jewish communities from the face of the earth. At the same time the revolt demonstrates the extreme feebleness of the anarchic Polish kingdom and prepares its dismemberment." (189-190).

But the events in Ukraine were only a foretaste of what was to come. The liberation of the serfs in 1861 under Alexander II of Russia brought about the rapid collapse of the position of the Jews. Leon gives a detailed breakdown of the rise of emigration as the economic basis of Judaism was undermined by nascent capitalist development in Russia, first from the small Jewish towns (*shtetls*) to the large cities, and later to the West, to Germany, to France, to the United States.

By the beginning of the 20th century 150,000 Jews per year were emigrating to the US.

In the Western countries, the emancipation of Jews had given rise to a partial assimilation of the Jews. Respectable bourgeois Jews played an important, but fairly unobtrusive role in all these countries.

They were highly disturbed by the arrival of large numbers of often impoverished Jewish refugees from the East, which threatened the comfortable positions that many Jewish bourgeois had gained. Indeed Leon hypothesised that if this massive influx had not happened, Jewry in the West would simply have disappeared through assimilation.

The bifurcation of the Jews was a product of the time lag, of several centuries, between the decay and decline of feudalism in the West and that in the East. As Leon put it:

"If Judaism did not completely disappear in the West, it was owing to the mass influx of Jews from Eastern Europe. The Jewish Question, which is now posed on a world scale, therefore results primarily from the situation of Eastern Judaism. This situation is, in turn, a product of the lag in economic development of this part of the world. The special causes of Jewish emigration are thus linked with the general causes behind the emigration movement of the nineteenth century." (p89)

Indeed, for Leon, such assimilation would have also have been inevitable for the migrant Jews in time, were it not for one other crucial factor: the decline of capitalism, which more or less began in the 1880s with the rise of modern capitalist imperialism, as evidenced among other things by the 'scramble for Africa'.

Early Imperialism and Anti-Semitism

The rise of anti-Semitism roughly coincided with this decline, which was only later elaborated on by Lenin, Bukharin and others into a new epoch of capitalist decline. For Leon, capitalism, which should have been able to absorb the mass of the Jews and absorb them, proved unable to do so.

The result was that a huge, oppressed Jewish population became economic and political outcasts from the economic system itself, increasingly targeted by a new racialised dema-

gogy from demagogic defenders of the system itself as some kind of demonic force, as in the ideology of the *Protocols* and Hitler, which Leon likens to a religion of the petty bourgeoisie directed ironically against the petty bourgeois spirit of the Jews:

“Everywhere is rife the savage anti-Semitism of the middle classes, who are being choked to death under the weight of capitalist contradictions. Big capital exploits this elemental anti-Semitism of the petty-bourgeoisie in order to mobilise the masses around the banner of racism.” (p91)

And:

The primary commercial and artisan nature of Judaism, heritage of a long historical past, makes it Enemy Number One of the petty-bourgeoisie on the domestic market. It is therefore the petty bourgeois character of Judaism which makes it so odious to the petty bourgeoisie. But while the historical past of Judaism exercises a determining influence on its present social composition, it has effects no less important on the representation of the Jews in the consciousness of the popular masses. For the latter, the Jew remains the traditional representative of the ‘money power’”. (p229-230)

Or in another point:

“The first to be eliminated by decaying feudalism, the Jews were also the first to be rejected by the convulsions of dying capitalism. The Jewish masses find themselves wedged between the anvil of decaying feudalism and the hammer of rotting capitalism. (p220)

Thus Leon drew the conclusion that, without the overthrow of capitalism, the Jewish people were effectively doomed.

It is for this reason that he considered Zionism to be a false solution for the Jews, and his critique of Zionism was grounded in this, that Zionism would ultimately prove ineffective as it would not change the fact that the cause of the Jews plight was the inability of capitalism to absorb them and liquidate the legacy of the people- class.

The problem is that capitalism has not been overthrown. Zionism was triumphant in Palestine and is now playing quite an important role in the world, despite Leon’s predictions, apparently on the basis of his theory, that this was impossible. Jews are no longer a pariah population, as they were in Leon’s day, even though Leon thought that only a socialist revolution could save them from that situation. So this needs to be explained properly and in some depth.



“Cromwell, Lord Protector of the short-lived Commonwealth, was in general sympathetic to the Jews. This derived at least in part from his belief that their return to Britain would hasten the coming of the Messiah, and partly in recognition of the economic and political benefits they were expected to bring to England, particularly in its ongoing war with Spain”. And Holland. Bourgeois economic necessity under the cloak of religion.

An ‘Unknown Unknown’

Leon could not have known what was to happen after the Nazi holocaust, and after the Second World War. One paradoxically useful point made (after 9/11) by Donald Rumsfeld, Bush’s defence secretary during the Iraq invasion and the ‘war on terror’, is that there is a difference between ‘known unknowns’ and ‘unknown unknowns’.

There are things that you don’t know about, but you can make a reasonable

guess and hypothesis about what they might be, based on previous experience, observation of current events, etc., so even when you are taken by surprise by something, it is not devastating. But there are also sometimes things that are unexpected that you really know nothing about, which are outside of a current understanding, and which completely flummox you based on your current understanding.

This is relevant when dealing with the last couple of chapters or so of Leon’s work, and is possibly the main reason why this work has been so neglected. For Leon made some predictions, based on the understanding of these questions that he had developed at the time, about Zionism, its future, the future of the Jews, that turned out to be wildly wrong.

History and politics are unforgiving; errors of perspective and prediction can lead to a work being dismissed.

Some on the left pay homage to the power and coherence of Leon’s analysis of the Jewish question in antiquity and medieval history, and indeed its analysis of the plight of the Jews under imperialist capitalism up to his own time, but because of its erroneous predictions do not see it as a guide to action today.

Leon in his tentative predictions was trying to deal with some things that were in fact ‘unknown unknowns’ from his vantage point in time and placement. But there are also arguably a couple of times at the end of the work when he does not correctly apply his own theory, or draw the full conclusions of it. He was a prisoner of his time; in fact he died a murdered prisoner in a Nazi death camp. So there is nothing to reproach him with.

This is actually a complex subject in its own right. While I was putting this talk together I originally intended to deal with all of it at once. But while doing this, I concluded it is too large a subject and needs to be treated separately. So I will put together part 2 of this educational, on Abram Leon, Zionism and Trotskyism today, for a few weeks’ time when we can arrange it. ▲

Abram Leon and Zionism

Part 2 of Socialist Fight educational on the Jewish Question

This is the second part of the Socialist Fight educational on Abram Leon's work *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation*. In part one last month, to recap., I explained at length and in some detail Leon's theory of the Jews as a people-class of merchants and traders in medieval, i.e. feudal and similar societies that were based on natural economies and the production of use values as the basis for class exploitation, and not commodity production.

I explained how in Leon's view, which I share, finding that economic niche in the societies that succeeded antiquity is the reason why Jews as a distinct group still exist today. If that had not happened, Jews would have simply been absorbed by other peoples as happened to the Phoenicians.

To Leon, the Jews were not the bearers of capitalism as a mode of production, but rather an epiphenomenon of pre-capitalist societies, a commodity and money trading layer that depended for their economic role on the *absence* of capitalist relations of production, i.e. commodity *production*.

It was inevitable that the role of commodity traders in a natural economy would be done by people seen as foreigners, or having a foreign religion. This is a recurring phenomenon around the world.

Once capitalist production, in the form of manufacture and the organisation of handicrafts, began to emerge even in embryonic form, so did capitalist traders linked to such production, who proceeded to drive the Jewish 'foreigners' out of trade and into purely usury, where they became a pariah, persecuted population until the bourgeois revolution emancipated them.

But while the Jews were emancipated by the bourgeois revolution in the West, there was a lag of several centuries before the same process began in Eastern Europe, where the bulk of Jewry were concentrated after having been driven out of the West those centuries earlier.

By the mid to late 19th Century, when the crisis of the loss of the Jews' social and economic role came to a head in the East, Jews in the West were well on the way to complete assimilation, and were highly disturbed by the beginning of a mass exodus of millions of persecuted and impoverished East European Jews to the West.

Defining the Jews today; defining Zionism

This is where the weaknesses in Leon's predictions, and some of the later elements of his analysis begin. I will start by quoting two somewhat counterposed quotations from the later part of his book. In Chapter 6, "*The Rise of Capitalism*" he wrote:

"Judaism has therefore undergone a very important transformation in the capitalist epoch. The people-class has become differentiated socially. But this process,

I want to ask you why you ignored Abram Leon's Marxist theory of Jewish history in your book.

I regret very much that I did not mention him. You know sometimes you feel that someone is in your family, so well known, so close, that you take them for granted, you forget to mention him. I feel that Abram Leon is my family. Even before I became a student in the 1960s I was dealing with Leon's book when it became available in English in Israel. It was a mistake to miss him out. When I was analysing the causes for the Jewish presence in Eastern Europe I should have used Abram's Leon's class analysis.³

Reply by Shlomo Sand, author of '*The Invention of the Jewish People*'.

while of considerable scope, is accompanied by a multitude of contradictory tendencies, which have not as yet allowed the crystallisation of a stable form for Judaism in our period. It is far easier to say what Judaism has been than to define what it is." (p215)

In terms of a definition, Leon is evidently leaving things somewhat open-ended. That is his initial impulse in terms of definitions. Here he equates 'Judaism' with the people-class, i.e. with Jews as a population group, and we can take it as read therefore that by Judaism he means not the religion, but the human group involved.

Then we come on to the nature of Zionism. Leon wrote in Chapter 7, *The Decay of Capitalism*, that:

"In reality, Zionist ideology, like all ideologies, is only the distorted reflection of the interests of a class. It is the ideology of the Jewish petty bourgeoisie, suffocating between feudalism in ruins and capitalism in decay." (p240)

Here I think we see Leon's weakness in embryo. He (correctly) refuses to make a final definition of the nature of 'Judaism' for the historical period that he was in, he leaves it open-ended as it has not yet crystallised into a 'stable form'.

But he does **not** leave open the question of the nature of Zionism, an important force at the time he was writing, but rather defines it as simply the ideology of the Jewish petty-bourgeoisie, in effect as a petit-bourgeois nationalist force.

