

DIFFICULTIES OF POALE ZIONISM¹

I.

"HOW DIFFICULT it is to be a Poale Zionist!" exclaimed an old Party comrade at a jubilee celebration of the Warsaw organization. "How much easier to be a *Bundist*,² or a member of the Polish Socialist Party! In those organizations one is little perturbed by questions that provoke thought or study. How difficult and responsible, however, are the burdens of a Poale Zionist!"

We can fully appreciate the complaints of our devoted comrade, who, though paying for his Party convictions with a life-sentence to Siberia, still remains a devoted Poale Zionist. In spite of all difficulties, we firmly adhere to our principles. Wherein lies the power of this mission, which, while so complicated and so difficult, is yet so dear to us all?

There is a law of nature known as the law of the economy of energy. Each creature strives to achieve the maximum results with the minimum of effort. This law operates in both the organic and inorganic worlds. The growth of plants, the expansion of roots, the movements of microscopic creatures, the instincts of the animal world, the conscious as well as the unconscious life of man—all are influenced by this law of nature. This law is felt in human culture, in industry, science, morals, and art, in the ever-changing conflicts of social thought and in national and class struggles. In brief, *humanity strives to achieve in all its endeavors the greatest results with the least exertion.*

This tendency to economize energy is in itself not a simple, but rather a complicated affair. There is no absolute measure

¹ Written in 1913 and published in the organ of the Poale Zion *Yiddisher Arbeiter* (Lemberg, now Poland) on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of that publication.

² See footnote 2, p. 75.

of economy, for its degree always depends upon given circumstances. Thus, theoretically speaking, the shortest distance between any two points is a straight line. This, however, does not take into account the practical complications of a given situation. Imagine for a moment that between two given distances there is a mountain or a lake; it soon becomes evident that the straight line is by no means the shortest or the easiest way. To avoid unnecessary difficulties one would have to go in a round-about route or construct a tunnel or a bridge. In other words, the simplest is not always the true or correct path. Human life, both individual and group, is so complex that a simple solution is often an impossibility.

Nevertheless, under this law of economy, man strives first of all to achieve his goal in as simple a manner as possible. He first attempts to follow the short way, the straight way. But the realities of life often force him to adapt himself to complicated conditions by employing new and rational means. Such is the case in the history of the individual and the group. In the past, for example, men sought to conquer distance by the simplest means of transportation—horse, camel, or sail. Now, however, it is very difficult for a man during a short lifetime to master the techniques of transportation which have become complicated as a result of the introduction of railways, steamships, automobiles, and aeroplanes. *The development of human culture finds expression not through simplification but through differentiation and refinement of the mental and physical faculties. Simplicity of thought and social tactics are often a sign of primitiveness.*

There is another aspect to this problem. The law of the economy of energy refers not only to the exertion of the least amount of energy, but also to the achievement of the maximum results. In its most elementary and abstract expression, the simplest form of action is inaction; the simplest form of thinking is no thinking. Thus we would conserve all energy. But, man's ideal is the attainment of the maximum amount of productivity with the minimum of effort. Marx clearly points out both aspects

of this law in his thesis that the history of humanity depends upon the development of the forces of production.

It is really difficult to be a Poale Zionist, for Poale Zion thought and practice are more complicated and possess finer and more varied nuances than the thoughts and practices of other Jewish parties. Nevertheless, within Jewish life today, with its intricate Galut problems and its striving for renaissance, the Poale Zion program offers the maximum results with the minimum of effort. The *Bund* demands less spiritual and physical effort on the part of the Jewish proletariat, but it is also satisfied with more limited objectives.

We desire to revitalize Jewish life, Jewish labor, and Jewish energy in all fields of endeavor. We cannot be content merely with the results obtainable in the Galut. But even in our Galut work, our program for the Jewish proletariat opens a much vaster vista than the programs of the other Jewish parties. According to the Socialist-Territorialist,³ the Jewish problem can be solved solely by a program based on emigration. To the *Bundist*, the Galut problem is somewhat broader, but its program and activities are limited only to the most direct forms of struggle with the bourgeoisie and the State. Hence, while the Socialist-Territorialists perform constructive work only in the fields of emigration, and the *Bund* among Jewish workers on strike, the Poale Zion endeavors to do constructive work along all economic, cultural, and political fronts.

It becomes obvious that the complexity of our program does not in any way hinder its practicability. Though the Socialist-Territorialists speak of the need for regulation of Jewish emigration, they let the practical work be conducted by the bourgeois territorialists and assimilationists. The Poale Zionists, however, do not limit themselves to propaganda and have already, in the course of their short existence, achieved something through their own institutions (e. g., the Palestine Workers' Fund⁴ and the

³ See footnote 3, p. 60.

