

Borochovism

Moshe Zedek

When Nachman Syrkin offered his eulogy at the grave of Ber Borochov, he said, "Borochov has passed away, but the fruits of his labor for Socialist-Zionism will survive forever."

Little did Syrkin anticipate that not long after Borochov's death on December 17, 1917, at the age of 36, the contributions of the founder of Socialist-Zionism would become as marginal to the Zionist movement as the Jews were marginal to the socioeconomic structure of modern capitalist society.

The fate of Borochov and the Jewish proletariat were inextricably intertwined. Borochov's views, which helped to forge, nourish, and revolutionize the Zionist movement declined and almost disappeared in proportion as the Jewish working class diminished and Jewish Socialist-Zionist consciousness waned and became submerged in the class collaborationist view of establishment Zionism.

But today, Borochovism is emerging from the long historical winter of ideological hibernation and lives again in the thoughts and actions of growing numbers of young radical Jews for whom the ideas of Borochov serve as the basis of Zionism as

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the national and international liberation movement of the Jewish people. The revival of Borochovism is proportional as radical Jewish youths become increasingly aware of their Jewish identity and increasingly dedicated to the struggle for the termination of *galut* (exile) which Socialist-Zionism must bring about.

During the past two years, Jewish national liberation consciousness in the United States and abroad has deepened into a greater concern for Jewishness, *aliya*, and Israel. There are signs that this year will witness an even greater recognition of and rededication to the two basic principles of Borochovism: there can be no normal socioeconomic Jewish life in the *galut*, and the liberation of the Jewish people from the exploitation of the ruling class of each nation and the oppression of the Jewish establishment must be the tasks of the Jews themselves on a grass-roots level. Organizations in many countries in the West and even in Israel have been formed which adhere to Borochovism. What was, over the years since his death, carried on almost exclusively by groups such as Hashomer Hatzair, is now being put into practice by numerous organizations.

But Borochovism lives not only in the hearts and minds of growing numbers of radical Jewish youths. The theoretical and practical contributions of Borochov are being vindicated daily in the most diverse ways throughout the world. What is the substance of Borochov's views? What are their essential elements? Are they relevant to the Jewish condition in the U.S. and elsewhere?

Borochov was the first to apply the ideology of scientific socialism-Marxism to Zionism, and was the first Zionist to apply Marx's method of dialectical and historical materialism to the national problems of the Jewish people. In so doing, Borochov showed that the economic situation of the Jews was a recurring and insoluble condition under capitalism and that the Jewish people could not develop a normal nation and a normal socioeconomic structure of the *galut*. The struggle, therefore, has to occur in each country in a permanent fashion

until the Jews extricate themselves from the *galut* and build their own nation on their own territory. With that, a normal class struggle can develop which will lead to the establishment of socialism.

The essential elements of Borochovism can be summarized in eight points:

- The Jewish socioeconomic structure in the *galut* takes the form of an inverted pyramid: Whereas the base of the pyramid of other peoples is comprised of industrial workers, and its apex of capitalists and landowners, with the center comprised of small shopkeepers, intellectuals, technicians, white-collar workers, and professionals, the base of the Jewish pyramid is comprised of ruling-class elements; and the apex of industrial workers.

- This abnormal and peculiar structure is the consequence of an absence of territory upon which to build a normal nation and which, therefore, forces Jews to adapt themselves to the economic mode of production and ruling-class life style and isolates them for the basic process of productive activity. Under these conditions the Jewish people cannot develop a viable working class and must exist in the crevices of the economy. They become, therefore, a marginal people.

- The main enemy of the Jewish people is the ruling class of the nation which exploits and oppresses them just as it does the working class as a whole and all other national minorities. In addition, however, there is another enemy: the Jewish Establishment within the Jewish community. This Jewish Establishment acts as a transmission belt for the ideas, values, and mores of the nation's ruling class into the Jewish community. The Jewish people, therefore, must conduct a simultaneous class struggle against both ruling elements.

- Unlike other minority groups which are national minorities—the blacks in the U.S., the French in Quebec, the Catholics in Northern Ireland, the Basques in Spain—the dispersal of the Jews throughout the world makes them an international minority—the victims of ruling classes and elites in all nations.

This, consequently, provides the Jews with an internationalist outlook.

