

Sh'ma

a journal of Jewish responsibility

1/7, FEBRUARY 5, 1971

Love ourselves and ignore our neighbors?

Seymour Siegel

The greatest of all Jewish thinkers, Maimonides, saw the ideal life as one of balance and moderation. However, Jews seem to move from one extreme to the other. No wonder we are called *ama peziza*, an impetuous people.

In the sixties Jewish leaders saw involvement in the problems of the general community as an integral part of their Jewishness. There were complaints then that rabbis and Jewish leaders were neglecting the interests of their immediate constituencies for outside concerns. Now there seems growing feeling among Jews that we turn inward and concern ourselves only with those problems that directly involve Jews. The unspoken corollary to that often is that we leave to others the duty of dealing with the issues that plague our society. Writing in *Conservative Judaism*, a well-known rabbi said: "Ours must be a Jew-centric idea, where Jewish needs and Jewish issues are our priorities." It now becomes difficult to get committed Jews interested in the civil rights movement, in the ecology movement, or in the quest for better schools. There is a feeling that whatever energies or resources we have should be directed to the United Jewish Appeal, the Russian Jewish tragedy or the interests of our Jewish organizations.

This turning inward is not unmotivated by genuine concern. The civil rights movement has, in many areas, been taken over by hysterical extremists; the ecology movement has all the elements of faddism;

and the peace movement is dominated frequently by negativists who want a Viet Cong victory. At the same time critical problems mount up in the Jewish community. Israel is menaced; Russian Jews are oppressed; and religious institutions in our community are threatened with financial disaster. Isn't it time—many ask—that we tend our own vineyard?

This attitude is understandable but it is not wise.

We Jews do not dwell in a vacuum. It is not possible to mark off issues as purely Jewish or non-Jewish ones. The situation in our schools or urban ghettos affects us as Jews and as citizens. We cannot, even in our own interest, allow serious problems to fester. Of course many a solution heretofore proposed has proven to be a failure. This should not prevent us from looking for new solutions which have better prospects for success. To turn away from these problems now is to imperil our future as citizens and dwellers in our cities.

More important, however, it is an imperative of Jewish faith that we are to hallow this world by promoting justice and compassion in it. God did not create only the Jewish people. He is the Lord of all creation and as His servants we are all responsible to one another. We cannot turn away from any of God's creatures. They share with us a common Fatherhood. They share with us, too, a common brotherhood.

There must be found some kind of balance where our Jewish needs will be met at the same time that we fulfill our responsibilities to mankind as a whole. We have fought too hard to be Jews among mankind to retreat now into the ghetto. It is both in our Jewish interest and our Jewish responsibility to affirm ourselves as part of the larger world.

It was not a friend of the Jews but an implacable enemy who said of us: There is a people that dwells apart, not reckoned among the nations. (Numbers 23:9)

Antisemitism: the betrayal of marx

Moshe Zedek

It is fashionable in certain quarters to insist that what is happening to the Jews in the Soviet Union is the end result of Marxism. According to this view, Soviet anti-Semitism, officially at least, is inspired by and an implementation of Marx's early writings

on the Jewish question. Michael Wyschogrod poses the issue this way: "Is the anti-Semitism of the Soviet Union an accidental aberration . . . or is it something deeply rooted in the very nature of Marxism?" Some 11 years ago, Dagobert D. Runes edited a book entitled "A World Without Jews" in which he sought to establish that "Marxism may have failed in many of its postulates and prognostications, but its anti-Semitism lives on unabated" in the "German as well as the Russian forms of Socialism." Runes in his book and Wyschogrod in his article utilized the same method of proof: present a few quotations from Marx out of context from his socio-eco-philo-historico-logical system then leap forward into history to Stalin's era; quote Marx to the effect that the "social emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of society from Judaism" but ignore the fact that the system required such Marxists as Frederick Engels, August Bebel, Franz Mehring, Leon Trotsky and Antonio Labriola, let alone Marx himself, to fight against anti-Semitism. I would rather say there is sufficient evidence that Marxism and anti-Semitism are antithetical.

The context of the writings against bauer

Marx's early writings on the Jewish question were written when he was 25 and still a Feuerbachian humanist. They were a polemic against the left-Hegelian Bruno Bauer. He never returned to this topic. Critics imply that the present Soviet rulers are the heirs, rather than the betrayers of Marxism. There is another unwarranted assumption in this approach, namely, that Marx's writings on the Jewish question are an intrinsic element in his total system.

