

Letters

Various Authors

1983

Joy To Read

The following writer is one of the Vancouver Five. See our coverage of the start of their trials elsewhere in this issue.

Dear Fifth Estate:

I've just finished reading the Summer 1983 issue of the paper which you sent me. As usual, I found lots to think about in it, and it is a joy to read many ideas that I am more than less in agreement with. Zerzan was thought provoking, but I especially liked the article on economic recovery, and the replies to the letter by Ron Haley.

In terms of the short piece on our case, we really appreciate the coverage and support that you have been giving us. Just a thought regarding the Woodie Guthrie lyric: I wonder if such "clearing" type ideas really serves any constructive purpose? As well, we have been directly indicted and our first trial begins Sept. 6th.

It is expected to take about four months. It will be primarily a legal battle, through which the major legal issues regarding admissibility of evidence, house bugging legality, etc. will be decided. The outcome of these major legal factors will determine how we conduct our defense in the remaining four trials.

In resistance and solidarity, with primitivist longings,

Brent

Vancouver 5 (Organization listed for identification purposes only)

More Is Lost

Brave People:

I read your lead article (FE #312, Spring 1983, "Fifth Estate Tool of the Year: The Sledgehammer") and it reminds me of B. Traven's novel of the 1910 Revolution in "Yucatan" where the people set out to destroy all written material because property records were kept thereon and used to deprive the campesino of his land.

You are right, there must be resistance and the destruction of computers/word processors. The problem again is the use of these things, for they could be used to store more poetry and writings of freedom than any one person can remember. On the whole, however, more is lost by computers than humanity gains due to centralized technology.

Howard Johnson

Los Angeles

A New Rhythm

To The Fifth Estate:

Against Rhythm, Hearts and Sex: A Tribute to John Zerzan's "Annulment of Time and History" FE #313, Summer 1983.

And now that time and history are no more, let me help in the annihilation of a few remaining encumbrances until now associated with the aforesaid. First let me burn away rhythm, that mechanistic reification of fluctuating periodicity drummed up by civilization. Without time rhythm ceases to exist. Since one is defined by the other, and the other no longer is, let us all gather and symbolically rejoice around a new stew of rhythm, and boil it all away.

Every ceremony centers about! Lest we remain hungry in this celebration of time's fall, and whilst the pot filled with rhythm is still brewing, let me use this occasion to raise our ecstatic state of timelessness one notch further into this deep present.

This moment is most sacred and I look about at all eyes so as to share my next act. I sing out loud a single tone, timeless, and gouge long fingernails deep into my chest. My fingers clasp about a pulsating muscle, and though it hurts, I know the pain is without consequence. Into the stew of rhythm I cast my heart. It was but an appendage of time.

I stand now before your eyes, my mouth open singing an eternal monotone, my heart boiling in a stew of rhythm, and my excitement climbing ever deeper, deeper into this present. Between my legs I feel a throb. My eyes begin to glisten. I know as I look into all of your eyes that this ceremony has not yet climaxed. Our rhythm bubbles—my heart bobs, time is stewed, yet a throb still pounds. Into the eternal monotone I squeeze the words: "time, history" as the throb—throbs on.

This ceremony is now forever; forever without time, forever without consequences, without rhythm, without heart. All of that is stewing in the pot. But as yet this stew has no taste.

I see all of your noses come forward. Forward towards the smell of the throb.

Once, when there was a past, I might have rebelled at noses so close to my sex. But now there is no need to step back and no back to step into. I accept all of your noses into this ceremony. My words are scissors. Just a few snips and the stew fills with odor.

One last snip—my sex—to quell the throb.

Algis

San Francisco CA

FE Sidesteps

Dear Fifth Estate:

This is in response to the exchange last issue (see FE #313, Summer 1983) between Ron Hayley and the FE in the letters column.

I think that Ron made several important mistakes in his letter, but that he was sincerely and respectfully trying to address some questions to the FE which needed addressing. They still need addressing, which is to say that the FE, while managing to distort Ron's position in several instances in order to make it (and him) look bad, answered some of his questions only partially, and neatly sidestepped others.

