

**WHAT WE DID:**  
**The American Jewish Communist Left and the Establishment of the State of Israel**  
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Key dates to keep in mind:

**November 1946** – founding of the magazine, *Jewish Life*

**May 1947** – Gromyko speech in the UN

**November 1947** – UN resolution 181 (partition)

**May 1948** – Declaration of State of Israel/Nakba

**December 1948** – UN resolution 194 (right of refugees to return)

**Summary:** In the 1940s the U.S. Jewish communist left, consistent with its ideology and following the leadership of the Soviet Union, advocated that once the British gave up on its mandate that Palestine should be a single state with equal rights for all. In May 1947 the U.S.S.R. suddenly changed course and opened the door to partition and the creation of a Jewish State. How did the American Jewish communist community interpret this change in policy? How did it relate to the Jewish State and to the Palestinians? What lessons can be learned? To find the answers, I focus on *Jewish Life*, a monthly magazine closely associated with the Communist Party of the U.S.A. and the forerunner of today's *Jewish Currents*; its daily newspaper, the *Daily Worker*; and *Political Affairs*, its theoretical journal, from November 1946, the inaugural issue of *Jewish Life*, through 1949.

### **1. Introduction**

How did the Jewish communist left in the U.S. view the creation of the state of Israel? How did it act between November 1946 and December 1949--the key time period that included the partition of Mandate Palestine, “the war of independence” of the state of Israel (or, for Palestinians, known as “the Nakba,” the catastrophe), and the plight of Palestinian refugees? I wanted to know the answers to these questions—as a former civil rights worker in the 1960s South, a current Jewish activist in the Israel/Palestine movement, a red diaper baby, and faithful (though critical) daughter of the left<sup>2</sup> --that is, the grouping(s) dominated by the policies of the Communist Party U.S.A., which was very small but

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<sup>1</sup> With the inestimable research assistance of Shaina R. Low, J.D.

<sup>2</sup> Naturally, many groups consider themselves part of the left and may have had different approaches to Palestine, but none of them had the outreach of the CPUSA, and besides, this is the community I am familiar with. Hopefully there will be enterprising people associated with these organizations who will critique their own past.

influential beyond its numbers. All my identities merged and pushed me into a quest for answers. This paper is the result.

First, I need to say that I am proud of much of the history of the Communist Party USA: its organizing work in the 1930s; its pioneering role in organizing interracial unions during the Great Depression, its heroic participation in the Spanish Civil War; its courage fighting fascism during World War II; and the Party's constant, uncompromising struggle against racism.

In my teenage years I read almost everything I could about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, where the last vestiges of Polish Jewry, armed with only a few weapons, held off German army divisions for six hardly believable weeks before the ghetto was obliterated. I identified with these young fighters and often daydreamed about whether I would have had enough courage to be one of them.

I spent 20 years in the South, ten of them as a civil rights worker—five with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and five with the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF)—and I've been an activist in the Israel/Palestine movement for the past 16 years. I traveled to Israel and Palestine 10 times from 2002 through 2012. I was profoundly shocked and horrified during my first visit by what I saw and experienced in the West Bank and Gaza—and I still am.<sup>3</sup>

My parents were immigrants—Jewish, leftist, secular, non-Zionists who could speak Yiddish (though they almost always spoke English), and life-long followers of the Soviet Union. My father was particularly emotional about his politics: he felt that socialism, the Soviet experiment specifically, was a lifeline for the human race, and would end exploitation, poverty and racism. During World War II he obsessively followed the progress of the Red Army, hoping against hope that it would be our savior. (It

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<sup>3</sup> As an activist in the Israel/Palestine movement, I am a founding member of Jews Say No!; a volunteer for Jewish Voice for Peace; and a founding member of the board of the Friends of the Jenin Freedom Theatre, a group that supports a leading cultural resistance institution in the Jenin Refugee Camp, Palestine. Over the years I've written several articles and participated in panels, speaking engagements and at demonstrations on this subject. In 2015, along with three other Jewish civil rights veterans, I traveled to 13 colleges in six states on a tour sponsored by Open Hillel, which showed that the national Hillel organization banned Jewish speakers who were critical of Israel, no matter what their movement participation had been.

was.) Among the stories he told me as a child was that the Nazis had forced Jewish men to put “Israel” and Jewish women “Sarah” as middle names on their passports, despite their actual middle names, so that it would be easier to identify Jews for future registration (and, although they didn’t know it, death). It didn’t help that my mother’s name was Sara. (I saw examples of these passports for myself many years later in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.)

So while I don’t remember either of my parents being particularly thrilled in 1948 when the Jewish state was proclaimed, my father was grimly satisfied. He said, “They are calling it *Israel*.” I was 10 years old.

In 2017, while researching another project, I discovered a Jewish monthly magazine with close ties to the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) that had existed in this time period: *Jewish Life*, whose inaugural issue was in November 1946. (*Jewish Life* became *Jewish Currents*<sup>4</sup> in 1956 and altered some of its politics.) That date, November 1946, and that magazine, *Jewish Life*, became my starting points.

Realizing that since studying the magazine alone would be only part of the story, I consulted two other CPUSA publications: the *Daily Worker*, its daily newspaper; and *Political Affairs*, its theoretical journal, to get a full view of what the Party’s Middle East position was at the time.<sup>5</sup> The three publications shared both a point of view and many of the same writers.

A note here about language before I go further. The publications I studied used the word “Arab” to lump together all indigenous Palestinians with the people and governments of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and other nations, as if there were one huge “Arab” mass without national, historical or cultural distinctions. (This still happens today.) The Arabic language and culture also embraced many religions; hence there are Arab Christians, Arab Muslims and Arab Jews. Yet the publications erased these

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<sup>4</sup> Jewish Currents is still being published today and is now being edited by a group of young people who are transforming its content, outreach and appearance.

<sup>5</sup> I did not consult the CPUSA’s West Coast newspaper, *The People’s World*, or the *Morning Freiheit*, the Yiddish-language daily newspaper associated with the CPUSA (alas, I do not speak or read Yiddish) but I have no reason to think that either of them departed from the general line established by the CPUSA, although it is possible that the *Freiheit* might have approached the subject with more and different nuances.

distinctions, too. Rather than putting quotes around the word “Arab” every time it appears in this text, for clarity when I am referring to indigenous Palestinians I have chosen to use the term “Palestinian Arabs.”