The formulation "suffocating between feudalism in ruins and capitalism in decay" explains why he does not make the usual qualification that Marxists usually make about petty-bourgeois nationalist ideologies, that the purpose of such ideologies for a given petty-bourgeoisie means that that stratum sees it as a means to become a bourgeoisie itself, ruling its own nation.

Leon, it is pretty clear, believed such an aspiration by this particular petit-bourgeoisie to be a non-issue because, in his view, the Jews were doomed if capitalism was not overthrown:

"The first to be eliminated by decaying feudalism, the Jews were also the first to be rejected by the convulsions of dying capitalism. The Jewish masses find themselves wedged between the anvil of decaying feudalism

and the hammer of rotting capitalism. (p220)
There is no reproach to Leon in my analysis. Earlier I used Donald Rumsfeld's useful point about 'known unknowns' versus 'unknown unknowns' to underline that for Leon in the historical situation he was in, the outcome of WWII can only be described as an 'unknown unknown'.

After WWII – New Period and New Perspectives

I mean the enormous changes brought about by the Second World War, the defeat of Nazi Germany by US imperialism and Stalinist Russia in alliance, the survival of the USSR and its conquest of Eastern Europe.

Then you had the Yugoslav revolution led by partisan-guerrillas, the Chinese revolution and the later creation of deformed workers states in Vietnam, Cuba, etc. There was the rapid dismantlement of the British and French colonial empires after the war, which was intertwined with this. Not least, there was the creation of the state of Israel, which also happened in this context.

All these developments were inconceivable to the pre-war Trotskyist movement and particular to cadres in the position of Leon, who it should be remembered not only authored this analysis during the war, but was involved in leading his movement in resistance activities to the Nazi occupation, that cost him his life.

The Trotskyist movement could not have foreseen these things in detail. In fact Leon's whole outlook is based on the conception, completely comprehensible in its day, that no significant further economic development was possible under capitalism, and that capitalism in the late 1930s was in its 'death agony' as Trotsky put forward as the immediate perspective of the Fourth International, whose programme was titled '*the Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*':

"The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism. Man-kind's productive forces stagnate. Already new inventions and improvements fail to raise the level of material wealth. Conjunctural crises under the conditions of the social crisis of the whole capitalist system inflict ever heavier deprivations and sufferings upon the masses. Growing unemployment, in its turn, deepens the financial crisis of the state and undermines the unstable monetary systems. Democratic regimes, as well as fascist, stagger on from one bankruptcy to another. "The bourgeoisie itself sees no way out. In countries where it has already been forced to stake its last upon

the card of fascism, it now toboggans with closed eyes toward an economic and military catastrophe. In the historically privileged countries, i.e., in those where the bourgeoisie can still for a certain period permit itself the luxury of democracy at the expense of national accumulations (Great Britain, France, United States, etc.), all of capital's traditional parties are in a state of perplexity bordering on a paralysis of will.

"The "New Deal," despite its first period of pretentious resoluteness, represents but a special form of political perplexity, possible only in a country where the bourgeoisie succeeded in accumulating incalculable wealth. The present crisis, far from having run its full course, has already succeeded in showing that "New Deal" politics, like Popular Front politics in France, opens no new exit from the economic blind alley."

We have to make a distinction here, between the nature of the epoch and short-term crises. It is indisputable that the gargantuan crisis of the Second World War, just as much as the First World War, posed the imperative need point blank for the overthrow of capitalism.

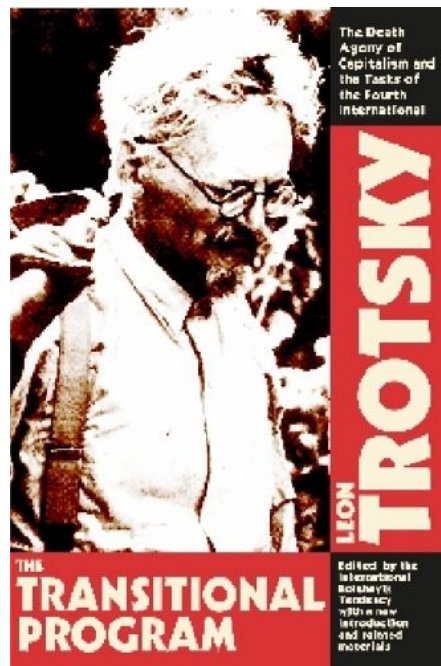
It posed the possibility of the collapse of capitalist civilisation into barbarism. Indeed, it is arguable that Nazi rule in Europe was a form of barbarism, with its scourging of

much of the continent, its extermination of millions of people on the basis of the most barbaric racial ideology which amounted to a reversion to the mentality of witch-doctors, at the level of the relations between entire peoples. But it does and did not necessarily follow that such a terrible crisis would necessarily mean the end of capitalism, if the working class failed to overthrow the system.

Nor that the system did not have enormous reserves left in it that, in the absence of working class revolution, could pull the system back together again and, by the application of material force to secure an economic revival, could not make major changes in the specifics of many of the features that appeared to be intractable in the period of the preceding crisis.

We have the benefit of hindsight. This does not entitle us to reproach those who fought in pre-war conditions, in difficult circumstances we can barely imagine, who were unable to see into a complex future accurately.

But neither can we be reproached for using hindsight to the full. We must use hindsight to analyse the faults and weaknesses of the Trotskyist movement that preceded us. If we don't use this to the full, we deserve to be reproached, as "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it". (George Santayana), often cited by Marxists.



Capitalist Revivals and the Danger of Barbarism

With the benefit of hindsight, it is now clear that the ‘death agony of capitalism’ is not necessarily expressed in a final depression and collapse that it is unable by any means to pull out of.

Though such a thing cannot be ruled out in the imperialist epoch, it is more the case that capitalism, in its reactionary phase, goes into a series of social and economic convulsions that repeatedly threaten humanity with barbarism and/or annihilation, which can be interspersed with periods of considerable further development of the productive forces.

And that development of the productive forces under imperialist capitalism itself poses an acute threat to the future of humanity, as we are now beginning to see with the environmental crisis that the recent heatwaves (including in Lapland and Greenland!) have brought to the fore.

This is not a crisis of capitalist economic collapse, though we have seen this posed with the Credit Crunch, but just as much of its socially harmful expansion.

The *Transitional Programme* is not a religious text, but a method that outlives the specific conjuncture of its creation. Thus this perspective is still palpably true today, though not necessarily in exactly the same way that Trotsky and Abram Leon saw it then:

“All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not yet ‘ripened’ for socialism is the product of ignorance or conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only ‘ripened’; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.”

This vindicates the main epochal thrust of the *Transitional Programme* for the entire post-WWII period, even though some of its specific elaborations, from the period of the Great Depression, are not always appropriate. From Leon’s standpoint these were unknown unknowns.

There was a speech by Trotsky in the late 1920s where he dimly foresaw the possibility of a new, prolonged capitalist expansion after a bloody war and depression in which millions of European workers would die from starvation.

But at the time that was mere conjecture. The reality of the depression and seeming ‘death agony’ of capitalism made it appear remote.

Zionism: An Impossible Dream?

So back to Leon; in a footnote in the last chapter of his book, we find the following prediction:

“The disappearance of Hitler can change nothing fundamental in the state of the Jews. A transitory improvement of their condition will in no wise alter the profound roots of twentieth-century anti-Semitism” (in footnote, p224)

This is a clear prediction, from his perspective and vantage point. Then we find another prediction about the supposed impossibility of the creation of a Zionist state in the Middle East:

“Therein lies the principle obstacle to the realisation of Zionism. *Capitalist decay – basis for the growth of Zionism – is also the cause of the impossibility of its realisation.* [emphasis in original] The Jewish bourgeoisie is compelled to create a national state, to assure itself of the objective framework for the development of its productive forces, precisely in the period when the conditions for such a development have long since disappeared. The conditions of the decline of capitalism which have posed so sharply the Jewish question make its solution equally impossible along the Zionist road. And there is nothing astonishing in that. An evil cannot be suppressed without

destroying its causes. But Zionism wishes to resolve the Jewish question without destroying capitalism, *which is the principal cause of the suffering of the Jews* [emphasis added]” (p242). And Leon says that even if a Zionist state is somehow created in spite of everything, it will make no difference to the position of the Jews:

“A relative success for Zionism, along the lines of

creating a Jewish majority in Palestine and even of the formation of a ‘Jewish state’, that is to say, a state placed under the complete domination of English or American imperialism, cannot, naturally be excluded.

....

“The situation after the eventual creation of a Jewish state in Palestine will resemble the state of things that existed in the Roman era only in the fact that *in both cases the existence of a small Jewish state could in no way influence the situation of the Jews in the Diaspora.*.... The temple will perhaps be rebuilt but the faithful will continue to suffer.” (p245-6)

And yet again:

“What can Zionism do to counteract such a disaster? Is it not obvious that the Jewish question is very little dependent upon the future destiny of Tel Aviv but very greatly upon the regime which will be set up tomorrow in Europe and in the world? The Zionists have a great deal of faith in a victory of Anglo-American imperialism. But is there a single reason for believing that the attitude of the Anglo-American imperialists will differ



after their eventual victory from their pre-war attitude? It is obvious that there is none. Even admitting that Anglo-American imperialism will create some kind of abortive Jewish state, we have seen that the situation of world Judaism will hardly be affected” (p247)

This has clearly been falsified by history. The Jews are no longer a pariah population threatened with extermination in the advanced countries, or indeed anywhere. The Israeli state was created after the Second World War, despite Leon’s stated belief that the ‘realisation’ of the Zionist state was ‘impossible’.

And despite Leon’s caveat that even if an ‘abortive’ Jewish state were created by ‘Anglo-American imperialism’, it would not affect the situation of world Jewry who would “hardly be affected” and would “continue to suffer”.

Jews do not “continue to suffer” at the hands of world capitalism, they are now in a very different situation. The Jewish state created in 1947-49 is 70 years old and shows no sign of disappearing. Nor is it a ‘creation’ of Anglo-American imperialism, though both powers played an important role in its creation.

It was created in a reactionary ‘War of Independence’ in part against British colonial rule, during which its forces struck major military blows against British forces in Palestine; notably the bombing of the King David Hotel, which made it militarily and politically impossible for the British to maintain their ‘mandate’ which they then relinquished.

Though Israel benefited from much diplomatic support from US imperialism and the Truman administration at the time it was created, there is considerable evidence that that support was not freely given, but was the result of determined, aggressive activity by the incipient Israel lobby at that time.

