

The Oppression and Liberation of the Jewish People in America

Jews for Urban Justice

There is a Jewish people. It lives and feels its life across state boundaries, drawing sustenance from the Jewish communities of America, the Soviet Union, Israel, Western Europe, and Latin America. It lives and feels its life across millennia, across the rise and fall of several successive civilizations. It is not simply a religious denomination, and its peoplehood is not even chiefly defined by religion. Indeed, its peoplehood is defined chiefly by its refusal, its transcendence, of the conventional categories of peoplehood. The Jewish people is not political, or religious, or cultural, or economic, or familial. It is political-religious-cultural-economic-familial.

The Jews for Urban Justice (J.U.J.) was the first of the new Jewish radical groups, being formed in November, 1966. For three and a half years, it published *The Jewish Urban Guerrilla*; today, its major organ is the *Voice of Micah* where this article originally appeared. The J.U.J. is different from most other groups in that its base is not students, but mostly young professional working people and families with children. It is involved in numerous activities: demonstrations, conferences, communal celebrations, a theater group, summer work communes, and the Fabrangen, a multi-faceted communal cultural center (see page xlii). This document was written collectively by J.U.J. in the fall of 1970; the present version was reprinted in *Response*, Fall, 1971 issue. Copyright © 1971 by *Response* magazine. At present, the J.U.J.'s most ambitious project is an attempt to focus on the problem of ecocide in Vietnam through the "Trees for Vietnam" program. Our thanks to Mike Tabor for the above information.

What characterized its peoplehood best, at its best moments, was the principle of *halakhah*: the Way, the Path; a wholeness and fusion of body, mind, and spirit; of action and ideology; of person and community.

During the last two centuries, the worst oppression suffered by the Jewish people was, of course, the physical extirpation of its membership by the Nazi genocide, aided or unchecked by many other governments (not least of them the Roosevelt government in America, which failed to open many avenues of action that could have saved millions of lives, hundreds of communities). But in America, during the past fifty years, the Jewish community has also suffered a deep oppression of a totally different kind: an oppression so subtle and so debilitating that it has felt to many Jews like victory.

The oppression of which we speak is precisely the cracking of the community, the splitting of The Path, the isolation and separation of religious Judaism from cultural Judaism from political Judaism from economic Judaism from familial Judaism. The categorization of a people into boxes.

To much of the movement that during the past decade has risen to struggle against the American empire, defining as "oppression" what we have just described may seem peculiar. There are so many more naked oppressions: the genocide of Vietnam, the subjection of blacks, Chicanos, Indians, and women, the exploitation of workers, the poisoning of the air and water on which all of us depend for our very lives. Yet we believe that in a sense the ultimate oppression, the one that even the most reformist ruling class would boggle at removing, the last-ditch defense of the powerful against the rising tide of popular anger and assertion is the cracking of community, the splitting of The Path into a maze of category boxes.

To understand the depth of our feeling, we ask our radical sisters and brothers to imagine the offer of a bargain from Amerika to the blacks: "Accept Amerika fully, and you're in the club. We'll give you proportional representation or better among the affluent; we'll mix you residentially all 'round; we'll let you celebrate King's birthday; we'll even let you keep polit-

ical ties with Africa, so long as you disband these trouble-making Panthers that seek socialism here, and forget about community control, and take these jive jobs in our bureaucracies. (See? We'll even add a few of *your* words to *our* language!")"

Perhaps the Amerikan empire cannot do this with the blacks and survive as an empire. *But if it did*, would the bargain be liberation—or oppression? We believe that it would be oppression—and that precisely this has been the status offered the Jewish people.

We are organizing and will organize against that oppression.

This does not mean we seek to restore the Jewish community as it was 200 years ago. The Jewish tradition has incorporated constant transformation. The Path has been a way forward—not a paralysis. There is much in the tradition that was either a corruption of its best sense, or a failure to raise to new possibilities. We shall try to avoid both—knowing, of course, that whatever we create will not be perfect.

We call upon the Jewish people to free itself by joining in alliance with others to abolish the Amerikan empire that now oppresses the Jewish people and many other peoples at home and much of the human race outside. We call upon the Jewish people to join the task of creating a democratic, communitarian, libertarian, and socialist society in America. We believe that a fully socialist society will be one in which many self-governing communities are able to end the alienations of mind and body, of politics from economics, of spirit from work, of individual from collective, and thus to create the new, unalienated person; that these communities will differ freely from each other in the shapes they give to the wholeness they make out of their previously alienated lives; and that among these communities a liberated Jewish people will joyfully take its place.