## 2. *Setting the historical stage*

The inaugural issue of *Jewish Life* in November 1946 appeared a bare 15 months after the end of the cataclysmic Second World War, during which an estimated 50 to 80 million people, military and civilian, died. Two-thirds of European Jewry were exterminated; several European cities still lay partially in ruins; and hundreds of thousands of displaced persons (DPs) of all ethnicities were either in DP camps or roaming Europe in search of sanctuary, the doors closed to them by the United States and Europe. As a last resort, many thousands of Jewish DPs were trying to get to Palestine and running a gauntlet manned by the British, the imperialist power that was about to wash its hands of the colony it had controlled since 1920 and depart, leaving its future in question. The word “Holocaust” had yet to be used in common parlance. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, the population of Palestine in fall 1946 was 1,267,037 Palestinian Arabs and 543,000 Palestinian Jews, that is, two-thirds Palestinian Arabs and one-third Palestinian Jews.<sup>6</sup>

The communist community in the U.S was in the process of accepting the grim truth that the war-time coalition between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R—which it had hoped would bring about a peaceful world—was morphing into the Cold War. Local anti-communist sentiment was brewing and would be institutionalized on March 21, 1947, with President Truman’s Executive Order 9835, requiring that government employees be subject to loyalty oaths and background investigations—in other words, the start of what we now call McCarthyism.

## 3. *Jewish Life*

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<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-and-non-jewish-population-of-israel-palestine-1517-present>

When I first looked at *Jewish Life*, I found a magazine that was opposed to Zionism,<sup>7</sup> relying on the construct that Jews were a people but not a nation, encouraging instead the struggles of diaspora Jewish communities to achieve full equal rights and safety in the countries in which they lived. At the time, the standard communist definition of a nation was a group of people that had a common territory, language, economy and culture. The Jews, it was felt, did not satisfy all these conditions, but had enough of a common history and cultural characteristics to classify it as a people.

The readership of *Jewish Life* was based in the left-wing U.S. working-class Jewish world that had deep roots in Yiddish culture. It featured accounts of Jewish activities in various parts of the world, via reportage, analysis, fiction and poetry, and in its early years included the work of such cultural icons as Arthur Miller, Marc Chagall, and Ben Shahn.

The inaugural issue of *Jewish Life* in November 1946 made it abundantly clear that it supported a single democratic state with equal rights for Palestinian Arabs and Palestinian Jews. In addition to pointing at British imperialism as the main enemy, the magazine stated, “Only the blind among us, or such as are ready consciously to turn the Jewish people into a tool of imperialists and warmongers, will agree to support anything else but an independent Palestine in which both Jews and Arabs can live in peace and freedom.” To make sure that its readers had no doubt on the subject of equal rights in a new Palestine, the same article continued:

Partition would violate every single precept of democracy. . . and . . . there are some among us who seem to believe in Arab-Jewish unity but only on condition that the Arabs agree to the Zionist program in Palestine. This is no unity at all but a policy of sacrificing the interests of one people, the Arabs, to the interests of another people, our people, the Jews. And no Jewish-Arab unity can ever be achieved on the basis of sacrificing the interests of the Arabs to those of the Jews, or the interests of the Jews to those of the Arabs.

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<sup>7</sup> Almost every issue of *Jewish Life*—from its inaugural issue through 1949 at least, when this study ends—ran articles criticizing the Zionist institutions that governed the Yishuv (the Jewish community). In May 1949, a year after the birth of the state of Israel, the magazine published the first of what would be a four-part series, “Zionism and the State of Israel,” by Moses Miller (issues May 1949 through August), in which the CPUSA position was distinguished from Zionism, the latter being described as “bourgeois nationalism” and worse. (See especially *Jewish Life*, “Zionism and the State of Israel: I,” May 1949, p. 6, for the first of the four articles.)

<sup>8</sup> *Jewish Life*, November 1946, “Palestine: What is the Solution?”, Alexander Bittelman, p. 1.

To further illustrate the point, the magazine ran a photo in its January 1947 issue of people marching in Tel Aviv in a street demonstration holding signs in Hebrew that said, among other things: “For a Jewish-Arab Agreement! For a Jewish-Arab Democratic and Independent State!”<sup>9</sup>

Along with its no-nonsense rejection of partition and advocacy of a single state with equal rights for all, *Jewish Life* was none too happy with what was going on in the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine). Its ire was directed mainly at the Histadrut,<sup>10</sup> the Jewish Federation of Labor—or, more properly, in Hebrew, the “General Organization of Hebrew Workers in the Land of Israel”—for its exclusionary policies toward Palestinian Arabs. As delicately phrased by the Zionism and Israel Information Center,<sup>11</sup> Histadrut’s policy of Kibbush Avodah (in English, “conquest of labor”)

“had two meanings. The first was to return Jews to manual and agricultural work rather than trades and professions. The second was to prefer Jewish workers over Arabs in Jewish farms and industries in Palestine.”<sup>12</sup>

(In addition to its preferential jobs policy, Histadrut wouldn’t let Palestinian Arabs join the organization itself. This policy lasted from Histadrut’s founding in 1920 until 1959, 11 years after the state of Israel was established.<sup>13</sup>)

In fact, in 1947 a *Jewish Life* writer, Louis Harap, who was to be associated with the magazine and its descendant for more than 50 years, and remained throughout his life a featured player in left-wing Jewish circles, called Histadrut “jimcrow.” He wrote: “Unfortunately the Histadruth is itself a jimcrow organization and has thus played into the hands of the British divide and rule policy.”<sup>14</sup> More damning, he continued,

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<sup>9</sup> *Jewish Life*, January 1947, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Histadrut is described by Zachary Lockman as “[eventually] one of the Yishuv’s (and Israel’s) largest employers, monopolizing or dominating whole sectors of the economy while providing a broad range of social and cultural services as well as many new jobs.” (*Comrades and Enemies*, University of California Press, 1996, p. 54.) Note that the word Histadrut was variously spelled with and without a final “h.”

<sup>11</sup> Zionism & Israel Center defines itself as “part of a network of Web sites supporting fair play for Israel by providing basic facts and informed opinion.” <http://www.zionism-israel.com/about.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.zionism-israel.com/dic/Kibbush\\_Haavoda.htm](http://www.zionism-israel.com/dic/Kibbush_Haavoda.htm)

<sup>13</sup> *Comrades and Enemies*, Zachary Lockman (University of California Press, 1996), p. 359.

