

NATIONAL HELPLESSNESS VERSUS NATIONAL SELF-HELP¹

I.

THE MOST important question facing the Jewish worker at the present phase of history is: How can our nation be insured against the recurrence of the horrible persecutions and tragic events which so often befall it in the various countries?

Each nation has its troubles. The Italians are not assured against earthquakes; the Chinese, against floods; the Indians, against failure of crops, cholera and pests. Nature is responsible for these catastrophes. Human knowledge, however, can combat these blind elements of nature.

Other nations suffer from continual oppression: Ireland and India are under the yoke of Great Britain, and Russia is under the yoke of the Czar. These peoples suffer because they are not sufficiently conscious of their nationality nor are they internally united. They cannot, therefore, successfully revolt against their oppressors.

Some nations are being ruined by the World War, in spite of the fact that they do not want war and are not to be blamed for it. Among these nations are the Serbians, Belgians, Poles, Latvians and Armenians. Nevertheless, they find a double consolation in their sufferings. They are not alone, not deserted, nor persecuted; they have someone to come to their aid. A great many nations came to the support of the Serbians and Belgians, and Russia pretended to come to the aid of the Armenians. Of greater importance is the fact that these nations may sooner or later expect

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to receive recompense for their sacrifices. *They struggle for their own national cause.* Should they lose in the struggle, the loss is not permanent; for they remain on their own soil and can always wait for the opportunity to arise and regain their rights.

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. We do not possess our own land, and are neglected by this colossal world which has its own troubles. We have no side to join in a war; the world is hostile towards us and wishes to wipe us out. Under the best conditions, the world is indifferent to us. Our fate is always determined by the fate of other nations.

How can we escape from this extraordinary condition? Are we absolutely helpless, or can we extricate ourselves?

The Jewish workers receive various answers to this question. Some Jewish Socialists place their entire faith in *assimilation*; others, in the *progress of humanity*. We Socialist-Zionists are convinced that our freedom depends primarily upon the *national self-help of the Jewish masses*. And the latest, most dreadful of all catastrophes befalling the Jews, the World War, substantiated our viewpoint.

II.

Death and suicide are the most radical reliefs from disease. Similarly, assimilation is the most radical solution to the Jewish problem. If there were no Jews, there would be no suffering from the Jewish tragedy. Nevertheless, no medical expert would advise his patient to take poison for a cure. No honest statesman or idealist ever attempted to solve, for example, the Polish question by suggesting that the Polish people should cease existing. And how would the Belgians, in their present plight, look upon anyone who gave them the excellent advice to assimilate with the Germans, and cease to exist as an independent nation?

Only to us Jews have self-appointed "physicians" had the audacity, the shamelessness, to preach national suicide. It is

beneath the honor and dignity of our great heroic and martyred people to take the assimilationist Utopianists seriously. The Jewish nation *lives* and *will live*! Other nations may love us or hate us, but they will never succeed in wiping us out, either by persecution or by assimilation.

Nevertheless, were assimilation possible, we might have considered it. The truth of the matter is, however, that assimilation is nothing more than a harmful illusion. The Jewish masses become assimilated only to some degree. At most, they accept *the external characteristics* of the neighboring nations: the clothes, the language, certain foods and habits. But inwardly, in their spirit, they remain strange to the culture of their neighbors. Even the most assimilated Jews cannot intermingle with their neighbors, and always lead a distinct Jewish life.

As long as other nations exist, the Jewish nation will also exist. A part of the Jewish intelligentsia and upper bourgeoisie strenuously attempts to commit national suicide, but the Jewish masses, the Jewish working class, will not yield to the notion that the Jew disappear among foreign nations and alien cultures.

III.

"Progress of humanity" is a beautiful idea, but we must always be aware of one thing: progress does not create man, but man creates progress. Progress is not self-made, but must be won, step by step, by the masses. True, there is such a thing as technical, scientific, and economic progress. We continually become wiser, keener, and more experienced in the control of nature. That alone, however, cannot make our character more humane, our feelings more refined, our motives, nobler. Political institutions do not of themselves become ennobled, and social justice does not just "happen".