This made it politically very difficult for the Truman administration *not* to support the foundation of a Jewish state, despite grave misgivings from many including the president himself that by doing so they were damaging US imperialist interests in the wider world.

Genesis of the Zionist State

A useful and very detailed study of this comes from a liberal Jewish US commentator, John B Judis, whose work *GENESIS: Truman, American Jews and the Origins of the Arab/Israeli Conflict* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014) is an immensely detailed study of this period.

I will not quote this at length here, but I do note that some of his explanations about how the tragedy of the Nazi holocaust paradoxically allowed Israel to be created, despite the fears of some in the Zionist movement itself that paralleled some of Leon’s predictions of Zionist failure, are quite powerful.

In particular the fact that a much larger Jewish state, including much of Lebanon and Sinai, and all of what is now Jordan, was envisaged by Ben Gurion and other Zionist founders to accommodate a much larger pre-Holocaust Jewish population. This population existed, but they had no way to prevail upon them to migrate to Palestine.



According to Judis, it was actually the horror of the Nazi holocaust, and the extermination of several million European Jews, described by Ben Gurion as a ‘tragedy’ for Zionism, that made the migration of a much smaller number of Jews to Palestine politically feasible, because of the impulse to flee the theatre of genocide.

The smaller number of Jews migrating meant that Zionist territorial aspirations had to be scaled back, but without Hitler’s genocide, it is highly unlikely that even that smaller number of Jews would have been inclined to migrate to Palestine. So that partially explains one of the flawed predictions made by Leon, which no one could have fully anticipated at the time.

However, despite the heavily lobbied help from US imperialism diplomatically, particularly in the newly-founded UN and in terms of relations with the outgoing British colonialists, it is clear that Israel, while manoeuvring between the various older imperialist powers, was and is an independent imperialist force in its own right.

This was underlined by Israel’s defiance of both the US and USSR in the Suez crisis of 1956, in a bloc with both France and Britain, when Israel as the main player in the war against Nasser was the last to accede to the US/Soviet demand to withdraw.

And it was even more underlined by the incident of the *USS Liberty* in 1967 during the Six-Day War, where Israeli aircraft and naval forces attacked a US ship off Sinai that was too close and too capable of monitoring Israeli actions and war communications, killing 34 US seamen and wounding over 100. It does appear that the most likely motive was to stop an Israeli massacre of Egyptian troops being recorded by the *Liberty*.

An Independent Force

The significance of the *USS Liberty* incident is similar to that of the bombing of the King David Hotel in 1946. It

was a dramatic demonstration that the Zionists are no-one's lackeys, but a separate and independent force that manoeuvres for position among the Great Powers, while serving none of them.

This is also shown by the obvious power that Israel wields in the advanced capitalist countries of the West; for instance the ability of Netanyahu to march into the US Senate and demand that the US toes the line of Israel's demand for aggression against Iran. The Obama White House defied him and signed a deal with Iran to lift sanctions in exchange for nuclear 'co-operation' and lucrative trade deals that benefited US and European companies. As predicted by myself, before Trump was elected, Netanyahu got his way.

One way or another, the bourgeoisie find a way to line up and support Israel. The campaign against Corbyn in the Labour Party, backed by virtually the entire British ruling class, but spearheaded by Israeli agents as the vanguard, is another case in point.

In that context, Leon's insistence that if somehow a Jewish state came into existence despite all the reasons that he gave for it being impossible, it would be "abortive" and "under the complete domination of English or American imperialism" was completely falsified by subsequent developments.

That, in a nutshell, is what this presentation is aiming to address. Because as I said in part one, the failure of these predictions to materialise, even approximately, is the reason why Leon's book today, though many of its insights about history are respected, is not regarded as a guide to action today by anyone else on the left, apart from *Socialist Fight*. And theory is always a guide to action for Marxists.

There are two strands to this. One is the perspectival problem that I addressed earlier regarding pre-war Trotskyism, the "Death Agony of Capitalism", and the problems dealing with the post-WWII reality experienced by the Trotskyist movement after Trotsky.

The other strand is a weakness in Leon's theorisation itself, or part of it. These are linked, but not exactly the same thing. There is a specific ambiguity, or weakness, in the latter part of Leon's work.

This is not about the concept of the people-class itself. That is spot on, as is his narrative of the Jews in antiquity, early medieval and late medieval times. There is no problem with any of this.

The Jews and Modern Imperialism

The problem is with one of Leon's later generalisations. Leon says, and I quoted it earlier:

"The conditions of the decline of capitalism which have posed so sharply the Jewish question make its solution equally impossible along the Zionist road. And there is nothing astonishing in that. An evil cannot be suppressed without destroying its causes. But Zionism wishes to resolve the Jewish question without destroying capitalism, *which is the principal cause of the suffering of the Jews* [emphasis added]" (p242).

The last phrase is key. And it is wrong, and always was

wrong. It actually contradicts Leon's own theory, if you consider it. Remember that the people-class, and its redundancy, has its origins in pre-capitalist, feudal society, not capitalism.

It is true that the growth of capitalism within the womb of feudal society disrupted the position of the Jews in feudal society. But it also disrupted the feudal society itself, and undermined the positions of the feudal ruling classes as well as the middlemen (i.e. the Jews). The people-class *was* part of the feudal social and economic system, and what happened to them therefore was a result of the decline of that social system, not capitalism.

By saying that capitalism "is the principal cause of the suffering of the Jews" Leon contradicted his own theory and introduced unclarity. The oppression of the Jews under capitalism was conjunctural, not systemic. That is clear now, as capitalism has survived the revolutionary crisis after WWII and the Jews, almost uniquely for a people who suffered such horrendous crimes (the worst of which were at the hands of German capitalism), have escaped from oppression and joined the ranks of the dominant peoples.

This is only possible because unlike the oppression of the peoples of underdeveloped, semi-colonial countries, which is fundamental to imperialist capitalism and cannot be overcome without its overthrow, the oppression of Jews was a leftover question from feudalism within the advanced capitalist world, in its dominant aspect.

The failure of capitalism to assimilate the Jews in the late 19th and 20th Century was a product of the failure of pre-capitalist relations of production to be sufficiently shaken by capitalist development in the East until several centuries after the same processes began in the West.

This produced a massive, redundant, itinerant Jewish refugee population just at the point when Western capitalism was becoming imperialist and experiencing its first major depressions and imperialist wars.

The Jewish population displaced by the crumbling of Tsarism and its satellites in the East fled westwards, in too great numbers to be emancipated and assimilated by European capitalism in these conditions, unlike earlier generations of Jewish migrants.

This unfortunate population became scapegoats for European capitalism's most convulsive crisis, in the 1930s, and became victims of Europe's most barbaric, genocidal excrescences of capitalism, Hitlerite fascism.

The Jewish Question in Historical Perspective

Leon's could not, quite understandably, see beyond the circumstances of the genocide that he was embroiled in, and generalised that the cause of the Jews oppression was fundamentally capitalism. But there were elements even within his own work that contradicted that, and pointed out why Jews and capitalism could be co-joined, given favourable circumstances. This pre-figured our own understanding of the genesis of Jewish overrepresentation

among the imperialist bourgeoisie today.

For instance, when discussing the experience of the NEP in the Russian revolution, Leon wrote:

“... The example of the USSR shows that even after the proletarian revolution, the special structure of Judaism—a heritage of history—will give rise to a number of difficulties, particularly during the transition periods. During the time of the NEP, for instance, the Jews of Russia, utilising their traditional business experience, furnished numerous cadres for the new bourgeois class.” (p254)

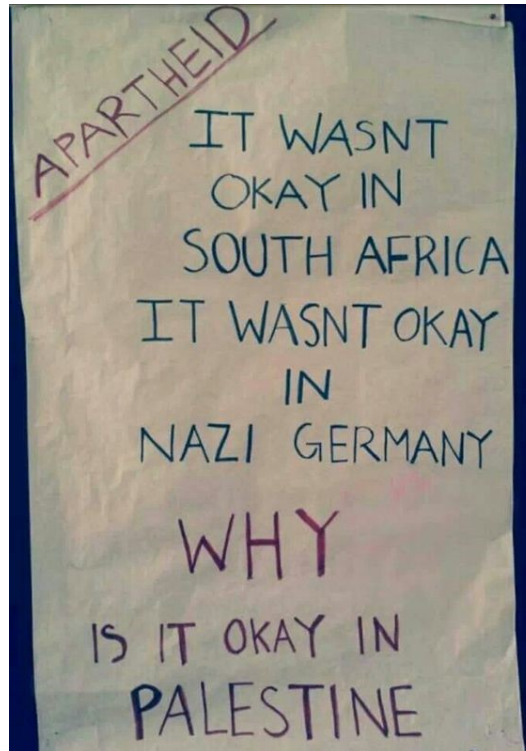
Leon’s close co-thinker during World War II was Ernest Mandel, who furnished the original introduction to Leon’s book. He wrote in similar vein, paraphrasing the views of Ber Borochov, a socialist Zionist thinker who was one of Leon’s earlier political mentors, whom he subsequently broke with:

“The social composition of other peoples resembled a pyramid having at its base hundreds of thousands of miners, metal workers, railroad workers, etc. and then passing through large layers of handicraftsmen, topped off by ever thinner strata of businessmen, industrialists and bankers. But the social composition of the Jewish people resembled an ‘inverted pyramid in which large handicraft strata rested on narrow layers of workers – who were moreover engaged in nonvital sectors of industry – and had to bear the full weight of an enormous mass of businessmen.” (p21-22)

Again, this clearly showed why Leon’s statement that capitalism “is the principal cause of the suffering of the Jews” was mistaken, and contradicts the entire thrust of his own theory.

In fact Leon and Mandel’s statements, quoted above, contain in embryo our own understanding of the overrepresentation of Jews in the bourgeoisie, and how the formation of Israel, which as explained above was certainly brought into existence by means of the Nazi genocide, has played a key role in drawing Jews to the right, exorcising the spectre of ‘Jewish Bolshevism’ that drove the bourgeoisie to accept the counterrevolutionary demonology of anti-Semitism.

One further ambiguity is when, as quoted earlier, Leon says that Zionism was the movement of the Jewish petty-bourgeoisie. What he failed to understand was that that petty-bourgeoisie was an aspiring bourgeoisie, and that the means available to it to achieve that were both Zionism, and upward mobility. Leon believed that impossible under



capitalism, but history proved him wrong on that.