I agree with Ron the Ivan Illich's thesis that women's oppression dates from the rise of capitalism is dubious history. However, he was wrong to say that "the hidden ideological thrust of such a position is to call for a return to the allegedly separate but equal status of affairs which each sex enjoyed 'dignity' in its respective station." Certainly one can believe that women's oppression dates from the rise of capitalism without having any such hidden agenda. Perhaps Illich has such an agenda, perhaps not; but this has no bearing on the validity of the historical thesis in question.

This was distortion on Ron's part, but the FE made many such distortions of Ron's position. For instance, in their critique of Ron, the FE said, "It is...degrading to women to describe their plight as total, continual enslavement by patriarchy since the dawn of human society," when Ron had made no such description. He merely stated that he thought the origins of women's oppression pre-dated capitalism and took place in so-called "primitive" society.

He said nothing about "total, continual enslavement." He can certainly hold his position of the origins of patriarchy and still believe that, for example, there were non-patriarchal primitive societies, that history is full of great

achievements by women, that even in patriarchy the oppression of women is not total since they continually rise above it. Can't he?

It happens that I disagree with the statement of Bookchin and Marx which Ron quoted: "Without (a material basis of abundance) want is generalized, and with want the struggle for necessities and all the old shit would necessarily be reproduced." It's the "necessarily" which troubles me: it is here that perhaps Ron can be criticized for being "degrading" to people, or, at least, for being pessimistic about human possibility in a way I don't think he can afford to be. It seems from this that Ron has totally succeeded in following his own suggestion and combining a critique of scarcity with a critique of technocracy; for if one is to decide that scarcity "necessarily" leads to class division, then mustn't one also decide, given the immensity of the dilemma posed by technocracy (as detailed repeatedly and eloquently in the FE), that today we are "necessarily" headed for environmental destruction, nuclear war and perhaps the extinction of life on earth?

However, instead of confining itself to a constructive criticism of this statement, the FE complained about Ron having quoted Marx in the first place, which he is said to have done only in order to invoke Marx's dubious "authority," when his true motive was more likely to help clarify an idea which he wished to be judged on its own terms.

Many anarchists possess an automatic antagonistic reaction towards anyone who suggests that Marx might have been right about something. The antagonistic reaction may come from legitimate hurts and angers, but nonetheless is a form of elitism, of ideological nationalism where the home nationalists are proud and patriotic citizens of the country Not Marx and at all costs defend themselves against the subhuman enemy, of ideological religiosity in which Marx, being totally evil, is identified with the Devil.

Ron made an attempt to distinguish between "technocracy" ("technology as a system of domination," as the FE put it) and "technology" itself, or the actual stuff of technology: machines. He agrees that technocracy is bad, but asks: is there, in the FE's view, any such thing as "appropriate technology," meaning appropriate machines? The FE answers basically by saying: We are against technocracy. This is what I mean by sidestepping.

Why the reluctance on the FE's part to answer this question? The answer, I believe, has to do with a larger question which Ron also raised in his letter, though not as clearly as he might have. This has to do with "program," with ideas about both where we should be headed and how we might be able to get there. The FE has said that some of its critics are unable to think outside the context of a program.

However, an underlying question (perhaps the underlying question) in Ron's letter (and no doubt in the criticisms of many of these other critics) is that: Is the FE able to think inside the context of a program? There is a point beyond which analysis of badness ceases to be done for its practical value in helping us move forward and becomes instead a narcissistic pursuit. FE's "endless" analysis of badness accompanied by so little analysis of how the knowledge contained therein can be applied to present activities makes many of us wonder whether or not it has gone beyond this point. Where should we be headed, and how might we get there from here? If "the living tissue of community" is what we should want, how might it now be created on a large scale? What do the lessons of "primitive" societies teach us to do now in the present overpopulated world? What place would appropriate technology (if such a thing exists) have in a more ideal society, and what place does it have in attempts to move towards one?

It's possible to avoid all these kinds of questions, but I see no point in doing so.