<sup>14</sup> *Jewish Life*, November 1947, “Britain Provoked Disunity in Palestine,” p. 21.

“Histadruth leaders have themselves on occasion threatened locals with expulsion if they cooperated with Arab unions in joint actions, as was the case in the joint strike at the Midgal Zader Quarries at Tel Aviv this year. Despite these threats of expulsion, the Jewish workers struck with the Arabs. . .”<sup>15</sup>

The word “jimcrow,” and the condition that it described, meant the kiss of death to anyone in these Jewish communist circles, and was considered the worst and most intolerable violation of human relations.

The segregation to which Harap objected was echoed by another *JL* contributor, Gabriel Baer , who wrote in the November 1947 issue that “. . .the majority of the Arab and Jewish workers at present still work and live separated.”<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. *November 1946 to May 1947*

In these six months, up to May 1947, *Jewish Life*, the *Daily Worker* and *Political Affairs* all sang the same song with only slight changes in the lyrics. To them, the main danger was Britain, the chief imperialist power in the Middle East; once it released control over Palestine, the Palestinian Jews and Palestinian Arabs would establish a state in which they would live together in peace and equality. *Jewish Life* cited the Communist Party of Palestine (CPP),<sup>17</sup> which called for “a progressive front against partition.”<sup>18</sup> The CPP had appealed to the UN to

. . . assist the peoples of Palestine in setting up a democratic Arab-Jewish state, based on an internationally guaranteed democratic constitution which provides complete equality of national rights for both Arabs and Jews, and secures full civic rights to all inhabitants of Palestine, irrespective of race, sex, creed or nationality.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> *Jewish Life*, November 1947, “Jewish and Arab Workers—Divided or United?,” Gabriel Baer, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> The history of the Communist Party of Palestine is dense and complicated and not within the scope of this paper, which concentrates on American communist publications. However, its past reveals the internal problems of attempting to organize a communist party within Palestine, and then, Israel. See, for example, *The Palestine Communist Party, 1919-1948*, Musa Budeiri (Haymarket Books, 1979); *Communism and Zionism in Palestine during the British Mandate*, Jacob Hen-Tov (Transaction Publishers, 2012); and *The Israeli Communist Party*, Dunia Nahas (St. Martin’s Press, 1976) for three differing looks at this difficult history.

<sup>18</sup> *Jewish Life*, February 1947, Esther Valenska, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Jewish Life*, April 1947, p. 31.

The *Daily Worker*, a favorite of my father's, was a feisty tabloid. It ran very short, very readable stories about everything it considered important--or everything it thought its readers might think was important: movie listings, the impending Cold War, celebrity marriages and divorces, film reviews, advertisements for dress patterns, sports, bathing beauties, strikes, infamous anti-labor laws like Taft-Hartley, crime, and the growing anti-Communist crusades. (Its sports reporter, Lester Rodney, became famous for his attacks on segregated baseball and his championing of Jackie Robinson.) It also ran stories from U.S. news services like the United Press and Associated Press.

Above all else, the *Daily Worker* was anti-racist. Unlike any other predominately white newspaper in the U.S. of the time (except for its sister CPUSA publication, the *People's World*), it excoriated jimcrow wherever it appeared, raised a hue and cry against the infamous lynchings of Black people, and wrote about the Black press, Black organizations, and the activities of Black heroes like Paul Robeson and William Patterson. (Not only was the CPUSA explicitly anti-racist in its public statements and publications, it also maintained an internal anti-racist posture, and had been known to expel white members accused of chauvinism.)

The *Daily Worker* ran its first major story in 1947 about Palestine on February 22 ("Palestine Communists Ask UN to Oust British)," quoting the appeal from Communist Party of Palestine to the UN for a "democratic Arab-Jewish state."<sup>20</sup> That the newspaper, a staunch fighter against racism or ethnic privilege in any form, promoted this position was entirely consistent with its ideology. However, despite advocating parity in Palestine, even in these early 1947 issues the paper seemed to focus more on the Jewish community than on Palestinian Arabs ("British Raid Jewish Ship; Use Tear Gas"<sup>21</sup> ; "800 Jews Deported to Cyprus"<sup>22</sup> and so on). This lack of interest in the Palestinian Arab community would have serious political consequences as political conflict in the Middle East intensified.

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<sup>20</sup> *Daily Worker*, February 22, 1947, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Daily Worker*, February 10, 1947, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Daily Worker*, February 18, 1947, p. 2.



*Political Affairs* took on the hefty issues of communist theory and ran lengthy articles on national and international questions. Regarding Palestine, the magazine advocated the defeat of British imperialism and the establishment of a single state. It ran without comment<sup>23</sup> the 16-page Resolution of the IX Congress of the Communist Party of Palestine (September 6-8, 1945) in which the CPP advocated the following: equal language rights of Arabic and Hebrew; legal guarantees of equality of national rights and opportunities; no domination of one people over the other, legal guarantees of freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, organization and press, and establishment of elected countrywide legislative and executive democratic institutions, “which will express the bi-national character of this country and will be based upon the unshakeable principles of equality of civil and national rights for all peoples in this country.”<sup>24</sup>

### **5. *A Stunning Surprise: The Gromyko Speech***

All this changed overnight on May 14, 1947. Ironically, just as readers of *Jewish Life* read in the May 1947 issue (in an article headlined “Declaration on Palestine by the Conference of Communist Parties of the British Empire”) that the desirable goal for the Middle East was “a free, independent and democratic Palestinian State,”<sup>25</sup> on the 14<sup>th</sup> of that month Andrei Gromyko, the 38-year-old Soviet Permanent Representative to the United Nations, made a speech at the UN that suddenly opened the door to possible support for partition.

His speech followed months of discussions by the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), which had held hearings both inside and outside Mandate Palestine with testimony from a very wide range of interested parties except Palestinian Arabs, who boycotted it on the grounds that “. .

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<sup>23</sup> Since all communist parties in the world followed the line of the Soviet party, “no comment” was equivalent to agreement.

<sup>24</sup> *Political Affairs*, March 1946, “The Anti-imperialist Struggle in Palestine: Resolution of the CP of Palestine,” pps. 275-276.

<sup>25</sup> *Jewish Life*, May 1947, p. 28.

