

Borochovist "Revival"¹

by Moshé Machover

Borochovist ideology is at present being exhumed by the Zionist propaganda machine. A whole network of Zionist emissaries and functionaries are busy Printing Baire Borochov's works in several European languages, writing their own exegesis on these works and diligently spreading the rehashed gospel among young Jews throughout West Europe and the Americas.

At first sight, this is rather strange; for, after long stagnation, decline and decay, Borochovism years ago ceased to exist as a living political force in the Zionist movement. In Israel, the Borochovist party Po`aley Tsion Smol (Workers of Zion, Left wing) ended its existence in 1948, when it combined with two larger – and non-Borochovist – factions (Hashomer Hatsa`ir and Le`ahdut Ha`avodah) to form a united left-Zionist party, Mapam. For the Borochovists this meant complete capitulation in the field of theory, as well as total organizational liquidation. The programme adopted by the newly formed Mapam was not based on a compromise between Borochovism and other left-Zionist ideologies, but was simply non-Borochovist,²

Organizationally, Mapam was divided into factions. However, Po`aley Tsion Smol did not even constitute a distinct faction, but merged with Le`ahdut Ha`avodah in the party's right-wing faction which was dominated by the latter. Towards the mid-fifties Mapam split; the right-wing faction – still dominated by Le`ahdut Ha`avodah, but including most of the ex-Po`aley Tsion Smol elements – constituted itself as a party which existed semi-independently for a number of years until it was incorporated into the big right-wing social-democratic Mapai, which was then re-named the Israeli Labour Party.

By then there was hardly a trace left of the Po`aley Tsion Smol group; most of them had been rather elderly already in 1948, and in the meantime they have died. In the Zionist movement outside Israel the old Borochovist guard has similarly disappeared and has not been replaced by a new generation.

The recent attempts to exhume Borochovism and revive interest in it therefore raise a double question: where does the new audience of Borochovism come from? And why are Zionist emissaries and functionaries so eager to "sell" to this new clientele an ideology that has long ago ceased to exist inside the Zionist movement itself?

¹ This article was first published in *Left Wing Zionism?*, ISRACA no. 4, March 1971.

² There were even cases of young people being expelled from Mapam's youth movement for trying to propagate Borochovist ideas.

It seems that the answer to the first part of the question lies in the fact that there is a rough analogy between the present political and intellectual atmosphere in the West, and that which existed at the place and time in which Borochovism originally came into being – East Europe at the beginning of this century.

True, the general social and economic conditions that prevailed in East Europe sixty years ago bear little similarity to the present socio-economic reality in the West; and in particular the position of the Jews in the last period of the Russian empire was – as we shall try to show – very different from their position now anywhere in the world. The analogy that we want to draw is therefore confined mainly to the political and intellectual spheres.

It consists in this: in both cases we have a major upsurge of revolutionary socialist consciousness, mostly among the young. A state of excitement and turbulence, typical mainly of periods preceding great revolutions, spreads first of all among students and other young intellectuals; a new awareness of political questions; apathy and cynicism give way to feelings of involvement and urgency; formation of a host of circles and groups; heated debates; direct action. No alert and self-respecting young intellectual can remain indifferent to all this; he is drawn in and must take a stand, make a choice.

Also, in both cases, Jews are very prominent in this process. As an ethnic-cultural minority haunted by a collective memory of persecutions ancient and recent, they are especially sensitive to social questions. As a group with a high proportion of intellectuals, it is not surprising that they are very much in evidence in the revolutionary movement.

So a whole new generation of young Jews is becoming politicized in West Europe and the Americas, as another generation was politicised in the Tsarist empire. And now, as then, when they come to make their choice they find themselves between two roads leading in opposite directions: socialism or Zionism. In practical terms, this is a choice between joining the revolutionary struggle where they are, or opting out of it in order to take part in the Zionist colonization of Palestine. In theoretical terms, the choice is between Marxism and a peculiar kind of nationalism.

For many the decision is a very difficult one. The attraction of socialism is counteracted by the weight of a petty-bourgeois class origin and a specifically alienated social psychology created by the circumstances of Jewish history. They try to compromise: choose Zionism without turning completely away from socialism. "Socialist Zionism".

This compromise has had many variants, of which Borochovism was only one – and, as we have seen, one which was in practice much less successful than others and became a dead branch of the Zionist movement. But as an ideology there is something special about Borochovism.

