NOTE BY MOSHE COHEN

The essay "Eretz Yisrael in our Program and Tactics" is an excerpt from an address delivered in Kiev, September 1917. The excerpt was taken from the minutes of the conference by S. Har.

After the Kerensky revolution Borochov left America to attend the Conference of the Holland-Scandinavian Socialist Committee in Stockholm. He was then also invited by the Russian Poale Zion to attend its Third Conference. In accepting the invitation, Borochov wrote to the Central Committee of the Russian Poale Zion that he had heard that the Russian Party had turned Bolshevik, whereas he himself was still a Social-Democrat. The Central Committee informed him that the rumors were exaggerated, and that many things would be clarified upon his return. As S. Har writes: "It seems that his fears were not without cause. There existed a chasm between Borochov and his Russian comrades (Borochov had been away from Russia for ten years), not so much with reference to his general views, as to his Jewish views which he expressed in his literary and Party activities in America."

Borochov came to the convention and delivered this famous address. To the young reader it may seem to contain nothing revolutionary. But a thorough study of Borochov's earlier theories will reveal the profound change that had occurred within him.

With the exception of his unrealistic stand on the Jewish National Fund and the Zionist Congress, Borochov formulated a new orientation. (The symptoms of this orientation were visible in almost all of Borochov's writings during the World War.) The new terminology which he employed gave expression not only to Borochov the thinker, but also to Borochov the man of sentiment. Therein he proclaimed his faith in the Jewish cooperative colonization movement; he proclaimed anew the belief in Jewish Nationalism. Whereas formerly he had contended that we go to Palestine not only because of our historic and cultural ties with that land but chiefly because of the pressure of objective forces, he now proclaimed as a justifiable motivating force our desire and longing for a Jewish National Home. Eretz Israel (the land of Israel), unlike Palestine, is not only our "strategic base" but is our National Home. "We must not hesitate to proclaim loudly 'Jewish Nation'," he said. "When we say 'Jewish Nation' we know that it has existed even before the class division in modern society. We also know that the proletariat at one time will constitute the nation and that the working class is the one that creates the nation." How similar that is to Ben Gurion's maxim, mimaamad l'am (from class to nation!)

The effects of the speech are revealed in the following description written by S. Har: "The speech made a very strong impression and was received with great enthusiasm by most of the delegates at the convention... Among the leaders, however, there reigned confusion. Some of the leaders combated the new revolutionary orientation, quoting ancient statements from Borochov's own teachings. In the midst of these polemics, many phrases were flung: 'Borochov has betrayed his own theory'; 'we do not accept the new Borochov'; 'we believe in the theory of the old one!'"
Through Borochov was successful in persuading the convention to adopt his point of view, the further developments of the Russian Poale Zion widened the schism that existed between the followers of the old Borochov and the adherents of the author of "Eretz Yisrael in Our Program and Tactics."

Speech

TIME IN its flight has not passed us by; it has brought to the fore new slogans and deeds. Some twelve years ago, our Party, the Poalei Tsiyon, made its first appearance as an organized body. Since then, the proletariat in general and the Jewish proletariat in particular here advance.

Hitherto the proletariat sought to remove only its immediate obstacles; now, it strives to create a new society. Our program, too, must keep pace with our growing aspirations.

Our terminology must be made richer and more elastic. Formerly, we approached life in general from a naïve, abstract point of view, and only our immediate demands were prompted by purely realistic conditions. Now, however, there have arisen in Jewish life cultural and aesthetic needs which demand immediate self-expression.

Socialism has several aspects. Economically, it means the socialization of the means of production; politically, the establishment of the dictatorship of the toiling masses; emotionally, the abolition of the reign of egotism and anarchy which characterizes the capitalistic system.

And so it is with Zionism. Economically, it means the concentration of the Jewish masses in Palestine; politically, the gaining of territorial autonomy; emotionally, the striving for a home.

Recent times have witnessed a desire on our part to give expression to these emotions. And we need not fear what our neighbors will say...