.Palestinian Arabs' natural rights are self-evident [and] an cannot continue to be subject to investigation but deserve to be recognized on the basis of principles of [the] United Nations charter.”<sup>26</sup>

Historians call the Gromyko speech “one of the most stunning pronouncements in the history of Soviet diplomacy”<sup>27</sup> and an “astounding” change of heart.<sup>28</sup> Among the most surprised of all were the future leaders of the future Israel. For instance, Abba Eban, the future Israeli foreign minister who worked at the time for the Jewish Agency in New York, commented, “Such a position was an incredible opportunity; in a moment all our plans on the discussion at the UN were completely changed.”<sup>29</sup>

Not only did Gromyko’s speech suddenly alter the position of all Communist Parties everywhere, it had a huge effect on the CP-affiliated Jewish left in the U.S. (Gromyko’s words were considered so important that the *Freiheit*, published it as a stand-alone pamphlet.)<sup>30</sup>

In the speech Gromyko linked Palestine with the devastating effects of the war on the Jewish community, citing the hundreds of thousands of people wandering about Europe, “seeking means of livelihood and shelter,” saying that the UN should not “remain indifferent to this situation. . .this is a time to give help, not in words but in deeds.” Furthermore, what had happened to the Jews at the hands of the “Fascist hangmen explains the aspiration of the Jews for a state of their own.” It would be unjust, he said, “not to take this into account and deny the right of the Jewish people to the realization of such an aspiration” (perhaps the first mention by the U.S.S.R. that Jews aspired to a state of their own). Then Gromyko laid out the four possible options to resolve the crisis in Mandate Palestine: 1) the creation of a single Arab-Jewish state with equal rights for Arabs and Jews; 2) division of Palestine in two separate states, one Arab and one Jewish; 3) creation of an Arab state “without due regard to the rights of the

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<sup>26</sup> Doc. A/AC.13/NC/ 1 6), Annex 5, a telegram from Secretary-General Trygve Lie quoting Vice Chairman of the Arab Higher Committee Jamal Hussein, June 13, 1947.

<sup>27</sup> “Moscow’s Surprise: The Soviet-Israeli Alliance of 1947-1949,” Laurent Rucker, p 17.  
[https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHP\\_WP\\_461.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHP_WP_461.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> “The Soviet Union and the Creation of the State of Israel,” Prof. Gabriel Gorodetsky, 2001,  
<https://www.marxists.org/subject/Jewish/Soviets-Israel.pdf>, p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> Rucker, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> “Andrei Gromyko, Soviet Delegate to the UN, on A Palestine Solution: Delivered at the UN General Assembly, Flushing Meadows, NY,” May 14, 1947, published by the Morning Freiheit Association, nd.

Jewish population”; and 4) the creation of a Jewish state “without due regard to the rights of the Arab population.”<sup>31</sup>

Gromyko concluded that the Soviet delegation preferred “the creation of one dual, democratic Arab-Jewish state,” but there was a problem. And here he followed with the comment that proved to be the bombshell: that “If it were found that this plan [a single state with equal rights] was unrealizable on account of the deterioration of relations between Jews and Arabs. . .then it would be necessary to consider an alternative solution. . .the division of Palestine into two independent separate states—one, Jewish, and one, Arab” and only if “the relations between Jews and Palestinian Arabs were so bad that it was impossible to reconcile them and to insure the peaceful co-existence of the two peoples. . .” The opinion, he said, of the UN Special Committee on Palestine would be “highly important” in determining this relationship.

Ecstatic Zionists immediately went beyond the actual words of the statement, as seen in a Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) story the next day, May 15, 1947:

. . . Soviet delegate Andrei Gromyko expressed satisfaction when he was told that his statement advocating the right of the Jews to a state of their own had been received very favorably by Jewish circles, which interpreted it as indicating in [sic] significant departure from the official Soviet opposition to Zionism.<sup>32</sup>

(In the preceding months the U.S. government had sometimes favored partition and sometimes trusteeship, that is, control by the UN or countries designated by the UN. In fact, to the modern reader it is a bit jarring to see the lineup of these two major powers: the current-day understanding is that the U.S. was always the fervent supporter of the “Jewish state” and the U.S.S.R. always favored Arab states. In

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<sup>31</sup> All quotes from Gromyko’s May 14, 1947 speech come from the pamphlet cited above.

<sup>32</sup> Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 15, 1947, <http://www.jta.org/1947/05/15/archive/gromyko-voices-satisfaction-at-favorable-reaction-to-his-speech-in-Jewish-circles>.

fact, on several occasions during 1946-1948, the U.S.S.R. supported partition and the U.S. favored trusteeship.<sup>33</sup>)

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) analyzed the speech paragraph by paragraph, calling it “sensational,” and ran its story under the headline, in capital letters: BARS COMPLETELY ARAB OR JEWISH STATE; STATEMENT STUNS ARABS, WELCOMED BY JEWS. It interpreted the speech as Gromyko’s calling for “the establishment in Palestine of separate Jewish and Arab states, if the two peoples could not be brought to agree on the establishment of an independent bi-national state.”<sup>34</sup>

However, in the days and weeks that followed, the conditional part of this sentence disappeared, and both the left and mainstream press called for separate states, focusing particularly on the Jewish state.

*Jewish Life* appeared to be stunned into silence. The May issue contained no mention of the speech. As a monthly, perhaps it had “gone to bed” before Gromyko actually gave it on May 14.

However, the June issue made no mention of it either. Finally, in July, articles appeared that reflected gratitude for the empathy expressed by the U.S.S.R. for Jewish suffering. For instance,

Gromyko’s heart is with the Jewish people because we had suffered from fascism more than others; because we had paid for the victory over fascism more than others; because we have earned as a people—our six million corpses are proof of this—that the United Nations shall respect and seek to fulfill our national feelings, strivings and aspirations.<sup>35</sup>

Ironically, it was the same person, Alexander Bittelman, who wrote these words—and the one who had written, nine months earlier, that “Partition would violate every single precept of democracy” in the inaugural issue of *Jewish Life*.

The *DW*, as a daily publication, could hardly ignore Gromyko’s speech. At first it ran a neutral story summarizing it.<sup>36</sup> This was soon to change. The next day, a *DW* reporter went out to get reaction

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<sup>33</sup> For a look at the U.S. position vis-à-vis trusteeship, see Irene Gendzier, *Dying to Forget: Oil, Power, Palestine, and the Foundations of US. Policy in the Middle East* (Columbia University Press, 2015) Chap. 7 beginning on p. 137.