I—The Jewish Identity: Growing Points

The identity of the Jewish people in America is built out of some specific bricks of Jewish experience. Most of these build-

ing blocks can be made to face two ways: they can be, and have been, used either to imprison the Jewish people in fear or smugness, or to provide Jews with a strong fortress from which to sally forth to change the world. The task of a radical Jewish movement is to organize and encourage the development of that side of the Jewish identity, that strand of the Jewish tradition, which would help liberate Jews and transform society. Let us specify some of these building blocks, and how we propose to build upon them:

** The heritage of *Tanach* provides on the one hand a comfortable cocoon for some Jews to rest in pridefully, as the "chosen" people; and on the other hand a constant spur to action by other Jews who take it to require that the Jewish people be a *committed* people (not the, but "a"—one among many). Jews deal in many different ways with the God-focus of *Tanach*: some accept the God-focus, some reject it as anything but a reflection of a transitory historical situation, some reinterpret it. The radical Jewish movement must develop that element of the tradition which sees *Tanach* as an open-ended record of dialogue between the present justice—committed, covenanted, but faltering—and the image or source of a future justice toward which the Jewish people and all humanity must respond and move.

** Almost all Jews perceive their history as one of marginality, persecution, and struggle. This perception includes a legend/history of slavery and liberation in Egypt, captivity and return to Babylon, rebellions against the Syrian-Greek and Roman Empires, pariah treatment and pogroms throughout sojourns in Western societies, the hostility of even some revolutionary movements (such as Russian communism) to Jewish peoplehood and autonomy, and of course the Holocaust. This perception on the one hand provides some Jews with an identity of struggle against the ruling-class institutions of whatever society they live in. On the other hand, it provides other Jews with an identity of fearfulness, retreatism, and sometimes a special fear of mass enmity (rather than of ruling-class oppression), and therefore a willingness to ask the ruling class

for protection. The radical Jewish movement must strengthen the latest knowledge that there is no safety for Jews in corrupt bargains with illegitimate authorities: that there is only safety in freedom, and in self-confident and devoted resistance to unfreedom.

** The history, memory, or legend of a fully integral, non-alienated Jewish community, in which elements that are now usually separately known as "religion," "politics," "culture," "ethics," "economics," "family life," etc., were felt, experienced, and lived through as a seamless whole: *halakhah*—not an externalized system of "law" but a "path," a "way" in which the community lived, integrating ideology and action. The triumph of the bourgeoisie in both the economy and ideology (the "Enlightenment"), industrialization and the resulting "rationalization" of Euro-American society brought about the smashing of this seamless community process among the Jewish people in Europe and America, and incorporated Jews there into the ordinary political and economic processes of the industrial capitalist state. "Freedom of religion" as an individual right was exchanged for the former semitolerance of Jewish communities, and many Jews were attracted by what looked like emancipation. But as the lonely individual Jew has felt more and more vulnerable, crushable, in the industrial-capitalist machine, some Jews have more and more clearly harked back to the lost community, or have harked forward to some new version of it. This feeling cannot be said to be anything like a universal in the Jewish people in America, but in semiconscious form is widespread—and is reviving. We must create communities that exemplify a new *halakhah*.

** The culture of Eastern European Jewry—the literature and songs, and especially the religious ceremonials that underline great differences between Jews and all other Americans—are shared so broadly among American Jews, even in dissipated form among the youth who do not know Yiddish or do not take religious ceremonies seriously—that they help unify the Jewish people in America. In addition, there is a growing American Jewish popular (i.e., upper-middlebrow) culture—

Goodbye, Columbus and *Portnoy's Complaint*; Saul Bellow—which, while shared with other Americans, is felt more strongly by Jews. We must revivify the moral-political meaning of such celebrations as Passover and Yom Kippur and encourage a radical Jewish culture.

Memories of the Holocaust are overwhelming among Jews over forty, and persist in unexpected forms among young Jews—for example, in the identification of "genocidal America" with Nazi Germany. These memories stir varied reactions; among some, guilt that they were "making it" in America while their brothers and sisters were being mass-murdered in Europe; among others, indelible fear, leading sometimes to hysterical outbursts; among still others, a quiet, steely determination that genocide against Jews shall not again be permitted; and among some with whom we stand, a belief that future Holocausts are liable to come in new ways, will destroy not only the Jews but also other peoples or all humanity and must be resisted by cracking the kind of institutions that spawned Hitler.

** Identification with the protection of Soviet Jewry and with the survival of the Israeli people is so strong among Americans, that they clearly help form the identity of an American Jewish people. For some Jews this feeling has taken the form of blind and total engagement with the Israeli government; for others it has meant much more skepticism or anger toward certain aspects of Israeli society. But for almost all Jews the "issue of Israel" feels qualitatively different from that of Sweden, Tanzania, Chile, or Rhodesia. We must help to revive the notion of a world-wide Jewish people that resists oppression and does not participate in it.