The large scale exodus of Jews from Eastern Europe to the United States and Western Europe, particularly, provoked fear and consternation at first from the established, near-assimilated Jewish bourgeoisie in the West, but after that was overcome, it led to a synthesis.

It led part of the Jewish bourgeoisie, an increasingly bold part, initially centred on part of the Rothschild family, who were divided over this, to embrace Zionism and finance the beginnings of its settlement of Palestine. Leon’s work does not really cover this facet of Zionism, it discounts it as being impossible, based on the misconception that capitalism “is the principal cause of the suffering of the Jews”.

But this was the genesis of the Jewish -Zionist caste within the bourgeoisie whose existence, social weight through disproportionate representation, and quasi-national consciousness is responsible for the power of Zionism in Western societies.

So the Jewish question is a paradox. The truth is, without Zionism, the Jews, who are in reality quite compatible with capitalism, would simply disappear as a distinct group into the bourgeoisie and the middle classes, and the Jewish question as a distinct question would cease to exist.

This is because the Jews are not a ‘race’ at all – ‘race’ is in general a myth - despite what both Zionists and anti-Semites believe. They are the remnants of a medieval trading class, who ought to have just been absorbed into the middle and upper classes of capitalist society, but because history is not a straight line, have had to go on a tortuous and perilous journey to get to that point.

The Jewish question has transmuted today into its opposite. In Leon’s day he was analysing and trying to account for the fate of the Jews as an oppressed population. Today we are dealing with the consequences of that phenomenon being transformed into its opposite, of Jews, as a distinct population with a claimed state power, oppressing the Palestinian Arabs and in fact threatening the Arab world, and possibly humanity itself, with destruction.

The Jewish question today, to summarise, is about Zionism - and nothing else! It has no relevance otherwise. But Zionism is not just about Israel, though Israel is its centre-piece, the only one conceivable. The Jewish question is about liberating the Palestinian people from Jewish-Zionist oppression, and setting free the Jewish people from their seemingly cursed history to join the rest of humanity on genuinely equal terms.

That is a key, strategic task of socialists and communists today. ▲

Draft Theses on the Jews and Modern Imperialism

By Ian Donovan 6-9-2014

This set of theses were presented for discussion at the meeting on 14th September of the Communist Platform of Left Unity

1. Of all the advanced capitalist/imperialist countries today, Israel is second only to the United States in the threat it poses to the future of humanity. It is an artificial imperialist entity introduced into the Middle East from without, and consolidated through the expulsion of the bulk of the indigenous Palestinian Arab population. As a result it is in a state of permanent conflict with the Palestinians, who have a dual national consciousness both as Palestinians and as part of the national aspirations of the Arab peoples of the entire Middle East.

Israel is built entirely on territory stolen by force from a native population that is on a much higher cultural level than the indigenous victims of earlier settler states associated with European colonialism, such as the United States and Australia. Its conflict is with Arabs who have a modern national consciousness and greater cohesion than virtually any dispossessed indigenous people. Israel has therefore armed itself to the teeth and become a garrison state, stockpiling likely hundreds of nuclear weapons, and threatens the population of the semi-colonial Arab states that surround it with destruction should it fear loss of supremacy.

2. What is distinctive about Israel is that, unlike earlier settler states populated by colonists from imperialist nations that conquered them as part of an imperial project, Israel has no 'mother country'. It was populated by part of the Jewish population from several countries, as part of a deal by the Zionist movement with British colonialism during the First World War. The Zionist movement being a unique nationalist movement politically led by part of the Jewish sections of the bourgeoisie in several advanced capitalist countries. This deal led over three decades of British colonialism and gradually accelerating Jewish immigration, in the context of the Nazi mass murder of European Jewry during WWII, to a reactionary war of national independence partially against the British, but mainly against the Arab population.

With conventional settler states, that have a 'mother country', the character of that power plays a major role in determining the character of the settler state that subsequently emerges. But in a sense, Israel's 'mother country' is the Zionist movement itself, not Britain, which only played an enabling role in the foundation of Israel by a third party movement. Therefore, the character of the Zionist movement itself is decisive in determining the character of Israel.

It is crucial for communists particularly in the Western imperialist countries, Israel's bankrollers in terms of aid, and armourers, to have a clear conception of the forces in the world that are supporting Israel in its war against the Palestinians. This is because, unlike the West's allied dictatorships, from whom the ruling classes are compelled to main-



Netanyahu addresses the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's Policy Conference at the Walter Washington Convention Center 4 March, 2014 in Washington, DC.

tain a certain political distance, Israel is openly embraced as a so-called 'democracy' and treated as a part of the 'family' of 'civilised' nations. This means ignoring that Israel's Jewish 'democracy' was achieved by expelling the majority of its Arab population; without this expulsion a Jewish state would be impossible. For communist internationalists, no stone can be left unturned and no question considered taboo in exposing the real bases of support for the oppression of the Palestinians in the Western countries. To fail to do this is to betray internationalism and the Palestinians.

3. Empirical observation alone shows that Israel has organised bases of support within the ruling classes of several imperialist countries, centrally the United States, and those in Western Europe (including the UK). In the US, AIPAC (American-Israeli Political Action Committee) operates with great influence in both political parties; in the UK, there are powerful 'Friends of Israel' factions in all three major parties; the Conservative Friends of Israel in particular embraces 80% of Tory MPs. This is a staggering level of sponsorship from the main party of the British ruling class; it is echoed in the other parties and this pro-Israel ideology has a similar level of hegemony to Cold War anti-communism among the ruling class.

This ruling class support has a material basis, and not just in terms of old-fashioned imperialist realpolitik. As the late Israel Shahak, genocide survivor and decades-long defender of Palestinian rights within Israel, wrote in a very important work on the Jewish question:

"US support for Israel, when considered not in abstract but in concrete detail, cannot be adequately explained only as a result of American imperial interests. The strong influence wielded by the organised Jewish community in the USA in support of all Israeli policies must be taken into account in order to explain the Middle East policies of American administrations. This phenomenon is even more noticeable in the case of Canada, whose Middle Eastern interests cannot

Jewish World Review Oct. 10, 2007 / 28 Tishrei 5768, Feel the power

By Joseph Aaron

Vanity Fair is nothing if not on the cutting edge of where society is and is going. Vanity Fair is definitely *not* a Jewish publication.

And yet, in this one issue, it tells us more about the Jewish world as it is today than any lecture or book or class out there.

It does that in two ways.

The first is its annual list of what it calls The New Establishment, the 100 most powerful, most influential people in American society.

What is absolutely amazing, stunning about the list is how many Jews there are on it. Jews make up about 2.5 percent of the U.S. population so there should be two or three Jews

on the list.

Guess again, *bubeleh*.

The list of the Vanity Fair 100 includes, get ready, 51, yes 51 Jews.

Minimum.

I say 51 because that's how many I'm sure are Jewish.

There may be others on the list who are Jewish but who I don't know are Jewish and whose names are not obviously Jewish.

But let's say I got them all. That means that more than half the names on the list of the 100 people who are the most vital to this society are Jewish. And this is a list that includes Apple's Steve Jobs and Oprah and Bill Clinton and Warren Buffett, to name a few of the few non-Jews on the list.

That is absolutely nothing short of astounding.

(<http://www.jewishworldreview.com/joe/aaron101007.php3>).

be considered as important, but whose loyal dedication to Israel is even greater than that of the USA. In both countries (and also in France, Britain, and many other states) Jewish organisations support Israel with the same loyalty which communist parties accorded to the USSR for so long. Also, many Jews who appear to be active in defending human rights and who adopt non-conformist views on other issues do, in cases affecting Israel, display a remarkable degree of totalitarianism and are in the forefront of defence of all Israeli policies. It is well known in Israel that the chauvinism and fanaticism in supporting Israel displayed by diaspora Jews is much greater (especially since 1967) than the chauvinism shown by an average Israeli Jew..." (*Jewish History, Jewish Religion: the Weight of Three Thousand Years*, 1994, p102).

The influence Jewish organizations are able to exert in imperialist policy is not the product of the 'Jewish vote' or even some mysterious 'lobbying' power at their disposal, as is euphemistically said by some critics who fear being falsely accused of racism. The Jewish vote in imperialist countries is electorally tiny. In the US around 2% of the population are Jewish, and there is no reason, in strictly numerical terms, why a 'lobby' based on such a small percentage of the population should have the power not only to force American governments to adopt the most slavish support for very brutal actions of Israel, but also to destroy the careers of politicians who speak out against such actions.

4. It is however, explained by one salient fact: Jewish overrepresentation in the US and other ruling classes. For the United States, which is the most powerful state in human history, you can easily find informed Jewish sources that place the representation of Jews among billionaires, the most powerful elements of the capitalist elite, at between 40 and 48% – nearly half

This is the only logically coherent explanation for the power of the so-called lobby. It must be faced fearlessly by Marxists, irrespective of any discomfort that may result

from confronting the widespread prejudice (for that is what it is) that to mention, let alone try to analyse, such factual matters is in some way racist. To ignore them in this way is itself an act of betrayal of those on the receiving end of the crimes that result from this state of affairs, and in that sense a chauvinist position.

A materialist analysis of why this is the case is crucial. This is a very complex and difficult question, and there are enormous social pressures on those who would try to analyse it. The history of genocide against the Jews in the first half of the 20th century is ruthlessly used by propagandists for the Zionist project to justify today's crimes against the Palestinians. Not only that, but in the earlier period anti-semites exploited the atypical social structure of the Jews – their overrepresentation in business and finance – as an important component of the paranoid, racist ideology that led to the Nazi genocide in Germany and Europe. This history is also exploited today against critics of this phenomenon. However difficult this makes addressing today's problems in this regard, the challenge of producing a coherent materialist analysis of them cannot be ducked. Today, as Palestinians face regular one-sided massacres and the threat of mass population expulsions, and the wider Arab and Middle East faces the real possibility of a nuclear genocide at Israel's hands, solving this very tricky ideological and political problem is possibly the most crucial, strategic task that communists have to solve. If we can't confront this, we may as well give up any pretence of communism and revolution.