The other brands of "socialist Zionism" consisted simply in eclectically mixing together these two heterogeneous ingredients. At most, some of them spoke about

a *synthesis* between Zionism and socialism, but: by this they only emphasised the fact that their theory is derived and composed from two completely different elements and premises.

Borochof, on the contrary, attempted to *deduce* Zionism from Marxism. He claimed to start from a *purely* Marxist position and to arrive at Zionist conclusions without making any extraneous additional assumptions.

This makes Borochovism as a theory much more attractive for a young person who wants to be a Zionist but has already had a taste of Marxism. Because Marxism is by its very nature a monist theory that does not mix well in a hotchpotch with alien ingredients. In particular, a "synthesis" between Marxism and any kind of nationalism is quite unacceptable – and this is perhaps more true today than it was in the beginning of the century, because in the meantime nationalism became more completely discredited and is now out of fashion even in non-Marxist circles.

Socialists today – more than ever before – are unready to support nationalist causes, unless this can be justified *without making any theoretical concessions* to nationalism hut purely on socialist grounds, e.g., wars of national liberation against imperialism.

All this explains the new *demand* for Borochovist theory: it is the only existing brand of Zionist ideology that suits the tastes of young Jews in the West v/ho have become politicized, radicalized and exposed to present-day socialist currents and the tradition of Marxist thought, but who are still seeking a compromise between joining the revolutionary struggle and opting out of it.

But we also have to say a few words about the *supply* of Borochovist literature and propaganda.

We would like to point out that the present purveyors of this ideology, the emissaries and functionaries of the Zionist machine, are not Borochovists; they do not belong to a Borochovist party in Israel, or to a Borochovist group in the Zionist movement.

Such a party or group does not exist³ and the professional Borochof wholesalers and pedlars do not have the slightest intention of creating one. In fact, they do not believe a word of the gospel they are preaching.

During 1968 the present author established close relations with a group of young people who had just arrived in Israel from several Latin-American countries. They were experiencing a very painful disillusionment at finding Israeli realities so different from the image that had been painted to them by the Israeli emissaries in their countries of origin. One of the things that bewildered them was that they could find in Israel hardly a trace of the Borochovism that had been fed to them in Latin-America. One day a member of that

³ As we shall show, the claims that Mapam is a legitimate heir to Borochovism are unfounded.

group happened to meet in Jerusalem the emissary who had indoctrinated him with Borochovism. (That emissary had in the meantime finished his term of office in Latin-America and was transferred back to Israel.) In the course of their conversation, my friend – who was delighted to find at last a true Borochovist with whom he could have an interesting discussion, eagerly raised the subject. “Oh, Borochov,” responded the emissary, “he was just a third-rate sociologist whom we merely use in Latin America to attract the Jewish youth away from Castroism!”

To which my friend could only reply sadly: “And I was one of them ... ”

The Zionist propaganda machine is prepared to use all sorts of ways in order to attract the Jewish youth in the West away from Castroism, Trotskyism and various other harmful ideas and movements. And if one of the ways is to indoctrinate young people with a doctrine in which the propagandists themselves do not believe, the latter console themselves that this is only a temporary measure, because “when they (i.e. the young Jews) come to us, we shall regain the initiative”.⁴

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The purpose of this article is to examine two questions concerning Borochovist Zionism.

1. In what respects does it differ from other brands of “socialist Zionism” which, unlike it, did not die but became dominant?

2. How far do the implicit and explicit assumptions that Borochov made regarding social facts and dynamics (especially in Jewish society, but also in the world as a whole) correspond to present-day reality?

On the other hand we shall not attempt a thorough discussion of how-far Borochovism fitted the realities of the beginning of the century.

We do not aim to convince those who use Borochovism merely as an excuse. We are addressing only those who have come to Borochovism in the course of a *genuine* search for solutions to problems which trouble their minds, and who are therefore prepared to think critically and non-dogmatically even about their *present* position into which their search has so far carried them. At such people the present author does not feel entitled to sneer or laugh; he too, in his own struggle to liberate himself from Zionist ideology, passed first through a Borochovist phase.

⁴ Y. Ben-Aharon, “A change of values in the relation between Israel and the diaspora” in Ot No. 2, February 1967. The writer is a prominent Israeli Labour Party ideologist and at present Secretary General of the Histadrut.