David Hillman
Portland, Oregon

Do Odious Tasks

Dear Fifth Estate,

A number of times, the last time in Maple's reply to Hayley, you assume that nobody would like to go into a mine if they had a real choice, or nobody would spend some free afternoon on some assembly line, etc. Now, I'm not too sure of that. I'm not sure whether I would outright deny that assumption, but I'm not sure I would agree with it. The reason is I can imagine, I think, situations in which I would willingly do some things that in the present context are odious, oppressive tasks. For example, post-technological tribes are emerging, learning to live on the

junk of the present. Our group has settled close to what used to be a coal mine. Winters are cold and long, so we use whatever we can find for fuel. Some of us, when the urge hits us, go down to get out some coal. We pile it up outside and whoever needs some, takes some.

Another thing you said in that reply bothers me. You (or whoever) appears to say that just because you critique technological and industrial society does not mean that you affirm primitivism or anything else. What do you affirm? Your critique sometimes has the feel of a radical religious critique in that it appears to reject the present completely without finding a single spot of ground on which one can stand in order to change it. Thus the present becomes hopelessly contaminated and beyond redemption. The religious critique offers the blessings of post-mortem joys and you offer nothing, but with respect to the present you are on equal footing. In the end, both are conservative because both have no reasons for changing one's life. As I said, your critique sometimes appears to be open to such a charge. (I'm being careful so as to avoid your scathing comments.) So my question is: What about the present do you affirm? Where do you, for yourselves, locate the seeds that can grow and burst forth into new social life?

In (off and on) solidarity,

M. Logan

Fredonia, New York

E. B. Maple Responds: Trying to avoid scathing comments are you? Actually, letters like the two preceding ones always puzzle me. I assume that reading this publication means their authors have an abiding interest in anti-authoritarian ideas, that they hate the political state as well as its functionaries, so why are we always asked to take up the role of politicians and describe the wallpaper in the dining room of the decentralized, communal village? Would they actually feel better if we had a program, even though we have said continually that all programs, by their nature of emanating from a central source outward to the "masses," are inherently authoritarian and conservative? Do they really want us to make a laundry list of what machines we will allow after the revolution?

Rather than asking us questions, why don't the two of you tell us what you affirm and how you think we might "get from here to there" or even what you think "there" is? Please do us a favor and read our staff box on page two; really, we mean it—we're a group of friends putting out this paper, not a political group or organizing center or "voice" of anyone other than ourselves and don't want to be.

There's almost an "If you're so smart, how come you're not rich" flavor to both letters. Although Michael's ideas of living on the junk of the present and David's final questions are good ones, let us be the first to admit that we don't have the answers to the problems which confront all of us. We hope we're involved in an intellectual process that shreds the mystification of this society and leads us to begin the kind of assertive actions in the real world in which all of the questions you both pose will be answered.

Until then, all dreams are accepted. You tell me yours and I'll tell you mine, but please, no programs!

Bob B. responds: While several of the questions raised by David Hillman and M. Logan have been treated before in the pages of the FE, they are asked again and again by our readers. It's often hard to know whether we are failing to make ourselves clear, or whether the questioners simply missed previous discussions of these issues. Whatever the case, the persistence with which these questions are raised is sufficient justification for trying once more to answer them.

David Hillman is quite right to point out that I erred in attributing to Ron Haley the position that women have always and completely been enslaved by patriarchy. I presumptuously assumed that Ron's examples of pre-capitalist barbarities were meant to illustrate the argument that only with the Enlightenment and capitalist society have people (especially women) discovered the realm of freedom. Although I am still unsure what Ron was trying to say, I concede that this is not necessarily what he meant.

However, I still stand by my previous statement that Ivan Illich is not arguing that women's oppression dates from the rise of capitalism. My impression is that he confines himself to stating that women's lives were diminished and degraded in unprecedented ways by industrialization. Without romanticizing or wishing to return to peasant communities, I think it is still possible to distinguish just what women (and all people) lost in the transition to modern society. Hence the link to Elshtain: her argument was that, all "theory" aside, she could see in her grandmother (who grew up in a supposedly rigid and oppressive—from the perspective of the modern sensibility—peasant community) a strength of character and anti-capitalist conviction missing in most of her contemporaries.

Doubtless Elshtain romanticizes a bit herself, but her point remains: what is it that is overlooked by those who indiscriminately characterize traditional communities as oppressive of the individual?