** The strength of the Jewish family structure has until recently been so great that, explicitly and implicitly, it has contributed to a sense of Jewish peoplehood; explicitly because much of Jewish life and tradition is mediated through the family by such sociologically powerful techniques as the Passover Seder, and implicitly because the resistance of Jewish family structure to the general breakdown of the family

in industrial capitalist society has seemed to validate Jewish peoplehood. But this too has had another side: in Eastern Europe there sometimes emerged the Talmudist father and home-preserving mother; men who presumably dealt with "ultimately serious" issues of God, *Torah*, *Talmud* (excluding women), and women who dealt with "immediately vital" issues of emotion, human relations, survival (excluding men). The result in the worst cases was a mutual contempt among men for "unintellectual" women and among women for "ineffectual" men. This syndrome has sometimes turned even more sour under the influence of American individualism and capitalism. It is our task to encourage the emergence of communities in which women, men, and children can be free and the family is a matrix of equality and joy.

So far we have tried to show that even in America, where the "carrot" has been used by the ruling class with perhaps the greatest subtlety in Jewish history to dissolve Jewish peoplehood or render it unthreatening, there remains a Jewish people. But the issue still arises: should this continue? Would it still be desirable for there to be a Jewish people after a democratic transformation of American society? Is it desirable for radicals to identify themselves as Jews and assume the worthwhileness of Jewish peoplehood in the present, when they are organizing for that transformation?

We say yes. We say it for three reasons: one intrinsic to Jewishness, two intrinsic to radicalism.

First: there are some Jews (not all) who not only strongly feel Jewish but strongly want and intend to remain Jewish for Jewish "religious," "cultural," or "political" reasons—that is, for reasons intrinsic to the Jewish "path." This is self-justifying, so far as Jews are concerned; it should carry justification with it so far as radicals are concerned, for a second reason:

Second: so long as any people, any national grouping, desires to be autonomous, radicals outside that grouping should respect and support that desire so long as it does not involve the oppression of another people. That is what socialist self-determination means. Some radicals may carelessly call such a

desire "racist," and others may put it down as "cultural nationalist." But it is not cultural nationalism if the national liberation is linked to the achievement of world liberation, the abolition of empires, and the achievement of democracy. And it is not racist, if it (1) is based not on hereditary inclusion or exclusion from the people, but on choice! and, much more important, (2) is *not* based on superior power or wealth—that is, on domination. Black, Jewish, Chicano, Italian, and Appalachian communities could live side by side in a non-racist way if none of them controlled another, or had wealth or income superior to another. That is obviously not the present situation in America; but radicals or revolutionaries should be organizing to make it achievable.

Third: we believe (out of both Jewish and general history) that in fact a multi-communitarian society based on real participatory democracy in decentralized institutions is in fact far more likely to involve and reflect real socialism than a unitary society and state embracing more than 200 million people like the present American state. We believe that any aggregation of that many people living under a single all-embracing government (either administrative-political like the one in Washington, or business-bureaucratic like the one in New York) cannot help but become a monster to itself and all other peoples. We believe that a "revolutionary" replica of this monster would still be a monster. We therefore believe that neighborhood, regional, ethnic, and workplace autonomy and participatory democracy are crucial to creating a real people's socialism. We therefore believe that the creation and preservation of autonomous black, Jewish, Chicano, Italian, and Appalachian communities in North America is not a tolerable temporary expedient but an intrinsically desirable process.

II—The Specific Oppressions of the Jewish People

In taking up the ways in which the American empire has oppressed the Jewish people, we must address two political

issues: First, has the Jewish people been uniquely oppressed, or are some of the oppressions we shall describe identical with those of other peoples? Secondly, has the Jewish people been oppressed from outside by the American empire, or has the Jewish people distorted and oppressed itself?

There is a link between the two issues which arises from the fact that clearly a special kind of oppression has been visited by America upon blacks, Chicanos, and Indians. These peoples were militarily conquered by the empire using naked force, have since been kept under military occupation and/or genocidal conditions—and have carried on guerrilla action against that occupation. Clearly the Jewish people *in America* has not been similarly treated. (It is, however, true that the Roosevelt government acquiesced in the Holocaust, and on many occasions refused aid to the Jewish people as a transnational entity—aid that might have prevented the Holocaust or greatly reduced its genocidal effect.) To the extent that the American empire did not use naked physical force to break and control the Jewish people, is the status of Jews a result of “oppression” that came less from outside, more from within—that came more from self-distortion?