The causal connection theory is utterly untenable. It fails to explain why the Soviet bureaucracy doesn't follow Marx in the more central matters. It has repressed workers democracy (Marx was for it); or why Stalin expelled seven national groups in the Crimea and the Ukraine after World War II (Marx never wrote about them); or why the state apparatus continues to grow instead of withering away (as Marx predicted). Strange that the Soviets should only follow Marx's early writings on the Jewish question. But it is not strange when we recall that there was widespread anti-Semitism in Russia before 1917. The assumption that Marx's writings on the Jewish question are an integral element in his total system is about as reliable as the assumption that Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* is

essential to his system of psychoanalytic therapy.

Does radical socialism need anti-semitism?

The test to determine the causal connection and intrinsic element theories is simple enough: would the dissolution of Soviet anti-Semitism change the communist social structure? Or, would the elimination of Marx's writings on the Jewish question alter his system? Does either the Soviet Union or Marxism stand or fall on Marx's polemic against Bruno Bauer?

A contemporary observation may help. Both Fidel Castro and Dr. Salvador Allende eschew anti-Semitism while adhering to Marxism. Both have publicly proclaimed that Israel has a right to exist. Allende openly assailed the trial of the Leningrad 11. Here the causal connection has been broken.

And it happened in the Jewish community as well. Early Socialist-Zionists like Nachman Syrkin and Dov Ber Borochov who were deeply committed to Marxism and who utilized his method of dialectical

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Sh'ma welcomes articles from diverse points of view. Hence articles present only the author's, not the editors', views.

We print typos that do not obscure the meaning.

Sh'ma is published bi-weekly, except June, July and August, by Sh'ma, Inc. Publication address, Room 1006, 1261 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10001. Editorial address, Box 959, Ansonia Station, New York, N.Y. 10023. Subscription \$10.00 for 2 years in U.S.A. and Canada, Institutional bulk (10 or more issues) \$2.50 each. Single issue 50¢, sixteen-page issues \$1.00. Application to mail at second class postage rates is pending at New York, N.Y. Copyright 1971 by Sh'ma, Inc.

1/7, February 5, 1971

materialism found Marx on Judaism so tangential to the system, neither referred to nor polemicized against his early writings. Instead, Syrkin and Ber Borochov utilized Marx's economic analysis of society to develop their own systems of Socialist-Zionism as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. They were not ignorant of Marx's alleged anti-Semitic writings. Seeing the total Marxian view, they realized that Marx was not anti-Semitic at all.

Understanding marx from within

What was Marx's view of the Jewish question? His basic comments are contained in "The Holy Family," a polemic against Bruno Bauer. Bauer had approached the problem of the role of the Jews in society from a religious point of view. Thus, the struggle by Jews for political equality could only succeed by overthrowing the concept of a Christian state. As a result, in contrast to their struggle for religious and political equality, Jews could only achieve a truly human existence by first becoming atheists.

Marx rejected Bauer's approach as dealing essentially with the religious, hence, "fantastic" existence of Jews. He sought to explain the Jewish problem not by the nature of the Jewish religion but the Jewish religion by the nature of the Jews' social existence. That in turn arose from the social framework in which Jews functioned. According to Marx's view at that time, Jews personified the early stages of capitalism: mercantile and loan capitalism. To that extent, therefore, capitalist society was itself Jewish or Judaized. It followed, then, that the emancipation of Jews from that specific social system and the emancipation of all those oppressed by that social system, indeed the transformation of society into one which was free from mercantile capitalism altogether required the elimination of the kind of capital Jews personified.

"Emancipation from buying and selling and from money, that is to say, from practical, real Judaism, would be the self-emancipation of our time," Marx wrote. "An organization of society which abolished the necessary conditions for buying and selling . . . would make the Jew impossible. His religious consciousness would evaporate in the clear and vital atmosphere of society. On the other hand, when the Jew recognizes this practical character of his as futile and works for its abolition, he is working from the basis of his own previous development for the

emancipation of humanity itself and turns against the highest practical expression of human self-alienation." (Emphasis mine. M.Z.)

The fundamental assertion

The key to understanding Marx's approach to the Jewish question then is his affirmation that in working for the abolition of capital the Jew is "working from the basis of his own previous development." Furthermore, Marx observed: "The Jews, like the Christians, are fully politically emancipated in various states. Both Jews and Christians are far from being humanly emancipated. Hence there must be a difference between political and human emancipation." Marx in writing that the secular basis of Judaism is self-need, that his worldly god is money and that his worldly cult is bargaining, was describing the Jew as an economic entity playing a very specific and definite role in capitalism at that time. This, according to Marx, was the real "everyday Jew" not the "Sabbath Jew."