- The most that Jews can obtain in the *galut* is national autonomy, but this, in Borochov's words, "is not a radical solution of the Jewish problem and, therefore, cannot remove the anomalies of the Jewish strategic economic base. However, it provides the Jewish proletariat with the necessary political forms" to conduct a struggle for immediate rights.

- There is no contradiction between genuine national consciousness and class struggle. In fact, the nation provides the base for developing the conditions of production and, hence, class consciousness. A movement or person with genuine national consciousness, while recognizing the existence of a common national character created in the environment of common conditions of production, realizes that "within every nationality the separate characteristics of each class appear more acutely and can be more readily discerned."

- There is no dichotomy between work in the *galut* and work for a Jewish homeland. "Poale Zionism (literally, proletarian Zionism or Socialist-Zionism) has to integrate the *galut* and Zion," Borochov wrote. This requires a development from trade-union consciousness to class consciousness to socialist consciousness to Socialist-Zionist consciousness.

- The condition of marginality—the phenomenal form of what is generally referred to as the "Jewish condition"—can only be solved in the Jewish homeland where a "normal pyramid" and a "normal" class struggle can be developed. There is, therefore, a permanent revolution in the development and fusion of the struggle against marginality and the establishment of a homeland.

These elements, which constitute the essential contributions of Borochov, were distilled by him in "Our Platform," written in 1906. In it, he wrote: "Our [Socialist-Zionist] ultimate aim, our maximum program, is socialism—the socialization of the means of production. The only way to achieve socialism is through the class struggle of the Jews within the world-wide so-

cial democracy . . . Our immediate, our minimum program, is Zionism. The necessity for a territory in the case of the Jew results from the unsatisfactory economic base of the Jewish proletariat."

The validity of Borochovism is borne out currently by world events: the growing anti-Semitic policies of the Soviet Union's ruling elite, reflected in the population, is intensified by the fact that Jews are dispersed and lack an autonomous, self-determined territory (Biro-Bidjan was not self-determined but created), and by the fact that relatively few Jews are members of the industrial working class.

In countries such as Chile and Cuba, and in other nations advancing toward socialized economies, Jews are obsolete to the process of production because their former economic status and activities have no place in the new social structures.

Ironically, even Israel vindicates Borochovism, but in ways unforeseen by him. The entity which is Israel—its modern economy, Jewish culture, and institutions, its highly politicalized development with multiple parties, and its class struggle—is marginal to the region as a whole compared to the socio-economic backwardness of the Arab world. It is Israel's development—its unilateral marginality—that makes it vulnerable and an object of scorn and hatred. In fact, Israel, which personifies the Jewish people, emphasizes the historical fact that marginality is the basic functional element that generates scorn and hatred of the Jewish people everywhere and makes them the object of vilification and attack by other oppressed peoples.

How does the form and content of the Jewish condition manifest itself in the United States—the citadel of world imperialism? What is the perspective for Jews in this country?

The Jews in the U.S. are oppressed on three levels: they are economically marginal, politically disunited, and dependent on the ruling class' political structure and parties, and psychologically schizophrenic in that they lack identity.

The Jews in this country comprise three percent of the population, compared to the Catholics and Protestants who comprise 25 percent and 67 percent of the population respec-

tively. Yet, 67 percent of America's Jews are professionals, white-collar workers, and businessmen, while only 36 percent of the Catholics and 31 percent of the Protestants are in those economic categories. At the same time, 68 percent of the Catholics and Protestants combined are manual workers, while only 14 percent of the Jews are in the industrial labor force.

The income of the Jews is also out of proportion. Sixty-six percent of the Jewish population has an annual income of \$7,000 and more, while 47 percent of the Catholics and 88 percent of the Protestants earn \$7,000 and more. At the other end of the income spectrum, only 15 percent of all Jews earn \$5,000 a year or less, while 28 percent of the Catholics and 39 percent of the Protestants earn less than \$5,000 annually.

From an economic point of view, the workers generally and the majority of Jews in particular are faced with the beginning of generalized unemployment affecting both the industrial and white-collar workers. Prosperity, based on a continuing war economy, is coming to an end. The vast majority of American Jews, white-collar workers, technicians and professionals, like their non-Jewish counterparts, rode on the crest of an economic wave between the Korean War and now. But a new era is emerging that will be marked by social unrest in which competition for jobs that are vanishing daily with increased automation and cutbacks in military expenditures will make the Jews the prime target of popular resentment.