Twelve years ago, we clung to the epigram "Better a Jew without a beard than a beard without a Jew." Then we did not attach any significance to form and to the aesthetic aspects of life. It had to be that way, for then our battle was fought on two fronts: the Bundist [1] and the General Zionist. [2] Lest we be confused with the latter we had to be cautious in our terminology. But even them we did not fear non-Kosher terms. Our program of that time always employed the term "Jewish Nation."[3]

But times have changed. The difference between our Party and the others is sufficiently clear. No one will mistake our identity. It is therefore an opportune time to introduce a newer and richer terminology. Now we can and must employ an emotional terminology. Now we can and must proclaim: "Eretz Yisrael [4] — a Jewish home!"

Our chief concern, however, is our program. The class interests of the Jewish proletariat remain unchanged. Our ultimate aim is Socialism; our immediate need is Zionism. The class struggle is the means to achieve both.

Our class struggle, however, is an abnormal one. It is largely thwarted by the prevailing conditions under which our people live and by the national struggle — the conflict
between the forces of production and the conditions of production, as I have outlined elsewhere.[5]

In the past, the international Socialist proletariat was weak. It was not interested in foreign policy nor in the national problem. But times have changed. The Socialist conferences in Zimmerwald and Stockholm indicate a new epoch in the struggle of the world proletariat. But does the Jewish worker keep pace with these new trends? In spite of his enthusiasm and tremendous revolutionary energy, the Jewish worker exerts but little influence. He is as impotent as the rock-bound Prometheus. This tragic plight compels him to demand a home for the Jewish people. This home will serve as a strategic base for the creative efforts of the Jewish worker in all fields of human endeavor.

Years ago we said: Zionism is a stychic [natural, objective, or dynamic] process.[6] Our only task is to remove all the obstacles which interfere with this process. And we left the creative work to the bourgeois Zionists.

There are two types of natural processes: the mechanical and the organic.[7] We erred formerly when we contended that natural emigration waves are already under way. General Zionists were closer to the truth when they said that for the present only the organic process had begun. It is clear now that what motivated our previous mechanical conception was our reaction to the Zionists’ assertion that the will [8] of our nation is the sole determining factor in Zionism.

Our experiments in Palestine have taught us a new lesson. Colonization in Palestine is an especially difficult task. But in spite of the difficulties and temporary failures, colonization in Palestine is developing and is gradually approaching the Socialist ideal. I refer, of course, to the co-operatives [9] and particularly to those pursuing the Oppenheimer [10] plan. Co-operative colonization is which the Jewish worker plays a very great role is also the way to a Socialist society in Palestine. While this colonization is not in itself Socialism, it does teach the Jewish proletariat the elementary lessons of self-help.

Small as the Yishuv [11] is, the Jews enjoy an autonomous life and have their own courts, post-offices, and banking system.[12] Jewish labor has gradually become enrooted even in such a small Yishuv. The Jewish working class is not as yet large; it nevertheless plays a prominent role. Its organizations and institutions, such as the Hashomer [13] and the "Palestine Workers’ Fund",[14] are publicly recognized.

It is important to note that Palestine is a semi-agrarian country, and hence it is adapted to the Jewish city-bred immigrant. Palestine is the cynosure of all Jewish eyes — its every activity commands the attention of friend and foe. In the last analysis this is the best guarantee for Palestine’s proper development.

Many point out the obstacles which we encounter in our colonization work. Some say that the Turkish law hinders our work, others contend that Palestine is insignificantly small, and still others charge us with the odious crime of wishing to oppress and expel the Arabs from Palestine.[15]

According to the latest investigations (for example, Ben Zvi’s), Palestine’s boundaries include some eighty or ninety thousand square kilometers, a land capacity sufficient to hold tens of millions of inhabitants. But even in its present limited boundaries, Palestine’s
twenty-seven thousand square kilometers can accommodate up to nine million people, whereas now it is even short of a half-million. It is understood, of course, that the Turkish rule and the prevailing system will cease. The War will create a change.

When the waste lands are prepared for colonization, when modern technique is introduced, and when the other obstacles are removed, there will be sufficient land to accommodate both the Jews and the Arabs. Normal relations between the Jews and Arabs will and must prevail.