5. Fortunately, there is a materialist, Marxist tradition we can draw on in analysing the origins of this. In its most developed form this was developed by Abram Leon, a young Jewish Marxist, during the Second World War. His work *The Jewish Question*, a Marxist Interpretation is the classic Marxist study of Jewish history, basing its starting point on Karl Marx's earlier sketch of this question. Beginning in antiquity, Leon's work most directly relates to the

period from early medieval times to that of early imperialist capitalism. His analysis is of the Jews as a 'people-class', whose very survival as a people since antiquity was bound up with their role as the repository of merchant's capital, commodity distribution and therefore foreign trade in fundamentally feudal society, where the dominant mode of exploitation involved the production of use value, not exchange value. Trade was therefore regarded as a separate activity, outside the social norm, that could best be confined to practitioners of a 'foreign' religion.

This is somewhat different to the question of usury, which only became dominant among the Jews with the decline of feudalism and the rise of commodity exchange as an increasing norm. This brought the rise of 'native merchants' etc., which pushed the Jews to the margins of commodity exchange in the form of usury, which was regarded as a socially odious activity.

Leon noted that in the early period of feudalism, the Jews were in fact often highly privileged due to their specialist trading role. Later, as their role shifted to usury, tax-farming, etc., they became exploitative intermediaries that were often hated by the exploited peasantry. On more than one occasion, events that are often regarded as pogroms were in fact peasant revolts against exploitation. In the later feudal period this had a dynamic that led to the Jews retreating into ghettos and/or being driven from country to country as their economic role became increasingly superfluous. This happened at different times in Western and Eastern Europe, so there is quite a complex tapestry of events that needs to be understood. In Eastern Europe, this period of Jewish decline and oppression coincided with the beginning of the decay of capitalism.

In the early capitalist period, a key achievement of the bourgeois revolutions was the opening up of the ghettos, and a beginning was made to the assimilation of the Jews, the logical outcome of the redundancy of this medieval trading class. However, with the end of the epoch of progressive capitalism, this came to a halt and you had the rise of racialised anti-Jewish sentiment. Leon witnessed the growth of this hatred, and the rise of Nazism, and projected that the Jews would remain pariahs, and that status would only be relieved through the overthrow of capitalism.

Unfortunately Leon did not live to see the foundation of the state of Israel, and thus to be able to analyse the Jewish Question in the post WWII period. He perished in Auschwitz in 1944, at the age of only 26. His writings about history were spot on; his speculations about future developments were not, since Jews are no longer pariahs but have been re-absorbed by later imperialism in a different political situation. But given that his historical analysis was correct, it ought to be possible to pick up the threads from where he left off and, using the same method, analyse the current situation correctly.

6. The redundancy of any class, including a people-class,

BELOW: British missionaries with men holding hands severed from victims named Bolenge and Lingomo by A.B.I.R. militiamen, 1904.



results in its dissolution and its members' absorption into other classes. This process began with the emancipation of the Jews after the bourgeois revolutions as laid out by Leon and referred to above. Members of the former people-class were absorbed into the bourgeoisie, the working class (particularly as an artisan-proletariat), and various layers of the urban petty-bourgeoisie. As a people with centuries of experience of trade in commodities – that is, in the operation of merchant's capital – prior to the capitalist era proper, they had major cultural advantages for operation within the bourgeoisie. They had more accumulated 'cultural capital' in the spheres particularly of trade and finance than the mainstream 'native' bourgeoisies of the nations they were beginning to integrate into.

In the early stages of capitalism, this did not matter, as the system was growing so strongly that there was room for many in the developing capitalist classes that were coming to dominate what became the Western countries. Jewish bourgeois prospered together with other bourgeois and assimilation appeared to be making good progress. But with the beginning of capitalist decline in the late 19th Century, suddenly it was not so rosy. With the narrowing of capitalist growth, the advent of depression, something similar to what happened in the mid-medieval period recurred.

In mid-medieval times the Jews were seen as insidious competitors by a rising 'native' class of merchants, who proceeded to drive them out of the mercantile field and into the degraded field of usury. In the later 19th Century, Jewish capitalists were seen in a similar way by many 'native' capitalists in Europe, and though they were not driven out in the same way, this hostility became one of the source components of modern anti-semitism.

This would probably have died down in time without another source component of the same anti-semitism – bourgeois hostility to the role of the Jews in the working class movement. Because the Jews had been an oppressed pariah class under late feudalism, those sections of the former people-class who did not make the transformation into the bourgeoisie itself became among the chief exponents and subjects of a genuinely progressive, working class radicalisation. Both Jewish workers and Jewish intellectuals played a

crucial role in the revolutionary wing of the labour movement in many countries.

One has only to mention Marx, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Jogiches, Joffe, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Abram Leon, and many more sterling leaders of the working class who were of Jewish origin. Thus the revolutionary Jews were hated by the bourgeoisie at the same time as the bourgeois Jews became regarded by many 'native' bourgeois as dangerous upstarts who were too successful in business for their liking. Then you can add a third component to this: the fact that Jews had played a significant, if secondary, role in earlier emancipatory events such as the French Revolution earned them the enmity of forces that still existed that were hostile to the legacy of the bourgeois revolutions themselves, such as most notably the Tsarist regime in Russia, as well as elements of the aristocratic Junkers class in Germany.

Then there was yet a fourth component, which was then subordinate but is much more important today with the existence of Israel and its role in the world. There is an undeniable element of anti-gentile hatred and bigotry among quite a few Jews that is symmetrical to anti-semitism, a belief that non-Jews are not 'chosen' and therefore inferior, and can be treated with contempt. This comes from Rabbinical teachers and some scripture. Obviously the progressive, revolutionary Jews did not hold with that, but it existed among the rabbis and the more conservative Jewish elements, and could be caricatured by the proponents of anti-semitism in roughly the same manner that Islamophobes today caricature some of the more strident passages from the Qu'ran, Hadiths, etc. to demonise Muslims.

These are the four main factors that gave anti-semitism its potency from the late 19th Century onwards. To cut a long story short the proletarian component of what the classic anti-semites saw as the joint conspiracy of the revolutionary and bourgeois Jews was wiped out in Europe by the Nazis and their supporters in other countries particularly in Eastern Europe. In Germany the bourgeois Jews were largely wiped out also, but not in the rest of the world, and not particularly in the United States, where the Jewish bourgeoisie was already quite influential and became much more so as time went on, particularly since WWII.

There is no moral judgement contained within the observation that Jews are overrepresented in the bourgeoisie of the United States and other advanced countries. It is simply a material fact with certain implications for politics. If there were no quasi-nationalist consciousness, no sense of com-

mon purpose, it would have no significance whatsoever. What makes it significant is that they do have such a common purpose today, and also a common project, which is manifested in Israel and Zionism. This is significant to those on the receiving end of Israeli oppression, and their sympathisers.

7. Virtually all accounts of the birth of Zionism in the 19th Century, including that of would be Marxists, talk of Zionism as simply a reaction to the birth of anti-semitism, and do not seriously analyse the class nature of the Zionist project. This is not spelt out; the birth of Zionism is simply put down to amorphous 'Jews' in general, making a mistaken response to anti-semitism that has reactionary implications.

This is not enough in terms of analysis. The fact is that Zionism always was a quasi-national movement of the Jewish bourgeoisie, which had been initially pretty painlessly successful in gaining a major share of the fruits of expanding capital in the era of progressive capitalism, only to see this come under threat when the imperialist epoch began. The

problem is that this bourgeoisie did not have a territory to build a nation around. And in any case, it was not necessarily in favour of migrating and tearing out its roots in other countries even if a territory were somehow miraculously given to it. But it felt it needed a territorial asset, a home base to call its own even if it did not want to reside there all the time. This is easily comprehensible in terms of bourgeois consciousness and a Marxist understanding of the national question, it just demands a degree of flexibility in the understanding and application of Marxist tools of analysis, that can be most

effortlessly applied to other, more straightforward national questions.

In the early period of Zionism, obviously this quasi-national project appeared problematic and there was not unity among the Jewish bourgeoisie as to whether it was viable or not. But the project was bourgeois, and was extensively funded by part of the Jewish bourgeoisie abroad, particularly in the USA. The lack of unanimous Jewish bourgeois support for the Zionist project in the earlier period meant that it had to rely on support from various pseudo-left Zionist currents, those who manifested nationalist deviations from the revolutionary impulses that drove the genuine elements of the communist and socialist movement who happened to be of Jewish origin.

Thus when Israel was founded, its original leaders were dominated by the fake-left nationalist trend. But despite that, the real nature of the Zionist project was thoroughly bourgeois and reactionary; that disjunction between con-



The Law of Return, granting every Jew in the world the right to settle in Israel, was passed by the Knesset on July 5, 1950. Even if your ancestors left 1,800 years ago. Palestinians ethnically cleansed in 1948, 1967, etc cannot return and if they try they are shot.

sciousness and reality has long since been resolved through the decay of the fake-left Zionists and the dominance of the open right. The 'left' always served a cover for the right, but now they are a pathetic fig-leaf for it.

The Jews are not a nation, but they have a pan-national bourgeoisie that had national aspirations and wanted a territorial asset to give expression to that. Once that territory was actually created, through manoeuvres with the imperialist powers, it led to a transformation of the situation. Israel's 'Law of Return' gives all Jews who fit Israel's criteria of who is a Jew, anywhere in the world, automatic citizenship rights. That legal right to Israeli citizenship is a material force, which gives some people power over and in preference to other people. It gives Jews overseas implicit power over the Arab inhabitants of Palestine. It does not make Jews a nation in the sense of Stalin's famous definition of a nation in Marxism and the National Question, which still arguably contains the correct Marxist definition of a nation. But it is a material change that confers legal, national rights. It therefore means that Jews, under the hegemony of their own bourgeoisie as most other peoples of the world live under the hegemony of their own bourgeoisies, constitute a semi-nation under that hegemony.

8. There is a common ethnocentric project between the ruling class of Israel and the various hegemonic pro-Israel bourgeois Jewish organisations in a number of imperialist countries, centrally the United States. This pan-imperialist Zionist bloc within the bourgeoisie plays an active role in the oppression of the Palestinians. This bourgeois current, which extends from the ruling class of Israel to penetrate deeply into the US ruling class (and to a lesser extent the ruling classes of several European imperialist countries also) has some of the attributes of a national bourgeois formation without a single territory exclusive to itself.