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All page-numbers cited below refer to the Hebrew edition of Borochov's works, published by Hakibutz Hameuchad and Siffriath Poalim, Israel, 1955. We use the following abbreviations of the titles of Borochov's works:

- ZT – On the Question of Zion and a Territory (Originally published in Russian in 1905)
- PL – Our Platform (Originally published in Russian, 1906)
- RP – The Role of the Proletariat in the Realization of Territorialism (Originally published in Yiddish as a sequel to PL, 1907).

I. BASIC PREMISES

According to Borochov, the Jews all over the world constitute a nation. In his article "The class struggle and the national question" where he discusses the national question *in general*, he defines *nation* as "a social group that has developed on the basis of common conditions of production and ... which is, moreover, united by a consciousness of affinity based on a common historical past."

Although we think this general definition is not satisfactory, and the claim that the Jews constitute a nation is false, we do not propose to argue this point here. What interests us here is neither the terminology nor the general concept *as such*, but the *factual* and *concrete* assumptions that Borochov makes concerning the Jewish people.⁵ Let us therefore return to his own line of argument.

"The most general condition of production, which is also the receptacle and basis for all the internal conditions as well as the channel of external influences" is the national territory. (PL, p. 193). The national territory is therefore "the *positive* foundation" upon which a nation leads a national life of its own. (*ibid.*)

The Jews, lacking this positive foundation, are (according to Borochov) an *anomalous, extra-territorial* nation. Their national existence is determined by a purely *negative* factor. Living in a foreign national environment of another, normal, nation, they tend to adapt to it and to assume the character of the surrounding society; but this tendency is checked and counteracted by the economic competition which exists between the Jews and the host nation.

⁵ We use the term "Jewish people" as a collective name for the Jews throughout the world, without making any theoretical commitment as to their constituting a national entity or not.

Because "national competition is always about the material possession of nations", mainly about territory, and the Jews have no territory, they are always defeated in the national competition. (PL, p. 195). This tends to separate and isolate them from the host nation. First they are pushed into economic sectors that have not yet been occupied by the host nation – generally speaking these are not the primary sectors (agriculture, production of means of production) but the secondary sectors (the final stages of production, commerce). This is *incomplete* isolation. Then the host nation enters into competition with the Jews even in the sectors that the latter were earlier allowed to occupy. The Jews then become *totally* isolated. (PL, p. 197).

Up to this point, Borochov has not told us anything original. A similar analysis was expounded not only by other "socialist Zionists" but also by bourgeois Zionists, including Herzl.

Without going into the question how far this analysis corresponds to the facts of Jewish history *in general*, we can say that on the whole it seems to give a plausible (although perhaps inaccurate) picture of the position of the Jews at *the time and place* at which Borochov was writing.

On the other hand, if we compare that analysis to the condition of the Jews *today* (especially in countries where Borochovist ideas are at present actively disseminated – US, Latin-America, Germany, France, England etc.) then Borochov's analysis is much less plausible. While it is quite true that Jews do concentrate in certain sectors of the economy (although not to the same extent as in Russia at the beginning of the century), they are not on the whole *isolated* or *separated* from the host nations by an economic competition. Of course, capitalist competition does exist, but it is not usually a "national" competition between members of the host nation on the one hand, and Jews on the other, in which, moreover, the latter as a group are the constant losers.

The Jews in Tsarist Russia were confined – by law – to a certain area, the Pale; the proportion of Jewish students in universities was limited by *numerous clausus* laws; they were not allowed to enter various occupations and professions, etc. As a result, the Jewish masses, who were losing their traditional economic role, were being to some extent isolated from society, pushed out of it and forced to emigrate.

No such process exists in, say, the United States (where the Jewish community is the largest in the world). The forces of integration are certainly stronger than those of isolation.