The fact is that the growing national rate of unemployment, currently six percent or close to five million jobless (it is close to 75 percent jobless in the ghettos) despite the war economy, is hitting those technical and professional job sectors in which there is a greater proportion of Jews to non-Jews. But because of their marginality, which will increase even further when their skills are no longer required in the emerging era, the Jewish scientists, technicians, and professionals could all disappear tomorrow and it would not essentially change the system of production. This was evidenced tragically in Nazi Germany when Jewish scientists, technicians, and profes-

sionals were first ousted from the economic sphere and then thrown in concentration camps and murdered or forced to emigrate; the economy continued to function without their skills.

By contrast, the blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Chicanos who are oppressed, exploited, and discriminated against today are vital to the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism needs their labor force—unskilled or skilled—to keep the economic gears meshing on the level of primary production. These minority groups can be either engaged as required as producers or as a reserve labor force. The Jews offer no such economic advantage to the capitalist class. In short, the Jews in their marginality are necessary to no one.

However, the nature of the Jews' marginality is such that those Jews who are being and will be fired from white-collar jobs will not be conspicuous to the majority of the unemployed. Jews (and others) in such jobs are eased out individually or in small groups, not, as in the case of industrial workers, in huge percentages and, sometimes, by whole factories. Since such Jews generally have some savings to fall back on, they will not be conspicuous on the unemployment lines or the welfare rolls, at least not for a certain length of time.

However, those Jews who are in favored economic positions are, by the very nature of these positions, conspicuous in contrast to exploited or unemployed workers. Such Jews create the impression that their economic situation is true for all Jews. This situation will provide the ruling class with the opportunity to make use of the Jews as a handy scapegoat to divert the attention of the jobless and oppressed groups away from the social system responsible for their plight. The identification of the Jewish Establishment with the ruling class and the opposition of both to revolutionary social change will stigmatize all Jews as oppressors.

Hostility will be directed by workers against Jews seen rising to the top of the economic ladder while they remain on the

bottom, and from the professionals and corporate elite which view all Jewish advances in these areas as threats to their own economic security.

Because a large segment of the Jews are involved in reshaping the techniques of production which makes it possible to increase productivity with less workers, the ruling class will hold Jews responsible for intensifying the contradictions of capitalism and the workers will hold the Jews responsible for their joblessness. While revolutions in the techniques of production (automation) are welcomed by the capitalist class in their quest for greater profits and required in the struggle for world markets, and while workers generally can be absorbed in other industries during periods of relative prosperity, the emerging era of depression will be ruinous to both workers and a portion of the capitalist class.

In this situation, the Jews in the U.S. will be subjected to pressures from three directions: from below—the working class; from above—the capitalist class; and from within—the Jewish middle class itself.

Borochoff, in an article published in 1911 entitled "The Anti-Zionist Concentration," observed that one of the contradictions in Jewish *galut* life is "the extraordinary strength of the individual and the unparalleled weakness of the group." This situation, he continued, "gives rise to the conflicting, antithetical 'material' interests within Jewish life."

This is reflected in the very nature of the inverted pyramid Borochoff described. This pyramid has four tiers:

1. The capitalists—the owners of large factories, realty, investment brokers, stock exchange and banking magnates, and oil men—whom Borochoff described as "aristocrats (who) . . . turn philanthropists," find their best interests served by assimilation. Were it not for the poor Jews (here and abroad), this Jewish capitalist class "would not be disturbed by the Jewish problem." The Jewish capitalist, Borochoff wrote further in "Our Platform," "is engaged in the search for a Jewish solution and a means of being delivered

from the Jewish masses." He would like nothing better than "to lose (his) individuality and be assimilated completely by the native bourgeoisie."

2. The Jewish middle class—small shopkeepers, professionals, technicians, scientists, intellectuals, doctors, lawyers—is bound more closely to the Jewish masses because its economic interests "depend on the market which the mass of people affords" since a major portion of its capital is invested in consumer goods and services. As long as this middle class retains its economic position it is "relatively unconcerned with the Jewish problem." This primarily white-collar class faces competition for jobs with the non-Jewish segment of the labor force which compels them to face the Jewish problem. "Jewish misery is closer to them than to the upper bourgeoisie" and they are, therefore, "the chief supporters of all types of 'cultural nationalism.'"