It is therefore both a powerful imperialist formation, and deeply unstable. In this epoch of declining capitalism, it plays the role of a kind of 'vanguard of the bourgeoisie' – not quite the mirror-image of Marxism but with aspirations along those lines. It has been instrumental in pushing the nationally limited imperialist bourgeoisies to partially transcend their own national particularisms. Hence the 'traditional' imperialist bourgeoisie, based on the nation-state, having overcome their previous fear of the supposedly proletarian-internationalist role of the Jews as a result of the outcome of WWII, now regards Jewish 'cosmopolitanism' and bourgeois semi-internationalism as a good thing, and to a considerable degree defers and follows the leadership of the Jewish/Zionist bourgeoisie.

But this is unstable, and depends for its coherence on the maintenance of Israel as a Jewish state. Without that ethnocentric entity in the Middle East, the Jewish layers in the ruling classes in the imperialist countries would have no focus to unite them; their 'internationalism' (in reality tribalism) would collapse, and the Jewish bourgeoisie would



Abram Leon
1918-1944

simply over time disappear through assimilation into the national ruling classes of the imperialist countries. This bourgeois caricature of internationalism would collapse.

Hence the rabid support of Israel by the bourgeois Jewish-ethnocentric fractions in the imperialist countries, their ability to maintain broader bourgeois support, and the failure of more seemingly rational voices in the ruling class to prevail over them. This represents a kind of bourgeois class instinct as to its interests against the proletariat, giving it additional political weapons against the genuinely internationalist aspirations of the working class movement. Unfortunately, due to inadequate political leadership, the left has until now failed to correctly deal with this problem.

9. Understood properly then, maintaining Israel's status as a Jewish ethnocracy is a strategic necessity for the stability of world capitalism. Conversely, for the same reasons, the dissolution of this ethnic tyranny and the assimilation of its Jewish population into a state of affairs where all of its inhabitants and refugees have equal political rights over all of historic Palestine is a priority of the working class world-wide.

10. There is no 'Jewish problem' in the sense that the racist movements of the late 19th and early 20th Century tried to make out. There is however, by means of the activities of the Jewish bourgeoisie, an additional factor of complexity in the relations between the imperialist ruling classes that in its distinctive way, threatens the world with barbarism in a novel and unexpected form. This is why, in many ways, the Israel/Palestine question is presently the most crucial and strategic question of world politics. ▲

The chimera of British anti-Semitism, and how not to fight it if it were real

By Norman G. Finkelstein

The current hysteria engulfing the British Labour Party resolves itself into a pair of interrelated, if discrete, premises: Anti-Semitism in British society at large and the Labour Party in particular have reached crisis proportions. If neither of these premises can be sustained, then the hysteria is a fabrication. In fact, no evidence has been adduced to substantiate either of them; on the contrary, all the evidence points in the opposite direction. The rational conclusion is that the brouhaha is a calculated hoax—dare it be said, plot?—to oust Jeremy Corbyn and the principled leftist politics he represents from British public life.

But even if the allegations were true, the solution would still not be to curb freedom of thought in the Labour Party. At its worthiest, the Left-Liberal tradition has attached a unique, primordial value to Truth; but Truth cannot be attained if dissentients, however obnoxious, are silenced. Given the fraught history of anti-Semitism, on the one hand, and its crude manipulation by Jewish elites, on the other, an objective, dispassionate assessment could appear beyond reach. Still, it must be attempted. The prospect of a historic victory for the Left might otherwise be sabotaged as, thus far, Corbyn's supporters, whether it be from fear, calculation, or political correctness, dare not speak the name of the evil that is afoot.

The degree of anti-Semitism infecting British society has been the subject of numerous polls over a sustained period of time. These surveys have uniformly, consistently, and unambiguously concluded that anti-Semitism (1) has long been a marginal phenomenon in British society, infecting under 10 percent of the population, (2) is far less salient than hostility to other British minorities, and (3) is less pronounced in the UK than almost anywhere else in Europe. One might suppose that settled matters. But in 2017 the British Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) published a study that purportedly refined conventional wisdom by measuring the “elasticity” of anti-Semitism: that is, not just the percentage of confirmed anti-Semites, but also the prevalence of stereotypes that stigmatize Jews.

It found that, whereas a mere 2-5 percent of the British population can be reckoned anti-Semites, fully 30 percent



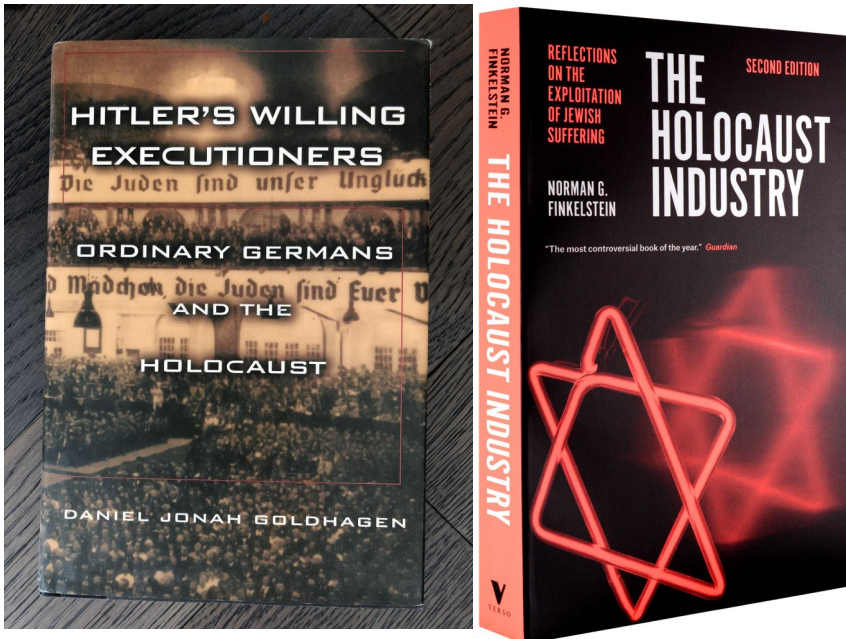
harbor at least one anti-Semitic stereotype. Before parsing the study's data, a couple of truisms warrant recalling. First, a generalization is something that is held to be generally true; it evidently allows for exceptions. Although Engels the mill-owner generously subsidized his impecunious comrade, it didn't prevent Marx from generalizing about cap-

italist “vampires.” Were it not for the heuristic value of broad generalizations, the discipline of sociology would have to close up shop. Its mandate is to map and predict the behavior, on the whole and in the main, of the multitudinous groups and subgroups crosscutting society.

Second, every national/ethnic group is subject to generalizations: “The French are,” “The Italians are,” “The Germans are,” . . . These generalizations range from more to less flattering to downright vicious, from more to less valid to outright false. It also ought to be obvious that if most positive generalizations raise no hackles, then neither should most negative ones. The fact that stereotypes of Jews run the full gamut is scarcely cause for alarm; it would be surprising were it otherwise. In fact, the JPR does not sound an alarm. Whereas some anti-Semitism-mongers have latched onto its findings, the researchers themselves sought to answer a different question: “Why [do] the levels of anxiety found within the UK Jewish population about the scale of contemporary antisemitism appear to be so far out of sync with the low levels of antisemitic sentiment observed among the general UK population?”

The study posits that, if British Jews express deep anxiety even as anti-Semites are going the way of the dodo, then it springs from the wider “diffusion” in British society of anti-Semitic stereotypes: “This [diffusion] goes a considerable way towards explaining contemporary Jewish concerns about antisemitism.”

But isn't that a hasty inference? If residents of Salem, Massachusetts, experienced deep anxiety about witches; if Americans experienced deep anxiety about Communists; if White southerners experienced deep anxiety about Black rapists; if Germans experienced deep anxiety about a “Judeo-Bolshevik” conspiracy; and if, for that matter, Christians experienced deep anxiety about Jewish ritual



child-murderers—if an anxiety is widespread, surely it doesn’t necessarily, or even probably, follow that it is a rational fear.

It could just as plausibly have been induced by powerful social forces standing to benefit from a deliberately contrived paranoia. Or, in the case at hand, it could spring from Jewish hypersensitivity—in light of historical experience wholly understandable—to a phantom anti-Semitism (see Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall*). The JPR study compiles a seven-item roster of stereotypes. If they are designated anti-Semitic, according to the researchers, that’s because Jews find them hurtful: “Some ideas are known to resonate with Jews as antisemitic, and this study adopts a Jewish perspective on what constitutes antisemitism as its starting point.” [4]

But a generalization can plainly be both hurtful and true, as in truth is often a bitter pill to swallow. If the hurtful generalization is true, then—inasmuch as the epithet anti-Semitic signals an irrational animus—it cannot be anti-Semitic. Some 20 years ago, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen wrote a book purporting that the Nazi holocaust originated in an ingrained German predisposition to murder Jews. Were it true, his thesis could not fairly be labeled anti-Teutonic: “There are no *prima facie* grounds for dismissing Goldhagen’s thesis,” this writer observed at the time. “It is not intrinsically racist or otherwise illegitimate. There is no obvious reason why a culture can’t be fanatically consumed by hatred.” [5]

Even as Germans might recoil at this depiction of them, indeed, find it singularly offensive, if the facts vindicated it, then it couldn’t be said to be rooted in irrational malice. As it happened, the evidence adduced by Goldhagen didn’t support his thesis, but that’s a separate matter. Consider now several of the stereotypes assembled in the JPR study to gauge the prevalence of British anti-Semitism: Jews think they are better than other people. Between their secular success, on the one hand, and their theological

“chosenness,” on the other, Jews themselves believe in their group superiority. Isn’t that why they kvell over the Jewish pedigree of the seminal figures of modernity—Marx, Einstein, and Freud—as well as 20 percent of Nobel laureates?