Of course, one can *claim* that this process of integration will one day be reversed, but this is no more than a mere claim so long as one does not point at a plausible socio-economic cause for such a reversal. However, the causes that operated in Tsarist Russia are completely lacking in the US. In Russia, the Jews at first fulfilled certain economic functions (in some crafts and in commerce) which Russian society required but could not itself fulfil because it was still feudal or semi-feudal. In such a society there is a "natural" place for relative

strangers who perform tasks that are useful to society but do not form an organic part of it. Later, when capitalism developed in Russia, the traditional occupations of the Jews either became unnecessary or were taken over by non-Jews. Moreover, in Russia – as Borochoff himself states the upper Jewish bourgeoisie was hardly affected by that process and adapted rather well to the new conditions. The true victims were the great mass of petty middlemen and craftsmen, the poorer sections of the lower middle class. But in what way is all this relevant to any big Jewish community today? In no way at all. *All these communities either do not live in pre-capitalist countries or do not have a social composition that would make them particularly vulnerable to a capitalist development.*

We want to make it clear that we are not claiming here that a Jewish problem no longer exists. But this is not the question we are discussing. The question is to what extent Borochoff's analysis of that problem reflects the realities of Jewish life today. And our conclusion is that the relevance of that part of his analysis which we have followed so far is extremely doubtful. But let us follow his analysis still further.

II. THE JEWISH PROLETARIAT

One of the central points in which Borochoffism differs from other brands of "socialist Zionism" is that it claims to deduce Zionism not from the dynamics and interests of the Jewish people "in general", or even from those of the Jewish lower middle classes, but, very specifically, *from the interests of the Jewish proletariat*. From Borochoff's point of view it was *not correct* to talk of a Jewish problem in a general way, without making any class distinction. And it was not enough to show that the spontaneous dynamics and real interest of the largest Jewish class of his time (i.e. the lower middle class) lead to Zionism. In PL (p. 264) he says: "The anomalies of the Jewish people as a whole interest us only as an objective explanation for the causes of contradictions in the life of the working class; but *the subjective argumentation of our programme follows only from the class interests of the militant Jewish proletariat.*" And even more specifically (p. 240): "If it were found that in fact the interests of the Jewish bourgeoisie and of the masses that are about to become proletarianized (i.e. the lower middle class-M.M.) lead them to territorialism (i.e., to a territorial solution of the Jewish question – M.M.) but that the interests of the Jewish proletariat are not connected with territorialism – then there would not be any grounds for saying that the future of the whole Jewish people is also the future of the Jewish proletariat. One should not take as a *starting point* the general-national future and deduce the future of the proletariat from it. On the contrary, one should take as a starting point the interests of the proletariat, and from this arrive at the future of the whole nation ... From the starting point of the interests of the militant Jewish proletariat and from our view of it as the *vanguard* of the Jewish future, we *deduce* territorialism for the whole of the Jewish people."

It must be stressed that when Borochoff claimed that his Zionism expresses the objective movement and interests of the Jewish working class, he was not

sneaking about a *potential, future class* but about a class in *actual existence*. He makes this absolutely clear not only in the remarks quoted above, but over and over again, in many places. In particular, the beginning of the fifth chapter of PL consists of a sharp and detailed polemic against rival left-Zionist theories precisely on this point.

This occupies such a central position in Borochovist theory, that without it the theory loses even its *formal* claim to be regarded as proletarian Zionism, and becomes "*ordinary*" (i.e. "*classless*" or *bourgeois*) Zionism.

Po`aley Tsion Smol were the only Zionist group to hold this view with any degree of consistency. All other Zionist groups and parties – including Po`aley Tsion factions other than the Smol, and all the parties and factions which at present exist as organized forces in the Zionist movement – reject this central Borochovist idea. They present Zionism as a Jewish national movement without any particular reference to class, or justify Zionism as necessary for *creating* a Jewish proletariat – a justification that Borochov did *not* accept. This is one of the reasons why all these parties and factions cannot be regarded as Borochovist; and the claims to the contrary which are made from time to time are based on theoretical confusion or intellectual dishonesty or both.

On the other hand it is not difficult to understand why Borochov had to insist so much on the proletarian nature of his---approach and make it a central pillar of his theoretical edifice. As mentioned in our Preface the real choice for him, and for all politically conscious young Jews of his generation in Russia, was between the Russian revolutionary movement and Zionism. To choose the Russian revolutionary movement meant working for the interest of the Russian *and international* working class, for its emancipation which would bring about the emancipation of the whole of mankind. But what did Zionism mean? If it meant working for the interest of a "Jewish nation" in general, without any reference to class, or for the interest of the Jewish middle classes – then anyone who had been seriously influenced by internationalist-socialist ideas would have to reject Zionism as an illegitimate diversion. If he wanted to be a Zionist he *had* to legitimize and rationalize Zionism as an expression of the interests of the Jewish proletariat; and then he could tell himself that, after all, struggling for the Jewish proletariat is not less important than struggling for the Russian proletariat, and for a Jewish revolutionary his own working class should naturally come first.