3. The Jewish working class—a steadily diminishing number in the needle trades, fur, millinery, jewelry, and some manual workers, sales clerks, social workers, teachers, journalists, and government employees. Many are not the classical industrial proletariat but are part of the "new working class." The condition of these workers in the marginal industries makes them least susceptible to assimilation although the upper-income strata of workers seek a *shidach* with their non-Jewish neighbors. The older generation retains a semblance of a vague and faltering Jewish socialism or Bundism while many in the younger generation (including those still in high school and college) develop varying degrees of Zionist consciousness. In this tier of the pyramid are also the declassed, aged, and impoverished who reside primarily in the urban centers that long ago lost their Eastern European *shtetl* character.

4. The Jewish "community leaders"—the officials of the communal organizations "elected" by their own closed organizations but which lack a mass base and constituency in the Jewish grass-roots communities—are a unique segment not found in this form within any other ethnic group. These

"leaders," who function without any democratic participation of the Jewish masses, are recruited from the upper and middle Jewish bourgeoisie and control and expend vast incomes and employ thousands of "staff personnel" for domestic and overseas philanthropic activities.

Borochov reserved the greatest scorn for the establishment Jews. In the 1911 article he excoriated "these new rulers" whose activities had one aim—"to obtain the recognition of the neighboring peoples, and to achieve personal integration in the *galut* through the medium of the Jewish people."

He scorned them because the services the establishment Jewish leaders and organizations rendered "satisfied only the most temporary needs. . . . Since these activities brought some amelioration, the *galutistic* intelligentsia boasted to the outside world of the partial confidence in them displayed by the Jewish people. . . . Their chief concern was to be the 'only representative' of Jewry to the mighty, enticing, outside world. Therefore they maintained that 'within the Jewish people, under our care, peace must reign.'" Borochov concluded that to unify the Jews to face new dangers and to retrieve all that has been usurped by these Jewish lackeys, this "anti-Zionist concentration," the Jewish people must establish "a national front against the anti-Zionist front."

This, then, is the nub of the Jewish situation in the U.S.: too liberal for the WASP community and too conservative for the oppressed minorities. The Jew is marginal even when deeply involved, an outsider even when thoroughly committed, a stranger even when he is in undisputed leadership.

The most important question still facing the Jewish people in the *galut* at this time is: How can we be ensured against the recurrence of the horrible persecutions and tragic events which so often befell us in various countries and epochs?

When other peoples suffer from oppression and persecution they all struggle for their own national causes; should they lose in the struggle their defeat is not permanent because they remain on their own soil and can always wait for the opportunity to rise again and regain their rights.

But the Jewish struggle in the *galut* is altogether different. In the August 6, 1915 issue of the *Yiddisher Congress*, Borochov wrote: "The *galut* condition of the Jewish nation is not only tragic, but also hopeless. Our *galut* tragedy is not temporary but permanent. We do not fight for a Jewish cause—we suffer for foreign interests." Cutting through the Gordian knot of "solutions" offered to Jews by various ideologists and ideologies which avoided dealing with the "Jewish condition," Borochov declared:

"We Socialist-Zionists are convinced that our freedom depends primarily upon the national self-help of the Jewish masses." The emancipation of the Jewish people, he asserted, "can be gained only by our own efforts . . . Organized national self-help [must be the national political slogan of the Jewish masses]. We must unite ourselves in the struggle for our own future."

Radical Political *Irbutz** in Israel

David Mandel

The concept of urban collectives has floated around Zionist circles for a long time, and history records a few failures. Discussion has resurfaced recently, with the development of an independent radical Zionist movement, whose members are dedicated to their own self-realization through communal life in Israel and to serious socioeconomic changes in the Israeli structure. Also, the Sha'al group in Israel has received wide publicity since its establishment three years ago as a "kibbutz" of professionals who chose an urban setting. In all due respect to the Sha'al group, which has seriously pioneered a life style that looks as though it may succeed, we should differentiate between them and what we shall call the "political *irbutz*." This concept has been proposed as not only a life style, though certainly the stability of such communes as permanent homes is crucial. The "political *irbutz*" is seen primarily as a means to effect political, economic, and social change in Israeli society.

* "*Irbutz*" is a contraction of the Hebrew words for city and kibbutz, connoting an urban collective settlement.

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