I repeat that we must originate independent activities in Palestine. We cannot merely content ourselves, as we have done until now, with the work of bourgeois Zionists and with our critical attitude towards it.

We must define anew our stand towards the various Zionist institutions. We cannot participate in the Zionist Congress [16] as long as it is a Party tribunal. We will, however, participate in a World Jewish Congress because it will be a national tribute, having a semi-parliamentary status.

We are sympathetic to the Jewish National Fund,[17] and as individuals we may even give it our support. But our official fund is the Palestine Workers’ Fund, which deserves our full support. Similarly, we must support the co-operative colonization movement.

In short, we must initiate a Socialist program of activities in Palestine. Then the Jewish worker, like the rock-bound Prometheus, will free himself from the vultures that torture him and will snatch the heavenly fires for himself and the Jewish people.

NOTES:

[1] General Jewish Workers Alliance, the Bund was organized in 1897. At first it was affiliated with the Russian Social-Democratic Party but withdrew after the 1903 Congress rejected nationality sections. The Bund embraced workers’ groups in Russia, Poland and Lithuania. Carried out propaganda in Yiddish. The Bund’s basic tenet is that Jewish problem must await the advent of Socialism, which will automatically solve it. Hence, considers Jewish problem to be of sectional rather than international importance. Opposed to territorialism and particularly to Zionism.

[2] In the beginning of the Zionist movement, General Zionism was the main force embracing bourgeois as well as liberal elements. Nowadays, General Zionism is divided into two main groups: Group A includes the progressive and pro-labor Zionists; Group B, the reactionary, anti-labor elements.

[3] In the earlier periods of the Jewish Socialist and Labor movements which were affected by cosmopolitan thought and phraseology, the term "Jewish Nation" was avoided. Kautsky’s volume, Are Jews a Race?, is also characteristic of this cosmopolitan outlook on the Jewish people. Assimilation and Reform-Judaism agreed upon and created an ideological philosophy that Jews are a religious group and not a nation.
Literally, Land of Israel. For the same reason as in [2], the term "Eretz Yisrael" was taboo; also because of the religious, historical and sentimental connotations. Even today the Yiddish daily, The Forward, which has of late accepted a positive attitude toward Zionism and Eretz Yisrael, still avoids the use of "Eretz Yisrael." Instead it always refers to it as "Palestina."

[5] In his essays "Our Platform" and "The National Question and the Class Struggle."

[6] The concept stychic process is found in all his major writings. In fact, this concept constitutes a basic element of Borochov's theory. The word stychic is derived from the Greek meaning "order." In religious literature this concept is frequently used to denote the elements of nature operating in the cosmos. In Russian Marxian and in sociological literature, the concept denotes processes which are not within the sphere of man's consciousness and will.

In his earlier writings, Borochov contended that the immigration of Jews into Palestine and their concentration in it will come about not solely because of our Zionist aspirations or because of Jewry's sentimental attachments to its old home, but primarily because of the natural, objective, or dynamic tendencies of life which force the Jew to immigrate into Palestine.

A. Revusky, in his article, "Ber Borochov and Present Jewish Realities" (The Pioneer Woman Magazine, February 1936), explains the concept as follows:

There is no better example of a stychic process than the present Jewish immigration into Palestine, where individuals from different countries, each driven by his own misery, form a great mass force, molding a new commonwealth out of chaos. Germany with its barbaric Hitlerism; Poland with its economic crusade against Jewish existence; Yemen with its medieval persecutions — all are aspects of the same acute Jewish problem. They are creating a desperate demand for a new haven of refuge. In other countries where the attacks on Jewish positions are proceeding at a slower pace, large sections of the Jewish population are being up-rooted every year; and many others, threatened by extinction, are in dire need of a secure haven. All this helps to broaden the stychic process of Jewish immigration to Palestine and to lend it tremendous momentum.