There can be no doubt that in many of the areas we shall mention, the American Jewish Establishment has collaborated with the American empire to control, cajole, and oppress the Jewish people. The interests of the Jewish Establishment have sometimes coincided with the interests of the empire, and so bargains have been struck. The ultimate legal and economic sanctions to enforce these bargains have, however, come from the empire. We predict that an insurgent, autonomous Jewish people would have to face direct governmental and economic pressures from the empire, as well as attempts at repression from the Jewish Establishment. We have already met the latter; we expect to meet the former as the strength of radical Judaism grows. Radical Jews have an obligation to organize *both* for internal democracy within the Jewish people now exercised by a small group of wealthy and powerful Jews; *and* for full democracy in America, and thus the end of the

power now exerted by the American ruling class over the Jewish people, over all the peoples and classes that live in America, and over most of the peoples of the world.

Secondly, the question can be raised: Although the oppression of the Jewish people in America is clearly not similar to that of blacks, Chicanos, and Indians, is it similar to that of what might be called the “middle nationalities” in America? If we glance at peoples like Poles, Greeks, Italians, who were on the one hand never militarily smashed and subjugated by the American empire, is it correct to say that on the other hand they were forced into the empire’s industrial-capitalist machine and made to abandon their own national identity and self-government? The answer to these questions is that we do not know, and as radical Jews would not presume to say. It may well be so; radical movements from among these peoples will have to analyze and describe their own situations. For what it is worth, we would only say that our hunch—our hypothesis—is that *all* the peoples who work and live in America, even including white Anglo-Saxon Protestants who now live in Appalachia, have been broken to the imperial machine—but in different ways from each other. If that is true, the best we can do is describe our own situation and suggest that other peoples describe theirs.

The most important oppression imposed on the Jewish people by the American empire directly has been the pressure by the empire to split the seamless wholeness of Jewish life—thought-action into fragments.

America has defined Jewishness as “religious,” or sometimes as “ethnic”—ruling out the self-governing policy and economy of the traditional Jewish communities. *For self-governing Jewish communities would have been indigestible blocks to the political, ideological, and economic hegemony of the empire at home.* Having defined Judaism as a “religion” which could be isolated from claims to state power or economic self-direction, the empire then acted to subvert any serious, profound spiritual element in even that truncated “religion”: it has tried to capitalize the communal, monetize

the mysterious, wipe out the sense of wonder. This the empire has done in pursuit of ultra-“rationalized” bureaucratic capitalism, in the attempt to incorporate within “everyday” dimensionality every conceivably threatening intrusion of deep, indigestible, human feeling and spiritual concern. When socialist ideology arose within the Jewish people, the empire encouraged that form of socialism which could be directed away from itself—Zionist socialism—and discouraged that form which was aimed against the empire directly—Bundism.

In addition, certain specific aspects of Jewish peoplehood have been denied, dissolved, or smashed by the empire. The language with which the Jewish people entered America—Yiddish—was practically wiped out by American cultural and economic pressures (who could get jobs; who could have inputs to the mass media, etc.); Hebrew has had similar difficulties, though it is slowly spreading. The celebration of the Sabbath in any profound way as a day of tranquility, contemplation, study, and joy was made extremely difficult—and the price in economic and political terms made high for those who insisted on pursuing the Sabbath. The other Holy Days were stripped of their moral and political meaning and some—such as Chanukah, which began as a radical celebration of a national liberation struggle—were commercialized.

Similarly, the key roles of Jewish life were de-Judaized: the rabbi (a people’s teacher and life-long student) was turned into an institutional clergyman; the *schliach tzibur*, “messenger of the people,” in the synagogue was turned into a professional “cantor”; the *shochet*, who by slaughtering animals for meat according to a holy process became the joiner of spirit to body, was turned into a butcher. A calendar built around the fusion of humanity into the world of nature was reduced to insignificance in order to fit the business needs of industrial capitalism. The process of *Torah lishma*, studying Torah for its own sake, and even the secularization of this impulse in the study of art and science for their own sakes, was broken by the capitalist ethic, seeking technological advance or social pacification.

In regard to the Jewish family, American society acted in much the same way: it fastened onto the damaging male-female division of roles that we have mentioned above, and worsened it by meshing it with American competitive individualism. Thus the male study of Torah was translated into “making it,” the female conflict-resolution role cheapened into manipulation of the family. Thus was created the desanctified family-competition scene typified by the Super *Bar Mitzvah*.

Through both these general and specific mechanisms, the sense of the Jewish people of what is meritorious and who deserves to lead was totally transformed by the empire. The dollar replaced the Book; the manipulator of propaganda media replaced the painstaking seeker after painful truth. “Jewish leaders” were found, named, and given power by the empire—not the Jewish people. And of course they serve the empire, not the Jewish people. Thus Jewish merchants break Jewish law to sell food grown by exploited labor; Jewish scientists break Jewish law to invent new weapons of mass murder and ecocide.