As Elshtain reminds us, and as every libertarian should know, most radical social movements have been undertaken by people who either lived in or retained a strong memory of community. Such people have believed that they were defending (or returning to) a way of life superior to that which was encroaching upon them. It's irrelevant that in some cases people's memories were selective, that they created the myth of a golden age out of their collective past—those memories and ideals gave them the emotional sustenance and vitality necessary to resist power. This is no more obvious than in the case of Spanish anarchism, which flourished among small villages in rural Spain and among industrial workers who had not yet been subjected to the culture-shattering experience, over several generations, of forced industrial labor, and who consequently retained memories of pre-industrial life. In fact, it would not be far wrong to state that the closer their proximity to non-industrial societies, the greater a people's ability to resist and rebel.

Hillman complains that I sidestep the question of whether there exists such a thing as “appropriate technology.” If by this he means do there exist forms of technics that humans can understand and control, rather than being controlled by them, the answer is: yes, appropriate technology exists. But this is only half the question. The other half is: appropriate to what? While I'm all in favor of experiments in small-scale technics, no-till farming, and the like, it seems to me that to place such practical questions at the center of our discourse limits us in subtle ways.

As E.B. Maple reasons, such a focus is potentially authoritarian and almost certainly conservative (in the bad sense). It can also be downright banal, as was the absurd blueprint in a recent issue of *Synthesis* calling for the formation of locally, regionally, and continentally federated communes comprising exactly 1500 (if memory serves) people. The manner by which this figure is arrived at presumably represents the author's liking for symmetry rather than actual consideration of conditions in various localities and regions.

But such a focus also encourages the assumption—widespread in our hyper-rational and instrumental environment—that all social problems are amenable to technical/practical solutions. (This attitude infects most of those who march under the banner of appropriate technology.) These people promote their hobbyhorse as a panacea, completely oblivious to the fact that capitalism is also interested in developing and promoting appropriate technologies and lifestyles.

Preoccupation with practical/technical matters is itself a kind of program, screening out other desires that are fighting to surface: the need to confront the state, the need to live exuberantly and harmoniously with each other and the rest of the natural world. Although not mutually exclusive, the realm of desire must be allowed to fully emerge before practical questions can be worked out in their entirety.

To be sure, the most radical currents in the anarchist, feminist, and ecology movements partake in some measure of these concerns. Let's not circumscribe their desires with ill-conceived, necessarily flawed attempts at totalization. The materials free people choose to fashion will reflect how they choose to live—and this is not strictly a practical question.

Review Anti-Semitic?

Dear Comrades at the FE:

I wish to take profound exception to E.B. Maple's “review” (an essay, really) “Three Books on Israel,” published in FE #313, Summer 1983. Comrade Maple's essay leaves much to be desired as an “anarchist analysis” of the Middle Eastern reality, and seems to fall into the current marxist fadism which forsakes an internationalist perspective here as elsewhere in an effort to gain favor with emergent Third World nationalist movements, however reactionary. Barely half a paragraph makes a gesture at criticism of the raving reactionary nationalism so transparently obvious within the PLO—at least as reactionary as the rightist zionist parties, and, while seemingly endless abuse is heaped with hindsight on the pre-war zionist efforts to ransom, smuggle or steal away as many Jews from Nazi Europe as possible in advance of the coming holocaust (termed “venal collaboration” by Maple), not one word is mentioned of the strong and close outright collaboration between Nazi Germany and Arab nationalists of that time in general and the Palestinian leadership in particular.

Practically every anti-imperialist group in the world of that period from Anwar Sadat and the Egyptian nationalists to the Irish Republican Army were talking to the Nazis during the period when Germany's British enemies still maintained imperialist rule over a substantial portion of the globe. Obviously, also, the motivation of Jewish groups of the time, Zionist or otherwise, were somewhat different than, say, the IRA, on the eve of the destruction of European Jewry when virtually no existing nation-state wanted an influx of Jews, including this country.

In his efforts to condemn Zionism, Maple even stoops to condemning or at least dismissing the kibbutzim of Israel as "socialist trappings" though all students of libertarian communism know that, with the exception of a few scattered experiments such as Twin Oaks in Virginia and possibly the Gandhian-inspired village system in (thoroughly statist and militarist) India, the kibbutzim, particularly those affiliated with the radical Zionist left party Mapam, constitute the closest approximation to pure non-coercive communism in the world today. But "reviews" like that of Comrade Maple, so typical of the authoritarian left press, always seem to omit mention that there even is a radical Zionist left, committed at least in theory to a class analysis of the Middle East, rather than a religious or nationalist analysis.