Let us now see how Borochov develops his analysis of the specific conditions and interests of the Jewish working class.

To begin with he points out that "national competition" tends to isolate the Jewish worker and to restrict his field of employment. "Because of national competition among the masses that are becoming proletarianized and are seeking employment, Jewish labour is employed only by middle Jewish capital; the anti-Semitism of the non- Jewish employers and non-Jewish workers does not allow Jewish labour to penetrate into workshops owned by non- Jews." (PL,p.202). The Jewish worker, he observes, suffers from certain handicaps in this competition, such as his weaker physique and higher demands (compared to peasants who come to

the towns to seek work), his lack of technical skills and his observance of Saturday as a day of rest. "But all these special and internal characteristics are significant merely as marginal or temporary factors, while the most important and constant factor is the national competition. The latter operates also when the Jewish masses that are being proletarianized migrate to other countries, the countries of big capital, in search of employment." (loc.cit.)

The effect of all this is not merely a *quantitative* restriction of employment. "Since almost the whole of Jewish capital is invested in production of consumer goods, in which labour is always more or less seasonal, which is dominated by handicraft with its high rate of exploitation, without mechanized production, in which the functions of the producer differ little from those of the tradesman-middleman, and in which piece-work is more usual than time-work – it is easy to see that qualitatively too, Jewish proletarianization is on a level lower than required. The exclusion of Jewish toilers from heavy industry and from machines is so widespread and conspicuous, that the Christian workers have adopted the view that operating a machine is their own special prerogative and privilege, and they systematically forbid Jews to operate machines even when the machine replaces handicraft in a branch of production where Jews are employed." (PL, p. 203).

Thus the employment of Jewish labour is numerically restricted, confined to branches where Jewish capital is invested – i.e, to non-basic branches of industry – and even within these branches it is confined to non-basic jobs. This restriction and isolation has an organizational consequence: "The Jewish proletariat spontaneously organizes itself during the process of development of capitalist economy; and in doing so it unites separately from the workers of other nations, in special national organizations. The reason for the special organization of the Jewish working class is the fact that its national existence is economically special, isolated. Since the economic isolation of Jewish life is growing, there is also a growing need for a special political organization..." (RP, p. 324)

On the other hand, because of the branches and jobs to which Jewish labour is confined, the Jewish proletariat does not have a proper "strategic base" in its economic and political struggle against capital.

"The economic struggle of the Jewish worker is most successful in the busy season, when the employers have to make concessions in order not to waste time. But on the other hand the employers regain in the slack season what they had lost, and by next season the fruits of the economic struggle vanish, and the Jewish worker is compelled to engage in the very same struggle to regain the same unstable results as before. But the strategic base of the Jewish proletariat is even less satisfactory from the political point of view. Since the Jewish proletariat is almost entirely employed in producing consumer goods, and is not active in any primary stage of the economic processes, it does not hold any life-lines of the economy of the country where it lives; hence its influence on the general trend of life is necessarily quite restricted. It cannot paralyse at once the whole economic machine, as can the railway workers and other workers whose conditions are more favourable. It is exploited not by

big capital but only by middle capital, whose own role in production is also small. While the Jewish proletariat can paralyse by militant struggle that capital which it produces, it cannot shake the country to any considerable extent. Even in its most just demands it is powerless to defend itself if other, more fortunate, workers of the surrounding people do not support it. It cannot achieve even the slightest improvement when this concerns its special national needs which are not shared by others." (PL, pp. 219-220).

In a later article (The economic development of the Jewish people, 1911) Borochof elaborates this point further. "The dry, numerical data imply that the Jews are separated just from the most important and influential branches of production, from the branches that are the hub of the wheel of history ... These numbers mean that Jewish socialism, Jewish class struggle, Jewish revolution will also play an insignificant role in socialism, class struggle and revolution of the surrounding peoples, just as the Jewish needle, the Jewish flat-iron, are insignificant compared to the non-Jewish plough, non-Jewish steam engine and shipping company."