What a Jewish child inherits is “no body of law, no body of learning, and no language, and finally, no Lord,” eminent Jewish novelist Philip Roth once observed, “but a kind of psychology: and the psychology can be translated in three words—‘Jews are better.’” A prominent Jewish-American scholar shamelessly gushed: “Jews would have been less than human had they eschewed any notion of superiority altogether,” and “it is extraordinarily difficult for American Jews to expunge the sense of superiority altogether, however much they may try to suppress it.” [6]

A popular American publication, in an article under the headline “Are Jews Smarter?,” pondered the genetic evidence. [7] Lest this be pigeonholed as a peculiarly American-Jewish conceit, prominent Anglo-Jewish author Howard Jacobson speculates that at the heart of anti-Semitism lies Gentile resentment of Jewish smarts: “Freud argues that Jews . . . over-evolved their mental and intellectual side. . . . We all have our arrogances and that is a Jewish arrogance. But the idea of the Jew as over-evolved mentally is one of the reasons humanity is in a constant argument with us. We gave the world ethics, morals, the mental life, for which the physical world will never forgive us.” [8]

If it’s anti-Semitism to believe that “Jews think they are better than other people,” then most Jews would appear to be infected by this virus. Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes. Voluble Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban is supposed to have quipped “There’s no business like Shoah business.” But when this writer published a little book in 2000 entitled *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, [9]

it evoked a torrent of ad hominem attacks. “It is perhaps too easy to write off a critic like Finkelstein as a self-hating Jew,” Jonathan Freedland opined in the *Guardian*, but that didn’t deter him from traversing this squalid path: “Finkelstein does the anti-Semites’ work for them,” indeed, is “closer to the people who created the Holocaust than to those who suffered in it.” [10]

Unsurprisingly, Freedland is now among those leading the charge against Corbyn’s alleged anti-Semitism. Be that as it may, nearly two decades have elapsed since the book’s hostile reception, and by now its argument no longer even raises eyebrows as it has passed into a cliché. Whether it be to justify another war of aggression or another massacre of civilians, whether it be to market another schlock Holocaust film or another schlock Holocaust novel, Jews have not hesitated—on the contrary—to wrap themselves in the sacred mantle of Jewish martyrdom. A book by former

speaker of the Israeli parliament Avraham Burg decrying Israel's fixation on the Holocaust casually refers to "the Shoah industry."

It "converts piercing pain into hollowness and kitsch," Burg observes, and extenuates Israeli crimes: "American Jews, like Israelis, are . . . raising the Shoah banner high to the sky and exploiting it politically . . . All is compared to the Shoah, dwarfed by the Shoah, and therefore all is allowed—be it fences, sieges . . . food and water deprivation. . . . All is permitted because we have been through the Shoah and you will not tell us how to behave." [11] Is Burg guilty of anti-Semitism? Jews have too much power in Britain. The three richest Brits are Jewish. [12]

Jews comprise only .5 percent of the population but fully 20 percent of the 100 richest [13] Relative both to the general population and to other ethno-religious groups, British Jews are in the aggregate disproportionately wealthy, educated, and professionally successful [14] These data track closely with the picture elsewhere. Jews comprise only 2 percent of the US population but fully 30 percent of the 100 richest Americans, while Jews enjoy the highest household income among religious groups. [15] Jews comprise less than .2 percent of the world's population but, of the world's 200 richest people, fully 20 percent are Jewish. [16]

Jews are incomparably organized as they have created a plethora of interlocking, overlapping, and mutually reinforcing communal and defense organizations that operate in both the domestic and international arenas. In many countries, not least the US and the UK, Jews occupy strategic positions in the entertainment industry, the arts, publishing, journals of opinion, the academy, the legal profession, and government. "Jews are represented in Britain in numbers that are many times their proportion of the population," British-Israeli journalist Anshel Pfeffer notes, "in both Houses of Parliament, on the Sunday Times Rich List, in media, academia, professions, and just about every walk of public life." [17]

The wonder would be if these raw data didn't translate into outsized Jewish political power. The Israel-based Jewish People Policy Planning Institute rhapsodizes that "The Jewish People today is at a historical zenith of wealth creation" and "has never been as powerful as now. [18] It is certainly legitimate to query the amplitude of this political power and whether it has been exaggerated, [19] but it cannot be right to deny (or suppress) critical socioeconomic facts. When virtually every member of the US Congress acts like a broken Jack-in-the-Box, as they give an Israeli

head of state, who has barged into the Capitol in brazen and obnoxious defiance of the sitting US president, one standing ovation after another, surely it is fair to ask: What the hell is going on here? [20]

Were it not for the outsized power of British Jews, it's hard to conceive that British society would be interminably chasing after a hobgoblin. True, although fighting anti-Semitism is the rallying cry, a broad array of powerful entrenched social forces, acting on not-so-hidden agendas of their own, have coalesced around this putative cause. It cannot be gainsaid, however, that Jewish organizations form the poisoned tip of this spear. It might still be asked, But is this "too much" power? Consider these facts. Jeremy Corbyn is the democratically elected head of the Labour Party. His ascendancy vastly expanded and galvanized the party's ranks. Corbyn has devoted a lifetime to fighting racism; like eponymous labor organizer Joe Hill, where workers strike and organize, it's there you'll find Jeremy Corbyn. By British and even global leadership standards, he cuts a saintly figure. On the opposite side, mostly unelected Jew-

ish bodies [21] have dragged Corbyn's name through the mud, slandering and defaming him. They have refused to meet with Corbyn, even as he has repeatedly extended olive branches and offered substantive compromises. [22] Instead they issue take-it-or-leave-it ultimatums. As it happens, Jews overwhelmingly do not support Labour, even when the head of the party list is Jewish (Ed Miliband in 2015). Nonetheless, these pious-cum-pompous communal leaders do not find it unseemly or even amiss to dictate from afar and from above internal Labour policy. This writer's late mother used to muse, "It's no accident that Jews invented the word chutzpah." The transparent motive behind this cynical campaign is to demonize Corbyn, not because he's a "fucking anti-Semite," but because he's a principled champion of Palestinian rights.

However, Corbyn's candidacy is not just about Palestine or even the British laboring classes. It's a beacon for the homeless, the hungry, and the hopeless, the despised, the downtrodden, and the destitute everywhere. If Corbyn's traducers succeed, the glimmer of possibility he has held out will be snuffed out by a gang of moral blackmailers and extortionists. Is it anti-Semitism to believe that "Jews have too much power in Britain"—or is it just plain common sense? (It is, to be sure, a question apart and not one amenable to simple solution how to rectify this power inequity while not impinging on anyone's democratic rights.) Still, isn't it anti-Semitic to generalize that "Jews" have abused their power? But even granting that a portion have been manipulated or duped, it certainly appears as if British Jews



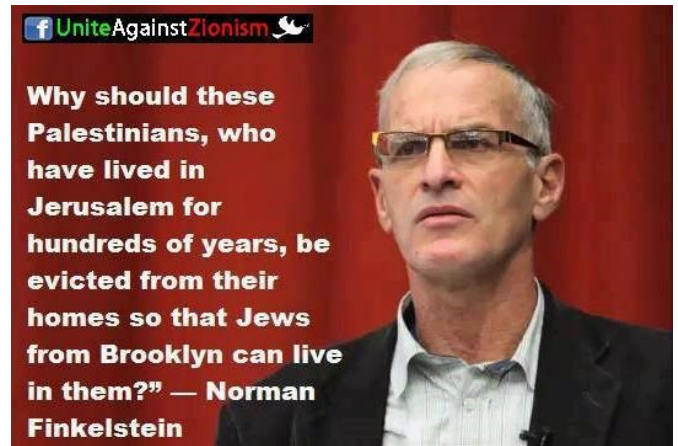
in general support the anti-Corbyn juggernaut.

If this indeed is a misapprehension, whose fault is it? The tacit message of the unprecedented joint editorial on the front page of the major Jewish periodicals was: British Jews are united—Corbyn must go! Is it anti-Semitic to take these Jewish organizations at their word? The upshot is, the JPR study does not prove the “elasticity” of anti-Semitism in British society. A couple of the incendiary propositions it tests do arguably indicate anti-Semitism—“The Holocaust is a myth,” “The Holocaust has been exaggerated”—but only an infinitesimal portion of Brits (2 and 4 percent, respectively) subscribe to them. Anti-Semitism of course exists in British society but the JPR has stretched the evidence beyond the snapping point. There’s no ground to doubt the conventional polling data that put its incidence at under 10 percent of British society. Even if the JPR study withstood scrutiny, it still wouldn’t prove that anti-Semitism threatens British Jews. Amidst the nauseating nonstop spectacle of solipsistic, narcissistic, self-pitying navel-gazing, a reality check is in order.

Were popular stereotypes plotted along a spectrum from benign to malignant, most anti-Semitic ones would fall near the benign end whereas those of truly oppressed minorities would cluster at the opposite end. Yes, Jews must endure the reputation of being stingy, pushy, and clannish—but Muslims are profiled as terrorists and misogynists, Blacks are despised as chronically lazy and genetically stupid, and Roma/Sinti are loathed as dirty beggars and thieves. Nor do Jews suffer the losses attending actual victimhood. How many Jews qua Jews have been refused a job or flat? How many Jews have been shot dead by police or railroaded into jail? Whereas being Black or Muslim closes doors, being Jewish opens them. If whites occupying seats of power discriminate in favor of other whites, and men occupying seats of power discriminate in favor of other men, it would be surprising if largely successful Jews didn’t discriminate in favor of other Jews.

Not only is it no longer a social liability to be Jewish, it even carries social cachet. Whereas it once was a step up for a Jew to marry into a ruling elite family, it now appears to be a step up for the ruling elite to marry into a Jewish family. Isn’t it a straw in the wind that both President Bill Clinton’s pride and joy Chelsea and President Donald Trump’s pride and joy Ivanka married Jews? Making the rounds of the British talk show circuit, self-anointed authority Barnaby Raine grimaces that “there’s a very, very serious problem of antisemitism across British society.” (Except for the fact that he is a “proud British Jew” and was once called a “kike,” it’s hard to make out the basis for his confident pronouncements.) Bertrand Russell once wrote of Trotsky, “He is very good-looking, with admirable wavy hair; one feels he would be irresistible to women.”

Something similar can be said, more or less, of Barnaby the Bolshevik—or, at any rate, of the ideal to which he aspires. The question then comes down to this: Would he prefer to be ugly and bald or to be Jewish in Britain today?



It’s not a trivial or tongue-in-cheek query. The fact is, personally as well as professionally, these physical stigmata are ten thousand times heavier a cross to bear than to be born a Jew. If the nonproblem of anti-Semitism ranks a “very, very serious problem” in the UK, then the British people are most fortunate. In fact, the Corbyn candidacy would be redundant as they will already have reached the Promised Land. “Those who cannot remember the past,” George Santayana famously warned, “are condemned to repeat it.”