⁴ Established by the World Confederation of Poale Zion to extend aid to all organized workers in Palestine irrespective of party affiliation. It was particularly useful as a financial agency during the World War. In America, this fund is popu-

Information Bureau in Jaffa⁵). Though the *Bundists* constantly propagandize on behalf of the Yiddish language, literature, and schools, they have done very little for Jewish culture, science, and education in comparison with the youthful Poale Zion Party.

The above clearly demonstrates that of all programs of the Jewish parties—both bourgeois and proletarian—the Poale Zion program presents the most inclusive solution to the Jewish problem. Therefore, it is really difficult to be a Poale Zionist—for Poale Zion thought and practice demand of the Jewish worker the greatest exertion of his spiritual and physical faculties. And yet this exertion is a bare minimum in comparison with the all-embracing program of Jewish life to whose attainment the Poale Zionists strive.

II.

Primitive mind presupposes that truth is simple. Complicated and well-founded thoughts puzzle the uneducated man.

The question of the so-called "consistency" of program and tactics of social movements is complicated. The undeveloped and insufficiently conscious Jewish worker assumes that "consistency" means one of two things: here or there, Galut or Zion. He cannot comprehend the integration of the two.

In Socialist thought, too, the question of consistency arises. Thus, for example, the Anarchists, who desire to simplify the tactics of the labor movement, accuse scientific Socialism of inconsistency. The Anarchists would indeed be right in their criticism were Socialism to preach *social revolution* on one day and *social reformism* the next. But actually, Socialism integrates in its program both the struggle for social revolution and for immediate reform. Thus, scientific Socialism is more complex than Anarchism, and though the common mind may not fully comprehend it, it is, nevertheless, consistent. Socialism then has to bridge the gap between reform and revolution, just as Poale Zionism has to integrate the Galut and Zion.

larly known as the *Gevekschaften Campaign*. It raised more than a million dollars during the past decade, thus aiding the various institutions of the *Histadrut* (General Federation of Jewish Labor in Palestine).

⁵ Established by the Palestine Workers' Fund to aid new immigrants.

The whole is greater than any of its parts. Since Socialism is a basic element of Poale Zionism the difficulties of Socialism are also the difficulties of Poale Zionism.

Scientific Socialism demands that our ideals be based on the objective forces operating in society. It is not sufficient that individuals or even the masses feel a need for something; it is essential that these needs and desires, expressed as vital elements of a Party program, be in harmony with historic trends. The objective forces which form the basis for an ideal also create the "historic necessity"⁶ for this ideal.

The prime difficulty of the Poale Zion program is that it demands of the Jewish worker who supports it to be thoroughly convinced that the social program of the Galut and the national program of Palestine are not only beautiful ideals, but also objective possibilities.

We can now fully comprehend the demands that scientific Socialism makes of each Poale Zionist. First, he must become acquainted with the conditions of our present day social life and he must study the essence of the historic necessity of Socialism. Second, he must fully comprehend the nature and solution of the economic and cultural problems of the Jewish working class. Third, he must orientate himself in the problem of nationalism in our own times and particularly in the Jewish national problem.

One should not err, however, in concluding that every Poale Zionist must necessarily be a great theoretician. Not every Poale Zionist need thoroughly master the Socialist, the Poale Zion, or anti-Poale Zion literature; nor need he necessarily be an expert in all questions pertaining to the Socialist movement of each nation and the Poale Zion movement of each country.

Through active participation in the Socialist Party, the worker acquires what is commonly termed a Socialist consciousness which is of greater value than his mastery of books. This is, in reality the essence of Socialist education. The very fact that the masses participate in Socialist work in increasing numbers is sufficient proof of its historic necessity. The course of historic necessity of

⁶ See footnote 2, p. 111.

Socialism cannot be charted with mathematical accuracy. Human knowledge is as yet not sufficiently developed to be able to foresee historic developments with mathematical precision. It is not correct to assume that Marx, or for that matter any other thinker, has succeeded in proving beyond any doubts the historic necessity of Socialism. Theories can illustrate and interpret—not prove historic necessity. But that which theory cannot do, life can. His daily experiences rather than books will convince the worker that the struggle between himself and the capitalist becomes ever fiercer.

In a similar manner, our education aims to develop a Poale Zion consciousness. That consciousness even more than our literature will solve the theoretical difficulties of our program. Poale Zion literature can illustrate and interpret our program; it cannot prove its merits. The fact, however, that our movement grows and develops is in itself sufficient proof of its historic necessity. The steady growth of national consciousness among the Jewish masses, the gradual rise of respect for the Jewish personality, the growth of the movement for Jewish national rights, the growing Jewish labor movement in Palestine—all these are the objective facts, the *real* factors which find their theoretical expression in the Poale Zion program.

Our program is more difficult than that of other parties which content themselves with a narrower perspective. Our task, however, is not impossible of achievement; for our theory is based on the needs of Jewish life, and on the living experiences of the organized Jewish proletariat. Like Socialism, Poale Zionism will solve its *theoretical* difficulties only in its *practice*.