From this Borochof deduces that a territorial solution to the Jewish problem is in the interests of the Jewish proletariat: "All these national anomalies will disappear only after the conditions of production of Jewish life will undergo a fundamental change, after the Jewish people will no longer be extra-territorial. When the Jews will be employed in the primary, most important branches of production, when the Jews will produce not only consumer goods but also means of production – then the Jewish proletariat will hold the life-lines of the country's economy ... then the class struggle of the Jewish proletariat will be directed not against an impotent bourgeoisie in the Jewish economy, as it is today, but against a strong bourgeoisie which organises production in a whole country: then the class struggle of the Jewish worker will achieve the necessary political, economic and social impact." (PL, p. 264).

It is not our purpose here to make a theoretical assessment of Borochof's general conceptions of the class struggle and of the national problem. We merely want to point out, in passing, that the idea that the Jewish proletariat in pre-Revolutionary Russia needed an independent "strategic base" for "its own" class struggle was quite wrong and harmful.

The proletarian class struggle *begins* as a confrontation between the worker and "his own" capitalist, his direct employer; it is *at first* conducted in relative isolation within a given industry, given branch, given locality and (in a multi-national country) given national or ethnic group. But the struggle assumes its true social and political significance only by overcoming these backward and narrow limitations. The task of a revolutionary working-class movement is therefore not to take the isolated struggles separately and look for a separate "strategic base" for each separate struggle, but on the contrary – to co-ordinate and *unite* them all on the basis of the *whole* country (and then on the international arena.)

The answer given by Borochoy to the question of the "Jewish strategic base" was wrong, because *the question itself* was posed in a narrow, nationalistic – and therefore wrong – manner.

The struggle of the Jewish workers *began* in the ghetto, in the Pale, *within* the Jewish community. In this struggle the strategic position of the Jewish workers was certainly quite weak, *so long* as it remained isolated.

Borochoy *assumed* that the struggle must *remain* isolated, must remain a confrontation between Jewish worker and Jewish employer. And this assumption is embodied *in advance* in the way he posed the problem: the problem of finding a *separate* "strategic base" for the Jewish proletariat.

In fact, what the Jewish workers needed was not a separate "strategic base" but a *common struggle* together with *all* the workers in the country.

While true internationalist revolutionaries were busy building a united workers' movement which would transcend all backward divisions between branches, regions and ethnic groups, Borochoy was engaged in searching across the seas for a "strategic base" for the Jewish proletariat, for a place where it could fight against a strong *Jewish* bourgeoisie.

Borochoy wrote that Jewish socialism and revolution could not – so long as the Jews were not concentrated in a country of their own – play a significant role in the socialism and revolution of the peoples among whom they lived. But only six years later, Russia was swept by a great revolution in which Jews like Trotsky played an important role – precisely *because* they were not looking for a Jewish national socialism on a Jewish national "strategic base". And what was Borochoy's own contribution to the history of world socialism and revolution? A truly insignificant, but negative, quantity. There is a lesson here which young Jewish socialists in Paris, London, Frankfurt New York, Cordoba and Montevideo should not ignore.

(By the way, to those who would point out that Jewish revolutionaries suffered a tragic fate when the Russian revolution degenerated, we reply: The lesson to be learnt from this is not that Jews should have nothing to do with "other peoples'" revolutions, but that they, together with all other revolutionaries, should guard the revolution from degenerating.)

Borochoy's "proletarian Zionism" came to wrong and harmful theoretical conclusions. But many of the *factual* assumptions that he made were not imaginary; they were somehow based on an existing reality. The Jews were relatively isolated and they were being squeezed out of their traditional economic role. The Jewish masses were becoming proletarianized. Jewish workers did find it difficult to get employment in non-Jewish enterprises. Their first experiences of the class struggle were within the Jewish community, in confrontations with the middle Jewish bourgeoisie. They formed a relatively coherent and geographically concentrated social group. The words "Jewish, proletariat" were therefore not just empty words; they denoted a definite, and

to some extent distinct, social group. It was meaningful to talk of the class interest of the Jewish proletariat.

But let us now come to the *present*. What possible meaning can "proletarian Zionism" have in relation to the Jewish communities that now exist in Europe and the Americas?

As we saw, the whole point about Borochovism was its claim to express the class interests of the Jewish proletariat. But a *Jewish proletariat does not exist anywhere* (except, of course, in Israel – but this is irrelevant, because we are talking- not about Israel, but about the Jewish "diaspora"). We are not saying that there are no Jewish workers. There are Jewish workers (and although their proportion among the Jewish people is rather small, this is not important in the present context). What we are saying is that there is no Jewish proletariat as a *coherent social group*. The factors which tended to segregate the Jewish workers in pre-revolutionary Russia and to form them into a relatively distinct social group do not now operate anywhere. A Jewish worker in Britain is – as a Worker – a member of the working class in general, not of any "Jewish" class.