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<http://www.jta.org/1947/05/15/archive/gromyko-asks-partition-if-bi-national-state-impossible-demands-end-to-mandate>.

<sup>35</sup> *Jewish Life*, July 1947, “Demand America Grant Justice to Yishuv,” Alexander Bittelman, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Daily Worker*, “Gromyko for Jewish-Arab State; Favors Partition If Necessary,” by Joseph Clark, a leading Communist spokesperson, May 15, 1947, p. 2.

from the Jewish “man on the street” and found one who said, “I think it’s a wonderful thing. If all the Jews of the world support it, and I think they will, it will be something great. It would make a state the world would be proud of.”<sup>37</sup> Even quoting a person in the street who had this point of view was highly unusual for the paper.

But not every *DW* editorial writer was on board in this period of transition, as evidenced by the editorial on May 16: “Our own opinion is, as we’ve said many times, that a joint Arab-Jewish state can work. It’s never been tried, and for the sake of the Jews themselves it ought to be tried. And a start should be made on the immigration issue, first of all by admitting thousands of them here” (that is, to the United States).<sup>38</sup>

The *DW* initially did not exactly forsake the single state proposition completely, but instead appeared to make room for the likelihood of partition. The probably confused CPUSA membership obviously needed some direction, so on May 20 the paper ran advertisements for two meetings for the following week: one for a mass meeting to hear Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a prominent CPUSA leader, speak on the topic of the “Communist Position on Palestine,” the other for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the *Morning Freiheit* (at Madison Square Garden) entitled, “WHAT CAN THE U.N. DO FOR PALESTINE AND THE JEWS?” featuring William Z. Foster, the head of the CPUSA, and Alexander Bittelman.<sup>39</sup> The title of the second indicates what would become the *DW*’s focus.

In the May 25, 1947 issue of the paper, Joseph Starobin made an effort to explain the Soviet shift:

But I think some Jewish circles, especially among Zionists, are seeing only one side of the Soviet proposals: the reference to a possible partition of Palestine. This is a new side. It is definitely a departure from the Soviet Union’s traditional emphasis on a solution of the Jewish problem primarily by the democratization of the countries in which the Jews now live. This new side indicates that the Soviet leaders develop new policies in response to new situations: the success of the Palestinian Yishuv and the shattering upheaval among the Jews of Europe which leads many of them toward Palestine are new and over-riding facts. . . .<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Daily Worker*, May 16, 1947, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Daily Worker*, May 16, 1947, editorial.

<sup>39</sup> *Daily Worker*, May 20, 1947, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Daily Worker*, May 25, 1947, p.5.

Unlike his colleagues, Starobin at least refers to the fact that the Soviet position had changed, whereas most of the other Communist columnists and news writers at first acted as if no departure had even taken place. And—as before—there was nothing in this article about the Palestinian Arabs and what their aspirations might be.

At the same time, however, in line with its political outlook, *DW* articles continued to give space to ethnic cooperation, e.g., running a story on May 21, 1947 about a unified one-day strike.<sup>41</sup>

*Political Affairs*, a monthly, was silent on the subject in June. In July 1947, none other than Alexander Bittelman wrote the first long theoretical article entitled “A Democratic Solution for Palestine” in which he lauded the Gromyko speech as a “just and democratic set of principles for the solution of the Palestinian crisis. . . a fact of tremendous importance” to both Jews and Palestinian Arabs” and for the Jewish masses, particularly, “[who greeted them] as opening a new chapter in the history of the Jewish people”<sup>42</sup>

There was still a degree of confusion. Bittelman wrote that the success of a Jewish national homeland could be realized only by “a free, independent and democratic state capable of living in peace, security, and collaboration with the Arab peoples of Palestine and with all Arab peoples.”<sup>43</sup> But “. . . a single state was not out of the question, since the only adequate, democratic and practical solution for both Jews and Arabs is the setting up of one Arab-Jewish independent and democratic state in Palestine, guaranteeing the equal national rights of both peoples.”<sup>44</sup>

It’s hard to say whether this article was a blow for independence from the U.S.S.R.’s position, or difficulty in absorbing the full meaning of Gromyko’s speech, or a failure to get the memo—or all three. No substantive article on the subject appeared again in *Political Affairs* on this subject until February 1948.

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<sup>41</sup> *Daily Worker*, May 21, 1947, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Political Affairs*, “A Democratic Solution for Palestine,” Alexander Bittelman, July 1947, p. 576.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 580.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 581.

Right before the partition vote, *Jewish Life*, in its one-year anniversary issue in November 1947, was much more definitive on the issue of the Jewish State: “The Soviet declaration. . .is inspiring and deeply moving in its humane understanding of Jewish needs and aspirations, in its warmth of approach and depth of understanding” and “accepts Jewish aspirations and treats them with dignity and respect.”<sup>45</sup>

### **6. Partition**

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted on the partition resolution, UNGA Res. 181, with 33 in favor (including the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.), 13 opposed, 10 abstentions (including Britain). Six Arab countries walked out in protest.

Three days earlier, Gromyko had given his second notable speech before the UN General Assembly. He reiterated that the Soviet would have preferred a single democratic state with equal rights for Palestinian Arabs and Jews but it had been convinced otherwise by the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), which had voted for the majority position of partition on the basis that, in its view, the claims of each group were unreconcilable (as opposed to a minority position of a “federal” state that contained separate communities with equal rights.)<sup>46</sup>

Gromyko concluded that a single state was an “unworkable” solution because “the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine do not wish or are unable to live together.”<sup>47</sup> In the speech he chided the Arab nations for their belief that partition would be “an historic injustice” because, “after all, the Jewish people has been closely linked with Palestine for a considerable period in history. . .” and “. . .we must not overlook the position in which the Jewish people found themselves as a result of the recent world war. . .[the result of which] the Jews, as a people, have suffered more than any other people.” He reassured the Arab nations that the “Government and peoples of the USSR have entertained and still entertain a feeling of sympathy for the national aspirations of the nations of the Arab East” as they “rid themselves of the last

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<sup>45</sup> *Jewish Life*, November 1947, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_Special\\_Committee\\_on\\_Palestine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Special_Committee_on_Palestine)

<sup>47</sup> This quote and all quotes in this paragraph come from Gromyko’s speech to the UN General Assembly on November 26, 1947. See <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/8E9EACABC8A7E3D185256CF0005BA586>.

fetters of colonial dependence.” He said that the USSR, however, objected to some “clumsy statements made by some of the representatives of the Arab States in connection with the future of Palestine” and drew “a distinction between such statements, which were obviously made under the stress of fleeting emotions, and the basic and permanent interests of the Arab people. . .”