The phenomenon of the present Palestine immigration, over-flooding the facilities of organized Zionism and always meeting greater restrictions imposed on it by the present mandatory rulers of the country, is exactly the kind of stychic process anticipated by Borochov thirty years ago. Though it cannot be denied that it is the stychic process, it does not imply inactivity. It is not to be confused with fatalism. Any interpretation which is guilty of such confusion is based on malice or lack of understanding. As Borochov himself repeatedly stated, processes that are taking pace in a human environment are of the organic kind. They do not exclude organized activity of individuals. Quite the contrary, this organized pioneering activity is strongly spurred by the conviction that is much more than a product of multiple individual whims, that it is basically rooted in a strong historical necessity.
This thesis was accepted by certain factions in the Socialist-Zionist movement, and rejected or minimized by others. It is not the task of the editor to solve this age-old philosophical battle, which of the two — man’s will or circumstances—operates as the determining factor in our social life. The history of the immigration movement into Palestine contains in its records both the human material whose driving force to Palestine was Hitler, and the heroic movement of the Second Aliya (“immigration stream” during the period 1905-1914) which had the choice of emigrating to America or Palestine but voluntarily chose the latter.

[7] By "organic process" is meant that process which is directed by man’s consciousness and free will. By "mechanical process" is meant those forces which operate apart from man’s efforts.

[8] The assertion made by some that Borochov was a thorough materialist is questionable in the light of his later writings of which the following citation is characteristic:

Men, at different times, have in their own way envisioned "the days to come." Some envisioned it through the power of prophecy; others, at a later period, envisioned it through mystical ecstasy; and still later, others have envisioned it by cabbalistic calculations. The great revolutionists of England and France have by means of their "common sense" and "mathematical proof" predetermined that "day to come." Marx did it on the basis of his "historic necessity," concentration of capital, and the laws of proletarianization. In my opinion, all were correct; for after all, these predeterminations, whether made by mystics, logicians, or scientists, were guided by the powerful voice of man’s will. They dreamed because they wished, and all of them wished freedom, fraternity, and equality. Each conceived it differently in accordance with his particular terminology; yet, each desired the same. And today we witness the fact that the will for independence rules the world — that is the will of which it was said "where there is a will there is a way." ("The Hagada of a Freethinker," Die Warheit, April 8, 1917.)

[9] It will not be an historical error to state that the co-operative movement developed in spite of the ill-natured opposition or indifference of orthodox-Socialists, who regarded it as Utopian or even harmful to the cause of the "class struggle." Borochov, in his early years, did not look with great favor upon the co-operative movement, but in his later years he modified his views as this article indicates.

[10] Franz Oppenheimer, a German-Jewish economist, devised a plan for co-operative colonization in Palestine, the central idea being that the members of the colony be treated as ordinary workers under the guidance of experts. When the members of the colony have undergone the necessary training, they are to manage and administrate the work themselves. This experiment was first tried in Merchavia in 1909, having received the approval of the Ninth Zionist Congress of the same year.


[12] During the World War, the Jewish Community in Palestine had a monetary system of its own.
Hashomer was the name of a semi-professional organization of armed watchmen in pre-War Palestine which protected the Jewish colonies from thieves, plunderers and attackers. Its members were known as Shomrim (the Hebrew for guards — singular Shomer). In modern Palestine the Jewish colonies designate members for guard duty as well.

Established by the World Confederation of Poale Zion to extend aid to all organized workers in Palestine irrespective of political affiliation.

This is a charge often made by Communists and Arab reactionaries. Even the official government report of Palestine refuted the charges that Jews are responsible for allegedly landless Arabs.

Among the numerous schisms in the Poalei Tziyon movement (1905-1920) one occurred on the question of participation in the Zionist Congress. The "later" Borochov was an anti-Congressist. Some self-styled Borochovists (e.g. the left Poalei Tziyon) maintain to this very day the attitude that Socialists cannot and must not practice class collaboration. Since the Zionist Congress includes non-Socialist elements they contend that the proletariat cannot participate in it.

Borochov, in common with other, so-called orthodox Socialists, believed that institutions not created or solely controlled by the worker could not be considered his own. In the early stages of the Jewish National Fund, there were some Poale Zionists who opposed it or, at best, were indifferent to it. Today the Left Poalei Tziyon alone still cling to this anachronistic concept

Sources: Zionism and Israel Information Center