The truth is, that an anarchist critique of Zionism as such must rest on the foundation of opposition to statism, period. Israel has an admirable system of free communes. Israel is proportionately the most solar nation in the world. Israel's union federation has the closest thing to participatory democracy in the shop of any labor federation in the world, and, considering that Israel's total population is only a little larger (Arab and Jewish) than the city I live in, it has a model "town hall" democracy in its parliament...

BUT ISRAEL IS A STATE, and anarchists are and should be opposed to any and all states, be they imperialist giants like the U.S. and the "Soviet" union, or client states like Israel, or third world nations like Libya or Nigeria. Arguments about "who is indigenous to Palestine" are of only historical interest; manifestly both Arabs and Jews have long histories there.

Arguments about expansionism, atrocities and abuses of individuals and groups by the state should ring a bit differently in anarchist ears; we do not expect—in fact, assume that all nation states will commit atrocities, will abuse liberty and will tend to engage in expansionist wars? Israel is certainly no exception. By its structure and past actions, the PLO gives no indication that, were it to come to power, it would act any different...

What bothers me is that, in meeting this ugly truth about our enemy, the State, from an anarchist-internationalist perspective all this is to be expected, but it seems that, in the eyes of some including Comrade Maple, "some are more equal than others" and somehow the predictable statist abuses of "the Jewish state" are condemned somewhat disproportionately... This is what disturbs and alarms me most about Maple's essay and others current along similar lines. One should not leap to hasty conclusions about anti-Semitism, latent or otherwise in such cases, but any enemy of bigotry should always at least raise a cautionary note when the behavior of one group seems judged by a "different standard" than the general run of humanity, and Comrade Maple makes a number of disturbing observations.

For example, he tends to blur the line between criticising Israel and criticising Jews. He says that, "one winces at the upper middle class and wealthy suburban addresses these (American) Zionist apologists sign. Begin and Sharon have allowed them to shed the uncomfortable liberalism Jews have worn for so long..." "Uncomfortable liberalism"? "Wealthy suburban addresses"? One winces, indeed. For better or worse, as far as I can tell, pro-Zionist feelings among American Jews is not confined to any particular economic strata.

And shades of Comrade Emma, what the HELL is this bit about "uncomfortable liberalism"? Broad Jewish participation in various progressive movements including our own is one of the few clear facts known about American Radicalism in the past and today. If there is any discomfort of any sort today among American radicals of Jewish background, it is at least largely due to comments like Maple's ill-considered arguments. Again, one begins to wonder whether we are talking about the state of Israel or the Jewish people.

Peace, Solidarity and World Revolution,

Spider Rainbow

Atlanta

E.B. Maple replies: Spider Rainbow has distributed the *Fifth Estate* in the Deep South, along with many other anti-authoritarian publications, through his SRAF-affiliated affinity group, RAAG. He also publishes *Circle A* in Atlanta, Post Office Box 77326, Atlanta GA 30309. He has our gratitude for the former and our admiration for the latter.

It was at first difficult for me to understand Spider's intense anger at my "review" or essay if he prefers, but I think the nub of it lies in his charge of anti-Semitism. It seems strange to have to defend oneself from such a charge in a publication like ours, but in many ways no more so than from his other somewhat hysterical accusations of "marxist fadism" and the like.

Since I believe that anti-Semitism continues to exist in the world in a virulent form and it is something for radicals to be concerned with, let me repeat the point I was trying to make in hopes of presenting it unambiguously. I was trying to say that when people become captives of reactionary nationalism, it affects their entire world view.

I think this has become true of many U.S. Jews regarding their support for Israel regardless of their class (as Spider says), and that Zionism has caused a generalized trend toward de-liberalization within the Jewish community. In many ways I was motivated to write the "review" after witnessing two people I know leave radical activity for a politics defined solely by a defense of Israel and its Likud leadership.