Finally, the warmth and skeptical lovingness which Jewish communities in different places have traditionally felt toward each other has been badly damaged and corrupted by the American empire. The pity and love which most American Jews feel toward Russian Jews who are being stripped by the Soviet government of the cultural identity and history as well as of all political freedom and popular power has been twisted by the American empire into support for that empire’s own cold war against the Soviets—a cold war fought not for Jewish or other liberties but solely for American power. The love and concern which most American Jews feel toward the Israeli people has been twisted by the empire into hysterical militarism supporting any alliance on any terms between the American empire and the Israeli government.

This last requires some elaboration. Among a free Jewish people in America, there would almost certainly have developed a wide range of feelings toward the Jewish people in Israel. Some American Jews would have wanted to migrate

to Israel, in accord with a belief in "return" to the land of *Tanach*. Some would have wanted to assist the emergence of a healthy, free, democratic, and peaceful Israel, and would at the same time have felt both free and obligated to criticize vigorously the policies or structures of Israel whenever they failed to be free, democratic, or peaceful. Some would have criticized the very existence of the Israeli state, either on orthodox religious grounds or out of a modern commitment to the Diaspora or out of a sensitivity to the Palestinian claims to the same soil or out of a belief that (as the Prophet Samuel said) the Jewish people ought not to have a state "like other nations." *It is a major oppression of the Jewish people in America that this broad range of feelings has been narrowed down almost to one or two that are allowed to be felt by large numbers of Jews.*

There are many ways in which this has been accomplished. In most of them, the Jewish Establishment has acted in concert with the American empire to assert that the only "possible" choices are (a) migration to Israel; (b) total support for Israeli government policy; or (c) dropping out of the Jewish community. But it is also sadly true that some American radicals have responded to this repression by the Jewish Establishment by accepting these false "realities," these restricted choices permitted by the Establishment, acting as if indeed these were the only choices. They have thus been so insensitive to the legitimate range of feelings among the Jewish people as to constrict the choices available to Jewish radicals who wish to view Jewish liberation as a part of world liberation, and to many Jewish radicals this has felt like a real oppression.

Let us take up first the ways in which the Jewish Establishment, in concert with the American empire, has tried to restrict the freedom of the Jewish people on this issue. The empire itself has done its best to define the situation as one in which the cold war against communism is equated with protection of Israel against hostility from some Arab states and peoples, and especially from the most radical ones; in which military support

for Israel is the only reasonable way of protecting or improving Israeli society and is also the only legitimate "American" position; and in which that form of support is conditioned (as in blackmail) on support of other imperial objectives.

The Jewish Establishment has been ready—even anxious—to join in this game. It has been "more royal than the king," more militarist than the Israeli generals in divining the goals and nature of Israel. It has scorned the Israeli left, greeted with great pleasure the constantly strengthening alliance between the Israeli government and the American empire, supported the most capitalist elements in Israel. In twenty-five years time it has transformed American Zionism from a movement led by labor unionists and kibbutz-oriented socialists to one dominated by wealthy businessmen. All this was to be expected from a Jewish Establishment that was itself capitalist and that had during the last fifty years tied itself more and more closely to the American empire; in accord with this policy, the Jewish Establishment has put great pressure on Jewish groups and organizations not to take anti-imperial stands on issues of great importance in America—for example, not to oppose the Vietnam War—lest such stands endanger the empire's commitments to the Israeli government. And the Establishment has argued that any criticism whatever of Israeli policy or social structure would weaken political support in America for the empire's alliance with the Israeli government, and would therefore endanger Israel.

Any attempt by the Israeli left or American Jewish left to open up a whole new outlook—to point toward an anti-imperialist Israel at home in the Third World, protected by peace with anti-imperialist neighbors rather than by constantly escalating war against both imperialist client-states and anti-imperialists among her neighbors—any such attempt has been rigorously smashed by the American Jewish Establishment. Thus the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith pressed all Jewish organizations to avoid sponsoring, assisting, or even debating an independent-left, pro-Third-World member of the Israeli

Knesset who toured America. Thus the Bundist movement—a Jewish socialist, anti-Zionist movement that had great strength in the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe and America before 1940—has been systematically opposed, excluded, and where possible, smashed.

In short, the feelings of solidarity and love—together with constant skeptical reexamination—which we believe would have been widely felt, and legitimately so, within American Jewry toward the Jewish community in Israel, have been warped into blind hysterical support for not only the Israeli state that has been created but for the particular policies of a particular government of that state. The responsibility for this distortion must lie upon the American empire, the American Jewish Establishment, and the Israeli government. Its victim has been the Jewish people in America.