Gromyko’s third and final speech on the subject that was covered in any detail occurred on December 26, 1947, not before the UN but at an American-Soviet-Palestine Friendship dinner given in his honor in New York by the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists. Printed in its entirety in the February 1948 issue of *Jewish Life*, Gromyko’s speech gave more depth to the Soviet position, worth quoting at length:

It is true, we heard at the General Assembly statements to the effect that the Arabs are prepared for the creation of a single Arab-Jewish state but under the condition that the Jewish population will be in the minority and that consequently the deciding power in such a new state would be one nationality—the Arabs. It is not difficult to understand, however, that such a solution of the problem, which excludes the granting of equal rights to both of the peoples could not provide a proper solution of the question of Palestine’s future, since, first of all, it would not lead to the settlement of the relations between the Arabs and Jews. Moreover, it would be a source of new frictions and complications in the relations between these peoples, which are not in the interests of the Arab nor the Jewish population of Palestine nor in the interests of the United Nations. Thus, the United Nations were confronted with the problem: either to leave the situation in Palestine as it has been up to now, or to adopt a decision which would radically change the entire situation in Palestine and lay the foundation for peaceful and fruitful collaboration between the Arabs and Jews on the basis of due consideration of the interests of both of these peoples.<sup>48</sup>

A curious statement from the representative of the U.S.S.R., as if minorities, by virtue of smaller numbers, cannot achieve equal rights.

Gromyko again described the exceptional suffering of the Jewish people during the war, which made it “. . . utterly unjust not to take into account the legitimate aspirations of the Jewish people for the creation of their own state.”<sup>49</sup> However,

We cannot agree with the assertions which imply that the decision on the partition of Palestine is aimed against the Arabs and Arab countries. It is our deep conviction that this corresponds to fundamental national interest of both the Jews and Arabs.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Jewish Life*, February 1948, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.



Looking on the bright side of partition, he concluded that economic cooperation would result in “the utmost mutual benefit” and reassured the peoples of the Arab East that the USSR “has always sympathized” with their fight for liberation against colonial dependence because the Soviet national policy was “equal rights and self-determination of peoples” since the USSR was a multi-national state that “has no racial nor national discrimination” where “all the peoples inhabiting it enjoy equal rights protected by the Soviet Constitution.”<sup>51</sup>

Fighting in earnest between Palestinian Arabs and Palestinian Jews broke out the day after the partition vote in the UN on November 29, 1947. The tone of the CPUSA publications almost immediately changed into one of total support of the Jewish state. The January 1948 issue of *Jewish Life* printed a strident plea on its front page: “Safeguard the Jewish State!”<sup>52</sup>—and the magazine pretty much stayed that way until the State of Israel was declared, when its ardor even increased. (In its April 1948 issue, for example, an editorial column entitled “In Sight of the Promised Land” was prominently featured.<sup>53</sup> )

Not only did *Jewish Life* support the concept of partition; its main emphasis became securing Jews a home of their own, which it stated with gusto. For example, the editorial “Safeguard the Jewish State!” described partition as a “great and historic event,” a “centuries-old dream of the Jewish people,” and “Together with Jewish masses throughout the world, we rejoice that thereby Jewish national aspirations are moving toward realization.”<sup>54</sup> The word “national,” long a scourge in the communist way of thought, occurred with more regularity.

Now that the British appeared to be getting out of the way, the main danger, said the magazine, was U.S. foreign policy, which “can become a serious obstacle” to “guaranteeing that the projected

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> *Jewish Life*, January 1948, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Jewish Life*, April 1948, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Jewish Life*, January 1948, p. 1

Jewish state shall be truly free of every form of imperialist rule and oppression, that it shall be really democratic, and that it shall live in friendly collaboration with the Arab state.”<sup>55</sup>

International communist approval of the Jewish state became more evident when Jacques Duclos of the French Communist Party spoke to a French audience on March 3, 1948, as reported in the May, 1948 issue of *Jewish Life* under the headline, “Defend the Jewish State and the UN.” Since Duclos was known as one of Stalin’s main right-hand men, his words counted when he brought the “fullest support of the French Communist Party on your Palestine position. . . .I have the feeling that all of you know that the right of the Jews to remain in Palestine and there to develop their own independent state. . .”<sup>56</sup>

From November 1946 to the spring of 1948, articles that mentioned Palestinian Arabs were rare, and those that did see print relied heavily on the positions of the Communist Party of Palestine (CPP), which recommended the incorporation of “democratic forces among the Arab population in the Jewish state” into the Provisional Council of the Jewish state.<sup>57</sup> This is one of the few references to the fact that Palestinian Arabs might be included inside the proposed Jewish State as a minority population and that their rights needed to be safeguarded.

Of all the CPUSA publications, the *Daily Worker* became the most nationalist. The *DW* ran no substantive articles about Palestinian Arabs, their lives, their ambitions, their desires, or provided any context for readers to grasp the essential fact that Palestinian Arabs, the indigenous people of Palestine, were a majority of the population, that they had lived in the country for uncounted centuries, or, indeed, that they might have any serious legitimate claims to it.

As the fighting escalated, the paper also printed several stories that at best were rumor-based or at worst scandalous “yellow” journalism. To be generous, the *DW*, with its minimal resources, could hardly keep up with day-to-day confusing war events and relied on wire service reports, unnamed sources or the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *Jewish Life*, May 1948, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> *Jewish Life*, May 1948, p.30.

reporting of other publications. However, a close examination of one particular incident might be helpful in evaluating the paper's general reportage of events it considered critical at the time.