Marx's description both of capital and the Jews, in this context, expresses the idea that the Jew like the Christian is enslaved by capital. The human emancipation of Jew and Christian was not in having the Jew relinquish his "previous development" but finding his human affirmation in a society free from "self-alienation." All Marx was saying was that the quest by Jews for political and human freedom was a social rather than a religious problem and that human freedom, that is, emancipation from the rule of capital, would require the elimination of an economy that dehumanized all its citizens. By



They call us convenience packaging.

freeing Jews from their role as a commercial trading people they would find fulfillment as human beings.

Not the group, but the status, is changed

One can agree or disagree with Marx's analysis of the Jews at that time and the requirements necessary for human emancipation. But one cannot deduce from this that Marx sought, called for, or encouraged the elimination of Jews as a people from society. To do so is to charge that Marx confused the Jewish essence with their existence at a certain stage in the evolution of society. Borochov, for example, in his analysis of the Jews in medieval society and early capitalism agreed implicitly with Marx's characterization of their socio-economic role. Even today Nathan Glazer, in his article, "The Crisis of American Jewry," which appeared in the November, 1970 issue of *Midstream*, wrote: "It (the American Jewish community) is a community largely of businessmen and free professionals. To such a community, capitalism is not an enemy—it is a free benign environment."

Marx was analyzing what he believed to be the status quo characteristics of Jews in a specific social setting. He did not call for the persecution, extermination or elimination of Jews qua Jews to assure the transition from capitalism to socialism. Nowhere in his writings—either on the Jewish question or later writings—did Marx sanction pogroms, cultural genocide or political repression of Jews. Marx was equally opposed to Christianity which he regarded as personifying the "individual in his uncultivated, unsocial aspect . . . the individual who is not yet a real generic being." Using Wyschogrod's or Rune's logic, Marx would also seem to be a "Christ-Killer."

Marxism is not soviet communism

It is evident, then that Soviet political anti-Semitism continues not as an expression of Marxism but in violation of his precepts. Soviet anti-Semitism continues in direct proportion to its betrayal of Marxism and to the extent that the ruling clique reflects bourgeois values. If the Soviet Union was truly a Socialist society Jews would be granted cultural freedom and the right to emigrate. To the extent that it is not a real socialist society not only are the Jews not humanly free but neither are any of the other nationalities. Basically, the Soviet Union's ruling strata represents the repetition of capitalist norms in a non-capitalist but not yet socialist society.

The problem Jews face in all nations where revolutions are occurring is their *elimination* or *increasing isolation* from the socio-economic realm. The perspective in Chile and Cuba is not anti-Semitism directed against the individual Jew as much as the dissolution of the Jewish community under the impact of non-capitalist economies. To the extent that Jews there either personify or represent the *ancient regime* of the feudal latifundia or native capitalism, the revolutionary forces view the situation as a war against Jews. Again, this is so not because socialists, or socialism, are inherently anti-Semitic but because the role of the Jews places them "between the peasants and the king."

The power structure that needs to be replaced in the former colonial countries appears as an abstraction to the revolutionary forces. The Jew—marginal to the economy under attack—is more concrete and immediate, more real and an every-day entity. It is the role of the Jews, not the socialist objective, that abolishes their economic roles and social status under socialism. The Jew, in the galut, is everywhere merely the personification of the immediate oppressive social conditions. The solution to the Jewish problem, in terms of human emancipation, is his own homeland. The dilemma of the Jew—his marginality—is also the source of its solution: the ingathering of the Jewish people. There is no evidence that Marx would have opposed this.

The roots of our racism reach deep

Arnold Jacob Wolf

An important book is one that turns a cliche into a problem. Such a book, stunning in its mastery of many areas of human learning and in its ethical perceptiveness, is Joel Kovel's *White Racism; A Psychohistory*. Dr. Kovel, director of the undergraduate program in psychiatry at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, has given us in his mid-thirties a wise and important study of America's most acute social ill, a book at once dense and graceful, learned and exploratory. Basing his approach on what in other hands could be merely stereotyped Freudianism, Kovel draws on history, philosophy and economics to limn his own personal and apocalyptic vision of our modern capitalist society. He has turned "white racism" from an almost meaningless phrase into a powerful indictment and warning. He uses the naked