In response to these pressures, however, some radical groups have asserted that the *only* legitimate position for Jewish radicals is total opposition to the existence of an Israeli state. We accept that this is one legitimate position for a committed Jew to take—and some Jews who were fully committed to the Jewish people have, for a number of reasons, taken that position for centuries past.* But we do not believe that it is the *only* legitimate position for radical Jews who are committed to the liberation of the world and the Jewish people. Attempts to insist on it as the only legitimate position stem, we fear, from one of two mistakes in radical or revolutionary feeling or analysis:

Either, in regard to the situation in America, from lack

* Some believed that only in the Days of the Messiah can a true Zion living according to Jewish law be rebuilt and that anything less is a travesty, not a fulfillment, of *Tanach*; some, that the Return to Zion will be spiritual, not geographic; some, that a Jewish community should exist in the land of Israel, but by no means a Jewish state; some, that the Diaspora—their dispersion from their concentration in Zion; some that Palestine belonged to the Palestinian people—was politically and spiritually a higher good than territorial nationalism was obsolete.

of understanding of or hostility to the very notion of a Jewish people in America which would have some special concerns for the Jewish people elsewhere;

Or, in regard to the situation in the Middle East, from an understandable but shortsighted rejection of the deep dilemmas created there by the real emergence, during the past generation, of an Israeli people which is entitled to self-determination and which must at the same time deal justly with a Palestinian people that is also entitled to self-determination.

Our analysis leads us to the following suggestions insofar as radicals outside the Jewish people are concerned:

The word "Zionist" should not be used as equivalent to "oppressor who is a Jew." There are two reasons for this. First, it is quite possible to be a Jewish oppressor without being what most Jews understand to be a Zionist: that is, to be a Jewish oppressor while being uninterested in or even opposing Israel. (Judge Julius Hoffman is just such a person.) Secondly, it is possible to be what in most Jewish contexts is called a "Zionist" without being an exploiter. For example, an American Jewish revolutionary or radical who would like to live in Israel, to organize against the present Israeli social nature, and to press for self-determination for the Palestinian people would be called a Zionist by most Jews. For these reasons we urge that radicals from outside the Jewish people not use terms identifying as "Jewish" or "Zionist" oppressors who happen to be Jewish, any more than radicals outside the black people ought to use terms like "house niggers" to describe oppressors who happen to be black. Such analyses, slogans, and attacks are important for the Jewish radical movement to work out for itself. Of course, radicals and revolutionaries generally must work out who is an oppressor, and say so. But ethnic labels should be left to the radicals of that ethnic group.

We will take up below in more detail what we would regard as a legitimate range of behavior on the issue of Israel within a

liberated Jewish people who were committed to the liberation of all other peoples as well. Suffice it to say now that the alternatives now “permitted” among Jews must be enormously expanded in some directions.

III—The Oppressions Jews and Others Share

Of course there are many aspects of their lives in which American Jews are oppressed not because they are Jews, nor in their Jewish peoplehood—but as workers and consumers and residents in the same ways that their non-Jewish co-workers and coconsumers and neighbors are oppressed. It is important for a radical Jewish movement to be clear about this, and to raise these issues at the same time it is raising issues of particularly Jewish oppression. To do otherwise would be to retreat into the worst forms of a more cultural pluralism—which would not in fact liberate the Jewish people. (What good would Shabbat be if for six days of work our lives were utterly alienated and exploited? Indeed, would Shabbat be Shabbat?)

On the other hand, to abandon the particularly Jewish issues would ignore the nature of the American empire, would sell out our own belief that liberation must happen in and through real communities—not merely some abstract “human” identity—and would crush our own deep knowledge that one of those communities is Jewish.

The crucial fact about America that we must keep in mind is this: *The empire has acted so as partly to homogenize and integrate all communities into an atomistic, easily-governed mass; and partly so as to preserve just enough differences and separations between various communities as to make it difficult for everyone to move together.* Thus, for example, the empire has not, on the one hand, forced all women into the modern industrialized work force on a totally “equal” basis; but it has also not kept all women as separated slaves at home.

Similarly with blacks and Chicanos: they are not *purely* internal colonies, and not *simply* members of the same exploited working class as other workers.

In order to organize effectively and liberate all Americans, we must grasp this doubleness and organize through it, not reject it or pretend it isn't there.

What then are the “non-specific” oppressions it is important for a Jewish radical movement to address—the oppressions that large numbers of the Jewish people suffer as workers, consumers, residents? First, a swift examination of the class distribution of American Jews reveals that they are chiefly in two classes: the old middle class of small businessmen or self-employed professionals (grocers, physicians, etc.) or the new working class of hired professionals (teachers, civil servants, social workers). There has been a great shift in the last fifteen years in the direction of the new working class.