In light of the catastrophe that befell them during World War II, shouldn’t Jews assume and prepare for the worst and can they really be faulted for hypervigilance? Even if the indicators are for the moment faint, still it can’t be denied that it might happen here. If the availability of resources, time, and energy were infinite, such an argument could carry conviction. But they aren’t. “Economy of time,” Marx observed in the *Grundrisse*, “to this all economy ultimately reduces itself.” Whatever time is expended in one direction means less time expended in other directions. Can it seriously be contended that, in the face of the multiple domestic and global crises wracking British society—from homelessness, healthcare, and unemployment to Brexit, nuclear proliferation and climate change—anti-Semitism looms large on the list of urgent matters demanding immediate attention; that the finite resources at Britain’s disposal to fight here-and-now matters of life and death should instead be rechanneled to combating nebulous apocalyptic future scenarios? But the truth is, Jewish elites do not for a moment believe that anti-Semitism is a burning issue. If they truly feared that it posed a clear and present danger now or in the foreseeable future, they wouldn’t be shouting from the rooftops that Corbyn was a “fucking anti-Semite.”

For, if the UK was awash with closet anti-Semites, then, logically, broadcasting this accusation would hand Corbyn free publicity as it would be dulcet tones to the ears of potential voters. Far from damaging him, its diffusion could only facilitate Corbyn’s victory and pave the way for a second Holocaust. On the contrary, Jewish organizations know full well that vilifying Corbyn as an anti-Semite would drastically reduce his appeal, as anti-Semitism resonates only among assorted antediluvians, troglodytes, and fruit-

cakes. In other words, the irrefutable proof that Corbyn's pursuers don't believe a word they're saying is that by labeling him an anti-Semite they hope and expect to isolate him. However, as the accusation is manifestly a red herring, it's also possible that the current hysteria will pass most people by entirely, not because they are unconcerned by anti-Semitism but because it hardly occurs to them as an issue at all. If the controversy has an effect, it will be restricted to exacerbating divisions in the Labour leadership and perhaps also adding to a more general perception that the stories promoted by mainstream media are fake news. 17 August 2018.

To be continued ...

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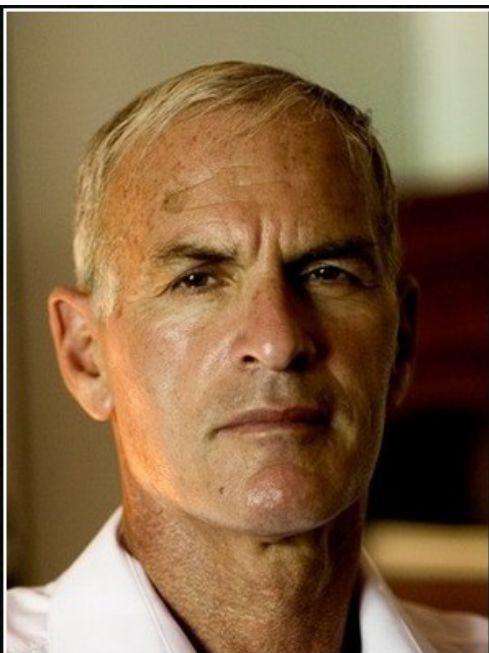
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The post Finkelstein on Corbyn-Mania appeared first on Norman G. Finkelstein. ▲



International law says people fighting for self-determination can use force in order to achieve their independence.

— Norman Finkelstein —

AZ QUOTES

Dave Rich and Abram Leon

We reprint below the comment of Dave Rich, deputy communications director of the Community Security Trust (CST), on the politics of Gerry Downing, Ian Donovan and Socialist Fight. Written from the standpoint of an arch Zionist and absolute political opponent it is nonetheless a politically honest assessment. We appreciate that, given the enormous amount of distortions and outright lies that are told about the politics of Socialist Fight since David Cameron began the witch-hunt in the HoC on 9 March 2016 at the instigation of Tory blogger Guido Fawkes.

Rich advises his readers to “familiarise themselves with Marxist theory” and sets out to enlighten them on it. Of course we would not expect such an opponent to present a sympathetic overview but, whilst condemning it and us, he does correctly identify Socialist Fight’s position as authentic Marxism.

“What Trotskyists mean by the ‘Jewish Question’ ... isn’t the same as the Nazi’s Jewish Question which led to the Final Solution.” he points out. How many leftist opponent have spread that lie about us? He goes on:

“The key Trotskyist text is *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation*, ... (by) Abram Leon. ... The book built on Karl Marx’s original *On The Jewish Question*.” Not only does Socialist Fight rely on Abram Leon but so does the SWP, e.g. their pamphlet *Israel: The Hijack State*: “Leon’s book is today recognised as the authority on

the Jewish question by both Jewish and non-Jewish opponents of Zionism” And so does Shlomo Sand, author of *The Invention of the Jewish People*, who said “I

feel that Abram Leon is my family” – politically speaking.

Rich quotes SF, “the Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie (note; not all Jewish billionaires [Soros!], let alone all Jews—SF)... is a key component of the vanguard of world capital”. American support for Israel can only be explained (by) the ‘fact’ and then says “I have no idea whether it is a fact”. We recommend he asks Norman Finkelstein who will certainly enlighten him (see page 19).

Rich finishes his piece with a condemnation of “antisemitic tropes”, “it’s easy to lose count of the antisemitic tropes being used: Jews and money, Jews and racism, Jews and political manipulation, Jews with no national loyalty.” A trope here is a useful thing which points one in an anti-Semitic direction, even if it is true (of the Jewish Zionist Billionaires). Logically then it’s best to tell kosher lies rather than speak supposed anti-Semitic truths.

Nonsense. As Rich implied on the phrase *The Jewish Question* what Trotskyists mean and what Nazis/antisemites mean are two diametrically opposed things. ▲

Why Marxists must address the Jewish Question concretely today

22/08/2015 by socialistfight



Gerry Downing’s ‘Jewish Question’

10 Mar 2016 by Dave Rich

[Gerry Downing](#) is an aging Trotskyist from the Socialist Fight organisation who has been expelled, re-admitted to, and now re-expelled from, the Labour Party. Amongst his many statements and ideas that have caused outrage is his belief that there is a ‘[Jewish Question](#)’ that needs to be solved.

The Labour Party isn’t the only organisation with housekeeping to do. Both Downing and his Socialist Fight comrade Ian Donovan were at the AGM of the [Palestine Solidarity Campaign](#) in January, and Donovan spoke in one of its policy debates. If antisemitism truly has no place in PSC, as it regularly [states](#), then Downing and Donovan should not be involved with that organisation either.

One of the curiosities of the Labour Party under its current leadership is that pundits need to familiarise themselves with Marxist theory that many assumed had become obsolete a long time ago. In that spirit, this blog post will provide a (very) brief guide to what Trotskyists mean by the ‘Jewish Question’.

This isn’t the same as the Nazi’s Jewish Question which led to the Final Solution. Trotskyists do want Jews to disappear, but not via genocide. Instead, they have theorised Jews out of history, and get upset that Jews refuse to go along with this theory and perform their historical function by disappearing.

The key Trotskyist text is [The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation](#), written by a wartime Jewish Trotskyist called Abram Leon. Leon wrote *The Jewish Question* while in hiding in Belgium during the Nazi occupation, before being caught and deported to Auschwitz where he was killed. The book built on Karl Marx’s original [On The Jewish Question](#) (written a century earlier) by coming up with the concept of the “people-class”: a distinct ethnic, religious or racial group, such as Jews, whose characteristics become effectively synonymous with their economic function in society. Using this theory, Leon explained that Jews survived in European history because they were traders and moneylenders and therefore had value in medieval society.

According to Leon’s theory, Jews should have disappeared under capitalism as they became a “declassed element” with no place in modern society. However, antisemitism had prevented them from fully assimilating. Zionism, Leon predicted, would fail because it was an attempt to “resolve the Jewish question independently of the world revolution.” Only socialism could provide a solution, by offering Jews “The end of Judaism” – something that Leon welcomed.

Leon’s book has proven enormously influential in Trotskyist thinking about Jews. Gerry Downing’s article on his Socialist Fight website titled

“[Why Marxists must address the Jewish question concretely today](#)” draws extensively on Leon. [Several other articles](#) on the website do the same. The Socialist Workers Party pamphlet [Israel: The Hijack State](#) claims that “Leon’s book is today recognised as *the* authority on the Jewish question by both Jewish and non-Jewish opponents of Zionism” (emphasis in the original). [Shlomo Sand](#), author of *The Invention of the Jewish People*, said “I feel that Abram Leon is my family” – politically speaking.

The idea that Jews will one day dissolve into the revolutionary masses and cease to be defined separately as Jews remains part of orthodox Marxist theory. The fact that they haven’t done so yet causes problems. As Socialist Fight [put it](#):

“How to explain the current situation then, when far from Jews being pariahs and rejected by capitalism, Jews are revered by capital and a form of Jewish nationalism – Zionism, exercises enormous power in the imperialist world? Why are Jews so overrepresented among the most strident spokespeople for capitalist reaction – the neo-conservatives and neo-liberal ideologues?”

The answer to this is found, according to [Ian Donovan](#), in “Zionism’s hegemonic role in Western racist politics today”. Zionism, he argues, is a “highly specific form of Jewish racism” and “the Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie... is a key component of the vanguard of world capital”. American support for Israel can only be explained the ‘fact’ (I have no idea whether it is a fact) that nearly half of American billionaires are Jewish. These Jewish billionaires act with “a common purpose”, which is to support Israel and Zionism. “The Jews are not a nation”, he writes, but Israel and “the various hegemonic pro-Israel bourgeois Jewish organisations in a number of imperialist countries” have a common project to oppress the Palestinians, and their power extends deep into the American and European ruling classes. Bringing this down is “a priority of the working class worldwide”.

At this point it’s easy to lose count of the antisemitic tropes being used: Jews and money, Jews and racism, Jews and political manipulation, Jews with no national loyalty, and so on.

Socialist Fight argue that their theory about “[the world Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie](#)” has nothing to do with antisemitic theories about global Jewish conspiracies. “There is no moral judgement contained within the observation that Jews are overrepresented in the bourgeoisie of the United States and other advanced countries”, Donovan [writes](#); “It is simply a material fact with certain implications for politics.”

Others may be less than convinced, but here’s one clear implication for politics: Gerry Downing is no longer a member of the Labour Party, and if he appeals against his expulsion he should be refused. ▲

Leon Trotsky: I am confident of the victory of the Fourth International; Go Forward!