To talk about the class interests and needs of the "Jewish working class" is not merely wrong. It is completely meaningless.

But then we must conclude that Borochov's "proletarian Zionism" is today not merely wrong, but a meaningless, absurd and irrelevant anachronistic fiction.

This is perhaps the main reason why Borochovism became a dead branch in the Zionist movement: the social group on which it based itself and which it claimed to represent has ceased to exist.

III. BOROCHOVISM AND REALITY

There was another reason that led to the extinction of Borochovism as a tendency within Zionism. Borochov died at the end of 1917, just before Zionism began to colonize Palestine on a big scale. But during the actual process of colonization, many arguments and forecasts on which Borochov had repeatedly insisted turned out to be false. This, of course, weakened the position of his faithful followers.

Since a detailed account of Borochov's prognosis and its divergence from reality would take us far too long, we confine ourselves to listing just a few points and making short comments.

1. Borochov claimed (see e.g. PL chapter 2) that the petty-bourgeois Jewish masses that immigrated into the advanced capitalist countries (e.g. the USA) would soon become impoverished and proletarianized. A new Jewish proletariat would emerge in those countries, and it would be subject to the same process of national competition and isolation as in Russia. The Jewish masses in the advanced capitalist countries would therefore gravitate to "proletarian Zionism" and migrate to Palestine.

In reality this did not take place. The Jewish immigrants in the advanced countries were not pauperized and proletarianized but, on the contrary, managed on the whole to improve their economic and social position.

2. Borochov insisted (see RP, p. 323) that there was no need to make propaganda among the Jewish workers to go to Palestine. He repeated many times that Jewish middle capital would gravitate to Palestine in a spontaneous way, and the Jewish workers would follow it – also in a purely spontaneous way. In fact, Jewish capital did go to Palestine (although not quite as spontaneously as he supposed) but the Jewish workers did not follow it. Among those who went to Palestine there were very few workers indeed. (Many people became workers in Palestine – but this is not the same thing.)

3. For Borochov, one of the main virtues of Palestine was that it was under Turkish rule. He repeatedly and emphatically rejected the idea of Jewish colonization in any country ruled by an advanced capitalist power. In particular, he bitterly opposed the idea of colonizing Palestine (or any other country) under a charter granted by an advanced capitalist power. (These matters are discussed in great detail in chap. 9 of ZT and, more briefly, also in chap 9 of PL).

In practice, Zionist colonization started on a big scale only when Palestine came under British rule. And the only way in which such a colonization could ever be realized was precisely the way in which it was in fact realized: under British imperialist sponsorship, granted in a charter. (The Balfour declaration was made a few days before Borochov died).

4. In Borochov's view (see chap. 9 of ZT and especially chap. 8 of PL) the Palestinian Arabs (he does not call them "Arabs" but simply "natives of Palestine") lack any national culture of their own and do not have any other national characteristic. "They easily and quickly adopt any imported cultural character higher than their own; they cannot unite for an organised resistance against external influences, they are not capable of national competition..." (PL, p. 282) He therefore deduced with great certainty and repeated several times that "the natives of Palestine will assimilate economically and culturally into whoever brings order into the country, into whoever undertakes the development of the forces of production of Palestine", (ibid.). As for the Arab national movement, Borochov was confident that "it does not have and cannot have any relation to Palestine". (PL 90, footnote).

Well, well, well ...

IV. CONCLUSION

We do not think there is a serious danger that Borochovism will become an important trend, with more than transient influence on young Jewish socialists in Europe and the Americas.

A person who has been convinced by Marxism but is still emotionally unready to dissociate himself from Zionism may first be attracted by this strange attempt to deduce the latter from the former. The very existence of such an attempt pleases him so much, that at first he is not aware that the deduction is not only based on a rather narrow and backward kind of "Marxism", but also relies on many "empirical" assumptions which have absolutely no connection with existing reality.

Later he will realise that this is just a compromise, and a compromise that cannot work. He will then have to make up his mind: Socialism or Zionism, this time without compromise. If his socialist conviction is strong enough, he will dissociate himself completely from Zionism.

We hope that the present booklet will help to make this process a little less painful.