In terms of middle-class and wealthy Jews, my point was that previously, as a group, they exhibited a disproportionately high degree of liberal sentiments for their social class, but that the Middle East events of the last year have created the context for a rightward shift in the totality of their social views to a position more consistent with their economic status. This includes support for Reagan's aggressive Middle Eastern strategies and for the U.S. military as the ultimate protector of Israel, but also, as I said, the shedding of traditional liberal positions such as racial equality.

Again, this is consistent with their social class, but not with the Jewish tradition. Black leaders of the 20th anniversary March on Washington this August expressed disappointment at the relatively small number of Jewish organizational endorsements for the event, compared to the original one two decades ago.

So, in that manner I was not trying to make a separation between Israel and Jews who support its bloody policies. But why, asks Spider, single out Israel for special abuse in a world of equally vicious nation states? Two reasons: 1) Israel plays a crucial role as the lynchpin of the U.S. empire's Middle East policies, and 2) because of the successful mystification Israel has been able to erect about itself among not only the general public, but even extending to some leftists and anarchist.

Among many radicals of Jewish background (from the soppy, barely concealed pro-Zionist writings of Sam and Esther Dolgoff to Spider's meticulous listing of Israel's "good" points) one realizes how extremely difficult it is for them to sever the emotional ties to a process which would have forever ended the Diaspora.

It's as though they almost ache to embrace Israel, to have a home, to leave their status as "rootless cosmopolitans," but the grotesque reality of Israel rains down upon them in a sad torrent making it impossible to do. One senses the feeling in them that when Jews, Europe's traditional victims, emerge as the tormentors of others, acting out the worst travesties that the Gentile nations once wreaked upon them, it becomes a shandah, a disgrace, on not just Israel, but on all Jews.

So please, they beg, don't mention the litany of horrors that Israel perpetrates—it will only make the world hate the Jews all the more. Suffice it to say that I don't think this is what causes anti-Semitism and in this case I think the shoe is on the other foot: It is Spider who wants special treatment for Israel by choosing to ignore Israel's special role within the American Empire, and it is those Jewish radicals refusing to make a clean break with Zionism who encourage the association of all Jews with its racist and reactionary ideology.

Just a few other points: Firstly, we have so often condemned national liberation movements in general and the PLO in particular in these pages that it seemed almost redundant to have to do so again. Besides, it was a review of three books on Israel, not of the Mufti of Palestine's maneuvering with the Nazis or of Arafat's statist intentions.

Secondly: I did not want to go too deeply into the question of the kibbutzim because they rate an essay in themselves, but since Spider raises the point, let me make a few remarks. I said "socialist trappings" because in modern Israel, that's what they are. No one with any sense alleges that Israel has a socialist economy. For those who choose to see no further than its agricultural communes, Israel's kibbutzim serve to disguise the capitalist nature of the country's economy, and to provide the illusion of participating in a system of production separate from "normal" capitalist forms of work. However, regardless of what the internal structure of the kibbutzim was or is and regardless of the high idealism which often is expressed by participants in the kibbutz movement, it cannot be separated from Israel's history, something apparently Spider would be pleased if we would all ignore. The authors of Our

Roots Are Still Alive, one of the books which was reviewed last issue, state: “The ‘equality’ of the kibbutz was for Jews only,” and relate how each kibbutz was also a military base for the Zionist Haganah army

But if Spider doesn’t like history, the rather recent past doesn’t fare very well for the kibbutz to be respected either. In that regard I find it more than curious that Spider would cite Mapam as an example of the radical Zionist left of which there most assuredly is in Israel, but all of whom accept the continuance of the state of Israel as a precondition of their politics. There are also a number of marxist and marxist-leninist formations which are anti-Zionist and call for region-wide revolution and reconciliation with the Palestinians. Mapam, which was one of the major parties of the ruling Labor Party coalition, and which supported every Israeli war, occupation and annexation, is certainly not one of them.