About two weeks after the UN partition vote, the *DW* ran a story on December 10, 1947 entitled "Haganah Repulses Attack by Arabs," reporting that

The Jewish Haganah repulsed an Arab attack on Tel Aviv yesterday. Seventy Arabs were reported to have been killed in the clash. Haganah reported the attack was the first planned operation carried out by uniformed Arabs since the UN partition was announced. The Arabs poured heavy automatic fire on Haganah positions from orange groves north of an area that became no man's land while other Arabs in uniform, numbering up to 600, crept through the groves to the east in a surprise attack on Jewish homes.<sup>58</sup>

No follow-up story was ever printed, the story was not attributed to anyone, and there was no byline.<sup>59</sup> I compared this story with six New York Times stories that appeared between December 7 and December 12 and found only one mention of any kind of "Arabs in uniform":

"Haganah—the self-styled Jewish defense army, declared in a communique last night that some Arabs yesterday were fighting in the uniforms of the British-commanded Arab Legion of Trans-Jordan. Some of the legion has been brought to Palestine by the British for police duty."<sup>60</sup>

Sam Pope Brewer, a key *Times* correspondent, evaluated his own communiqués on December 10 and made some unusual admissions:

"Sober reports today indicated that the scale of the fight last night at Beit Yaakov on the outskirts of Tel Aviv was vastly exaggerated in the first reports. The attackers infiltrated through a Haganah defense line and set fire to the huts before being discovered and driven off. The police estimated the number of Arabs at 300. This is the first instance of a mass attack on a Jewish village but Dr. Khalidi [the secretary general of the Arab Higher Committee] said today that it was the work of irresponsible elements and that no Arab organization was directing such attacks."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Daily Worker*, December 10, 1947, p. 10

<sup>59</sup> Here the use of the ubiquitous word "Arab" was most insidious, since the paper and wire service reports rarely made any distinction between local indigenous people or armies from Arab states so that it was difficult for readers to know who exactly was fighting who. "Arab bands" or "roving bands of Bedouins" were favorite descriptions.

<sup>60</sup> *New York Times*, December 7, 1947, story datelined December 6, 1947, "New Clashes Raise Toll in Palestine; Other Lands Quiet," Gene Currivan, continuation on p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> *New York Times*, "Jewish Units Fire on British Police," December 10, 1947, Sam Pope Brewer, continuation on p. 20.

Assuming that the *Times*' reporting was accurate—a possibly dubious assumption—it appears that the *Daily Worker* image of hundreds of Arabs in uniform creeping through the orange groves (in uniforms of a military force possibly commanded by the Brits!) was based on an exaggerated amalgam of various information gleaned from other sources, information that did not include such things as denials by Palestinian Arab leaders.

I have dwelt in great detail on this one instance of reporting not so much to expose poor journalism but rather to highlight what the *DW* thought was important—the armed struggle for a Jewish state. Unfortunately, this was not the last time that the feisty little paper would rely on rumor or scare headlines.

*Political Affairs* resumed comment on the situation in February 1948. Writing under the title “New Tasks and Realignments in the Struggle for the Jewish State in Palestine,” our friend Bittelman again attempted to give a theoretical understanding of the events. The CPUSA’s position now was that partition was now “an event of great historical significance” that would lay “the basis for a democratic solution in the interests of both peoples and of world peace and democracy,” primarily due to “the efforts of the Soviet Union, of the new democracy of Poland, and to the agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States.” Bittelman expressed hopes that the “coming Jewish state must take its place in the anti-imperialist and democratic camp, the only dependable ally of our people everywhere.”<sup>62</sup>

What was new about this article, although expressed in the passive voice, was an admission of criticism, presumably from within the ranks: “It has been asserted that Communist support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine became possible only through a departure from Marxism on the Jewish question and the consequent adoption of some Zionist ideas.”<sup>63</sup> No, insisted Bittelman, “. . . there is no contradiction in principle between Marxism and the idea of a Jewish state” and “. . . Marxism brought forth and supported the idea of a Jewish state when the objective conditions became ripe for it. .

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<sup>62</sup> *Political Affairs*, February 1948, p. 146.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

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### **7. *Establishing the State of Israel***

The U.S. recognized the state of Israel *de facto* 11 minutes after David Ben-Gurion proclaimed independence on May 14, 1948 (and gave *de jure* recognition nine months later). The USSR was the first to recognize the state *de jure*, three days later. Seven Arab countries invaded the day after independence was declared, on May 15, 1948.

The Jewish communist left reacted with a combination of euphoria and worry. The June 1948 issue of *Jewish Life* ran the headline, “That the Jewish State May Live,” over a photo of a demonstration of picketers in front of the White House holding signs saying “Lift the Arms Embargo,” “Arms to Haganah,” and “Halt Arms Shipments to the Arabs.”<sup>66</sup> Editorially, it cried that “The blood of patriots must be replaced,” and urged that “everyone who reads this take the responsibility upon himself or herself to organize groups of [blood] donors to the American Red Mogen Doved” [the Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross] to replace blood shed by the Haganah.<sup>67</sup> It continued to be fearful of British and American domination and recognized that “the future of Israel depends upon the fulfilment of the *entire* UN decision, which means the struggle for the establishment of an independent Arab state as well as of the State of Israel.”<sup>68</sup> This rare comment about the validity of an Arab state was unfortunately, however, raised more out of concern for the safety of the Yishuv than for Palestinian Arabs, who had, in large numbers, already become refugees.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 150.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 152

<sup>66</sup> *Jewish Life*, June, 1948, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Jewish Life*, June 1948, p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> *Jewish Life*, July, 1948, p.3.

An emotional poem connecting the new state with the evil of the Holocaust illustrates how *Jewish*

*Life* felt the at the time:

#### HAGANAH

Let your guns speak for us;  
 Erase the immigrant's accent,  
 And second generation's stutter  
 Before the old families.  
 (Once they valued the flint-lock  
 Above the tea-cup!)  
 Fill in the odious spaces on questionnaires  
 With a round of fire.  
 Answer for us, who, with politeness,  
 Bear the lighter insult,  
 Or, bitter, press against their lips  
 The taste of rage.  
 Defend your garden earth;  
 And for all whose native land  
 Became a charnel-house,  
 Attack.<sup>69</sup>

Even the CPP, formerly the staunch proponent of the single state, joined in under the headline

“Israeli Communists Hail ‘Great Day,’”<sup>70</sup> proclaiming,

This is a great day for us. The British mandate, covered with blood, is dead. The Jewish state arises. . . The British sent Abdullah's Arab Legion into action, who are now attacking savagely. . . On our side stands the whole Jewish people. On our side stand all progressive forces. We will fight and we will win. . .<sup>71</sup>

However, the CPP still acknowledged its Palestinian Arab constituents, saying it would “fight for the freedom of the Arab population and cooperation with them in *our* state” (my emphasis) and would “stretch out our hands for agreement with neighboring Arab countries, for their independence means our independence, and we want to stand with them against the common imperialist enemy. . .”<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *Jewish Life*, July 1948, “Haganah” by A. M. Krich, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> *Jewish Life*, July 1948, “Israeli Communists Hail ‘Great Day,’” p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

Some interest in Palestinians arose at this point, but it was based on support for the Jewish state.