In the small-business role and in some of the hired-professional roles, Jews (as well as other “middle nationalities” like Italians, and often together with the black bourgeoisie) have been used by the empire as the ill-paid-front-line exploiters or controllers of the poor. Thus Jewish grocers and Jewish teachers have been both pressed by the ruling class—as grocers and teachers, not as Jews—to exploit and control black communities. For example, banks, wholesalers, and great real-estate owners have through high interest rates, high wholesale prices, and high rents pushed small grocers into charging high prices for marginal goods. Basically the same mechanism is used by the empire when it assigns Jewish teachers to be front-line controllers of black children, and tries to break any effort by Jewish teachers to mutiny against this role. The result has been deep antagonism between the blacks and the Jews who were forced by the ruling class into this deadly embrace—and sometimes the emergence of anti-Semitism on the one side and anti-black racism on the other.

Radicals must of course reject both these responses and work toward an understanding in both groups of how both are being trapped (in different ways and with different levels of

suffering) by the American ruling class. Obviously, a Jewish radical movement should be organizing Jewish businessmen and teachers to turn against the empire; Jewish grocers to join with other grocers in like situations to resist the banks and serve the people; Jewish teachers to join with other teachers in like situations to resist the public-school administrations and serve the students.

There are ways in which the whole Jewish community as part of the whole American community suffers from forms of exploitation and oppression that are imposed upon the whole society by the corporate empire:

The destruction of the environment: All of us are subjected to poisonous air and water and to the danger of a total collapse of a life-supporting environment of plants, animals, and planet Earth. The danger is universal and the oppression increasingly imposed on all (though the in-workplace pollution of mines and factories is still worse than general environmental pollution). Most of this environmental degradation is done for corporate profit; a great deal is linked to the high-energy, low-labor technology of the war machine. Many elements of the Jewish tradition support far more life-affirming, life-protecting politics; it would be urgent for a radical Jewish movement to draw on and expand on these elements of the tradition and to ally itself closely with all other movements prepared to resist the corporate-military rape of earth. It should be made clear to Jews that individual responsibility in this matter requires political responsibility; not just that each family decide to use lead-free gasoline, but that the whole structure of the oil-auto-highway complex be remade, and transportation put under the direct control of its users and workers so that transportation can serve life, not destroy it.

Militarism, imperialism, and the danger of thermonuclear holocaust: Again, all are endangered. The fact that the Jewish people would not be singled out for destruction by a nuclear war should not blind us to the fact that general thermonuclear war would almost certainly destroy the Jewish people while decimating humanity. On behalf of ourselves and the whole

human race, we have an obligation as a Jewish movement, not simply as people who happen to be Jews, to end the militarism that is clearly moving toward that result. In the "meantime," while preparing for the Holocaust, modern American militarism saps the freedoms essential to the Jewish people and all other peoples living in America. It provides the physical and political technology and the political back-up for the internal militarism we call repression or a police state. It also provides the technology and back-up for imperialism in the Third World. To all these dangers Jews are especially sensitive; we should organize against the root institutions that feed these dangers.

The destructiveness of the "educational" system: Because of the Jewish past, disproportionate numbers of American teachers and students are Jewish. Jews thus suffer disproportionately from the new forms of oppression placed by the American educational system upon all its students and teachers. The schools and colleges do not teach, they train. They do not liberate, they dull the mind. They create not citizens but job holders; they encourage not spontaneity but regularity. Teachers and students are taught to police each other. Radical Jews should be drawing anew upon both the Jewish tradition and the radical vision to break the bonds of present schooling and recreate a free interplay of knowledge and moral reason—as exemplified in the Talmud, itself a kind of seminar notes from a free university.

The collapse of public services: All Americans, though not to an equal degree, now suffer from the generation-long failure to invest in such crucial needs and services as health facilities, sewage systems, schools, transport, housing, etc. We should be pressing not only for reallocation of resources to these areas, but for a tax system that requires the rich to pay for them, relieving the poor and the semi-poor working- and middle-class from the burdens of much of the present regressive tax system. In addition, we should be trying to achieve direct democratic control over these services, to be exercised jointly

by those who work in them and those intended to be served by them rather than by a corporate or political or administrative elite. Thus we should be creating worker-and-community-controlled co-op groceries, not assisting capitalist merchants; starting teacher-and-student-controlled schools, not helping the downtown educational administrators. *The Jewish hospital system should be one major focus of our energies in this area.* In all this the Jewish tradition is clear. We should be organizing in and through it, and developing its obvious public-oriented thrust in new emphatic ways.