Social and political rights grow only through bitter struggle. Oppression maintains itself as long as the oppressed have not the strength to throw off the yoke and institute a new *equilibrium*. The moral progress of mankind is nothing more than a result of this bitter struggle for this equilibrium. Wherever might and

helplessness meet, oppression will be the inevitable result. The only defense the weak have is their own organized effort and their common struggle for their interests. The law, the police, and the courts of justice will at most come to the aid of the innocent, suffering *individual*, but not to the aid of the oppressed *group or nation*. Every law, every statute is passed and controlled by the powerful, who utilize technical progress for their own purposes. The laws and judicial practices can improve in favor of the oppressed classes and nations through no means other than their own efforts.

The World War has clearly demonstrated that even the best of mankind will not cease to oppress the weak if the latter comes into conflict with its own interests. In proof of this truism, we submit the example of the German Social-Democratic Party which consented to the military move of the Imperial Army in occupying neutral Luxemburg and Belgium. No one will deny that the German Social-Democrats are good Socialists. But when it seemed to them that it was essential to violate the neutrality of weak neighbors, they did not hesitate in the least. The Belgian and French Socialists acted similarly.

In short, the weaker element, be it class or nation, should not depend on the humaneness and justice of the stronger. The basic principle of Socialism is that the emancipation of the working class must come through its own efforts and through its own struggle. What a fine thing it would be if the worker depended on the moral progress of the capitalist to cease exploiting him!

IV.

And are we not naive in assuming that the Jews will cease to suffer and will be guarded against all catastrophes when the nations shall have become more humane and shall no longer persecute weaker peoples? We Jews should trust no one but ourselves. *The emancipation of the Jewish people can be gained only by our own efforts.*

The only solution to the Jewish problem is the creation of an equilibrium of power which will not permit other nations to perse-

cute us so freely without being called to account. The uniqueness of the Jewish tragedy resides in the fact that Jews have no land of their own. For that reason Jewish interests and needs do not evoke respect.

Consider a tiny country like Montenegro which has a quarter of a million poor, semi-barbarian inhabitants without any influence whatsoever on world civilization. Then consider the Jewish nation, a cultured people of over thirteen million, with a thousand-year-old culture, a people of great capitalists and great revolutionists, of Rothschilds, Poznanskys, and Schiffs, and of Marxes, Lassalles, and Gershonys; a nation which has everywhere statesmen, journalists, artists, poets, teachers, and social leaders; a people of great capabilities, exerting a powerful influence on human civilization.

Whose interests will be taken into greater account—that of the thirteen million highly cultured Jews, or that of the quarter million Montenegrins? Whose voice will ring clearer in the international chorus of the movements for freedom? The answer is plain. The Montenegrins are in a better position to struggle for freedom than are the Jews. The interests of the Montenegrins will be taken into greater account for they do not depend upon assimilation and human progress, but on their own small forces and planned connections with the great powers of the world. This must also be the national political slogan of the Jewish worker: *organized national self-help. We must unite ourselves in the struggle for our own future.*

FACING REALITY¹

ZIONISM IS facing reality, while the enemies of Zion are turning their backs on it.

What we predicted about fifteen years ago, and again at the beginning of the World War, has now become a fact. The question of a Jewish national autonomous homeland has been placed on the agenda of world politics. For the present, this is all—no more, but also no less.

This is unquestionably a victory for all Zionists. Were it not for the twenty years of intense Zionist propaganda, and were it not for the ten years of practical revolutionary work in Palestine, this question would never have been seriously considered and world diplomacy would never have been seriously interested in it. Only people with a naive conception of politics could imagine that this question would have been given any consideration if there were no great Zionist movement. As a matter of fact, the Zionist movement has played second fiddle to none in bringing about this result—not even to the British march on Palestine. It will be well for our friends to remember this and surely it will not be harmful for others to take note of it.

No question of rights is ever raised until those directly interested demand them. History proves that the Jews secured their rights only after they demanded them and only in that measure in which they fought for them. The English and Dutch Revolutions of the seventeenth century did not bring equal rights to Jews because the Jews did not ask for them. The first French Revolution did not bring full equality because the Jews made their demands too late. Before the Revolution of 1848, the

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