The Israeli Socialist Organization, in its paper *Matzpen* (and reprinted by RAAG’s umbrella organization, SRAF), described Mapam in a 1971 pamphlet thusly: “Mapam’s traditional role has been to ‘sell’ Zionism to left-wing circles around the world” They have apparently been at least partially successful with Spider, if not on selling the concept of the state, then at least on selling their mystification of Israel’s white settler institutions. Here’s *Matzpen* from the same pamphlet describing Mapam’s kibbutzim which Spider exalts: “Let us mention their (Mapam’s) kibbutzim—e.g. Bar’am—which are founded on land confiscated from Arab peasants, who although being citizens, were disposed to make room for these Zionist settlements. “One wonders what “all students of libertarian communism” would say about such a startling revelation.

Regarding the Israeli union federation, Histadrut, *Our Roots Are Still Alive* describes them thusly: “The leaders of ‘Labor Zionism’ were the strongest supporters of Jewish separatism. They founded the exclusively Jewish trade union, the Histadrut in 1920. It rapidly became the spearhead of anti-Palestinian activity...As the Jewish colony grew in the 1920s, so did the strength of Labor Zionism and the boldness of its actions. Members of the Histadrut picketed and stood guard at Jewish orchards to prevent Arab workers from getting jobs. Squads of activists stormed through market places, pouring kerosene on tomatoes grown in Arab gardens or smashing eggs that Jewish housewives might purchase from Arab merchants.” When these actions are combined with the Histadrut slogan of “Jewish Land, Jewish Labor, Jewish Produce,” is it really too cynical to suggest a parallel with the Nazis in the next decade?

Another commonly held myth is the one repeated here that the Zionist leadership attempted to “steal away as many Jews from Nazi Europe as possible in advance of the coming holocaust” Nothing could be farther from the truth, and this is certainly not even what the Zionists themselves claimed at the time.

Regarding immigration to Palestine during the 1930s: What a German Zionist official termed the “cruel criteria of Zionism” was invoked to allow only a certain stratum of German Jews to reach Palestine. Most German Jews were simply not wanted there even after Kristallnacht in 1938, when the worst abuses of the Nazis were beginning to take shape.

Chaim Weizmann, head of the World Zionist Organization, in a 1934 report to that body, stated that those Who “were over 30, and possess no capital cannot be absorbed into Palestine...” During the middle 1930s, two-thirds of the German Jews who applied for immigration were turned down in favor of “qualified” American, British and other nationalities of non-threatened Jews.

In late 1938, after Kristallnacht, the British—colonial masters of Palestine—proposed expanding Jewish immigration, but were opposed by David Ben-Gurion at a meeting of Labor Zionist leaders. He stated: “If I knew that it would be possible to save all the (Jewish) children of Germany by bringing them to England, and only half of them by transporting them to Eretz Israel, then I would opt for the second alternative.” Israel was important, not the Jewish people.

I referred to the Ha’avara Transfer Agreement worked out between the Labor Zionists in Palestine and the Nazi government as “venal collaboration” because the adjective is an apt one, i.e., “Capable of betraying one’s honor, duty, or scruples, for a price; corruptible.” I don’t know what else to term an arrangement which on the one hand breaks a worldwide Jewish boycott of German goods, and on the other permits wealthy German Jews to buy their way into Palestine via cooperation with the Nazis at the expense of their poorer neighbors.

So great was the influx of Nazi-laundered German Jewish capital that between 1933 and 1939, 60% of all investment was from that source and meant that Palestine was one of the few regions not to suffer economically during the Depression. Even the fascist wing of Zionism, the Jabotinskyites, found the deal so abhorrent that one of their members assassinated a leading Labor Zionist official in 1933 who was one of those negotiating with the Nazis.

(One of the Jabotinskyite alumni, Itzak Shamir, as part of the Stern Gang, later tried to cut a deal with the Nazis, somewhat on the order of the IRA, but was turned down by the Germans.)

In closing, let me quote Stanley Diamond, the poet and anthropologist, who in the July 23, 1983 issue of *The Nation* (See “Jewish State, State of Jewishness”) defines Nazism in a way that can be applied no less to modern Israel and to the Jews who support it: “... the rallying of the people from the top down, the elaborate signals, the commanding signs of pseudo-integration (as opposed to symbolic reciprocity)—all reveal the frustrations of a civilized people hunting for meaning and inevitably failing, using the machinery of the state and falling victim to the state.” I’m sure Spider agrees with this no less than I do; the rest we can continue to disagree about.

fifth Estate

Various Authors
Letters
1983

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