The exploitation of consumers: The distinction between recipients of "public" services ("clients") and recipients of "private" services ("consumers") must be reexamined by a radical Jewish movement. Why is food not a public service? Should, for example, whole milk and vitamin-enriched soy bread be absolutely free to all Americans? But wherever, and for however long some form of "private" provision of food, furniture, clothing, etc., is considered desirable, every effort should be made to establish direct public controls to end and prevent the present corporate exploitation of consumers. Direct controls should include local neighborhood, workplace, and ethnic-group control, not the present process of Federal commission review, which constantly falls under the control of the corporations being "regulated."

No seriously radical Jewish movement can ignore these areas in which Jews are oppressed, along with other people, while focusing solely on arenas in which Jews are oppressed as Jews or in special "Jewish" ways. To do so would not only leave Jews unliberated in crucial aspects of their lives, but would also mean adopting for our movement a new version of the slogan "Jews at home, citizens outside." We utterly reject any such idea, believing as we do that Jewishness is adequately expressed only through wholeness, and therefore that our movement—as well as fully liberated individual Jews—must be Jewish both "at home" and "outside"; both on "Jewish" and on "general" problems.

IV—*The Vision and the Way*

The Jewish experience is replete with injunctions, commandments, and urgings, all directed at the ideal of universal brotherhood built on the concept of absolute equality. However, more than mere expressions of brotherhood are the commandments to seek justice and provide charity to all those in need. More than statements of social justice, these ideals were meant to reflect a desirable condition of human interaction.

The modern kibbutz movement of Israel, for example, was built on such principles, and we of the radical Jewish movement of America reject the notion that only in a Jewish state can such ideals be attained by the Jewish people. At least a portion of us will continue to give priority to building socialist communes, both rural and urban, *here*. That is not to advocate, however, a dropping out from the struggle. On the contrary, any communitarian movement which is to present a serious alternative to the individualistic life style upon which capitalism feeds will of necessity, we believe, become political. For if the prophetic vision of a time when men and women "shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks"—a time when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they study war anymore"—is ever to become a reality, it will necessitate the smashing of the power which stands in the way—the power of the American empire.

Our tradition tells us that the vision of the Messianic age is always before us, but the power to move toward it is within each human being. Long ago Judaism evolved a body of principles and rules called the *Halakhah* (the Way) whose purpose it was to help each human being to unite all aspects of his existence into an organic whole directed at the realization of the Vision. In addition to regulations concerning ritual, the *Halakhah* dealt with business relations, social obligations, the provision of charity, and the insuring of justice, as well as the celebration of the beautiful mysteries of life. To follow the

Halakhah, in principles as well as in letter, was to engage in the Messianic process. Today, the following of the traditional *Halakhah* is automatically to put oneself in opposition to the capitalist superstate; to oppose the exploitation of labor, the destruction of life, and the profit of the few at the expense of the many. As Jews we declare our intention to participate in the revolutionary process by synthesizing and following a new *Halakhah*.

Our new way will consist of the same elements as the old; i.e., the love of life, respect for all of Nature, the encouragement of individual development within a communal context, an active passion for social justice and human equality, a recognition of human potentiality. However, it will also be framed in the context of the realities of our day; i.e., an expanding technology, imperialism, racism, sexism, ecological disaster. We recognize the oppression caused by a system characterized by materialism and an overcentralized technology. We recognize our obligation to denounce evil everywhere it appears and work in a united community to hasten its disappearance. We dedicate ourselves to the creation of a decentralized socialist order, for that is the only way in which we can end our own oppression and that of all peoples. We will destroy the system that oppresses us by liberating its institutions.

The new Jewish community that we foresee will be one organized along many different lines. Some will form themselves into *havurot* (fellowships) of maybe 50-100 each; each *havurah* will be unique, but all will practice in some degree of communality as well as strong participation in the expanding Jewish culture. Others will form American-style *kibbutzim* where the collective will work as a unit and live as a unit. Others will form larger new communities (one of which might be the home of a new Jewish university) that will engage in a full range of activities and living experiments. Others will live within the larger community but still involve themselves in the cultural life through participation in the educational and celebrational activities. The entire community will, in keeping

346 JEWISH RADICALISM

with its mission, work closely with other individuals and cultural groupings to further the revolutionary process in America. The people will liberate the schools to serve their communities; they will force the hospitals, clinics, and other medical institutions to serve their needs, and they will build new institutions; and they will form collectives and cooperatives independent of, and in direct opposition to, the capitalist system.

We dedicate ourselves to the struggle for the achievement of our vision; a society where people will be able to develop their highest potential as unique human beings, with full awareness of the total commitment that struggle will entail.