*Jewish Life* publicized the organizing of the left-wing Arab League of National Liberation, which, among other things, issued a call to soldiers of the invading Arab countries to

Return to your countries and aim your weapons against the imperialists and their flunkys! . . . Brother soldiers! You are getting killed here, far from your homelands and your families, for the interests of traitorous feudal Arabs who themselves sold their lands and fled the country. Your presence in Palestine befits none but the imperialists and reactionaries. . . <sup>73</sup>

(There is no indication that any soldiers reacted sympathetically to this plea.)

In the same September, 1948 issue, *Jewish Life* hoped that the Arab League of National Liberation could

play a vital role in securing the independence of Israel through helping form an independent, democratic Arab state in conformity with the UN decision of November 29, 1947. Weak though this movement is, primarily because of ruthless repression by both the imperialists and the Arab feudal lords, a lasting and peaceful solution of the Palestine problem depends in part on the maturing of this movement.<sup>74</sup>

However, later in the year, in the December 1948 issue, an article about Deir Yassin did not provoke much discussion in the U.S. even though Esther Valenska of the CPP called the infamous massacre that occurred on April 9, 1948, “barbaric slaughter, “bestial,” and a “pogrom” perpetrated by the ultra-right wing terrorist groups the Irgun and Stern Gang, despite the fact that the “village did not fight against the Jews and also did not permit Arab bands to cross its threshold, ” which caused large numbers of Palestinian Arabs to flee [their homes.]<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, the CPP statement did not serve as an entry point to encourage discussion in the Jewish U.S. communist left about the fate of the Palestinian Arabs.

Overall, the party publications cheered on the Jewish state, giving special attention to support for the state from various luminaries—its own (Paul Robeson’s appearance at a Polo Grounds “Salute to the Jewish State” rally on May 15, 1948<sup>76</sup>) and others, more mainstream (“[Jack] Dempsey Gives Blood for

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<sup>73</sup> *Jewish Life*, September 1948, p. 28.

<sup>74</sup> *Jewish Life*, November 1948, “Cold War Against Israel,” p. 5. .

<sup>75</sup> *Jewish Life*, December 1948, “The Truth about the Irgun:II,” p. 17.

<sup>76</sup> *Daily Worker*, ““Salute to Palestine” Rally at Polo Grounds Saturday,” May 16, 1948, p. 7.

Israel.”<sup>77</sup>) Occasionally, its writers raised questions. For example, Joseph Starobin asked whether British imperialism perhaps had connived with the Arab states to “murder Arab Palestine even before birth.”<sup>78</sup> A. B. Magil feared that “chauvinistic anti-Arab practices” were “being encouraged or ignored by the dominant Zionist leadership, which play into the hands of the British and American imperialists and their Arab agents.”<sup>79</sup>

Clearly in the grip of nationalist zeal, the *DW* printed a horrifying story on its front page on May 31, 1948: “Arabs Set to Use Poison Gas,”<sup>80</sup> and continued on page 2, “Arabs Set to Use Poison Gas on Jews.” [Figs. 1 and 2] The story was entirely based on a United Press report that quoted an anonymous “Jewish spokesman” who declared definitively that “The Arab Legion is planning to use poison gas and heavy artillery in two lightning attacks on Jerusalem, tonight and tomorrow.” In addition, “The spokesman said the lightning thrust had been planned by the Arabs in an effort to complete capture of the Holy City before the United Nations truce deadline Tuesday. The spokesman hinted that Britain was supplying poison gas to the legion for the Jerusalem attack.”<sup>81</sup>

I could not find verification of any gas attack after going through issues of the *New York Times* during May 29-June 3, 1948 and the *DW* never printed a follow-up story or a correction to what it evidently considered a major story. I must conclude that it never happened. (A personal note here: when I saw these headlines I was profoundly disturbed that the *Daily Worker*, the newspaper of my childhood, had sunk to these levels of yellow journalism and jingoism.)

Only four days later, the *DW* ran another, and similarly fear-provoking, story [see Fig. 3]. Under a front-page photo of a Star of David grave marker and two soldiers, the caption, its entirety, read:

“HERO’S GRAVE: The Star of David on a pile of rocks marks the grave of 29 Haganah fighters killed in the attack on the Arab fortress of Nebi Yusha. When the fortress was finally taken by the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, June 13, 1948, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> *Daily Worker*, “Around the Globe by Joseph Starobin, May 7, 1948, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, “Arab Allies of the Jewish State: Zion Lefts Warn that Mistreatment of Masses Helps Invaders,” May 10, p. 7.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, May 31, 1948, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 2.



Haganah shock troops, the bodies of the 29 were found in the courtyard, *decapitated*. The men, who gave their lives for Israel, were buried where they fell.”<sup>82</sup> (Emphasis added)

It turns out that 28 Haganah soldiers were indeed killed at Nebi Yusha, an ancient Arab fortress named for the prophet Yehoshua/Joshua. (The event is still commemorated today with a marker and a

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, June 4, 1948, front page.



website and is named Metzudat Koach, “Fortress of Strength.”) But there is no evidence that these soldiers were decapitated. Nothing indicating such a horror can be found in either the fortress’ current website, the *New York Times*, travel reports, the Israeli organization Zochrot or the Palestinian organization, Badil.<sup>83</sup> There was no follow-up by the *Daily Worker* and no correction. But sadly, a right-wing Zionist book published in 2013 cited the *Daily Worker* caption and has quoted it word for word as if it were true.<sup>84</sup>

Only one *Political Affairs* article about the situation in the Middle East appeared in the period between the declaration of the state of Israel in May 1948 and December 1948—the August 1948 issue. Again Bittelman in “The New State of Israel” put forth the Party position in an article as tangled as the previous one (see pps. 720 through 730). For the Jewish people the emergence of the state of Israel marks “a great milestone” in its history and

we [Communists] were guided by the fact that there lived in Palestine two peoples, not one—an Arab people and Jewish people—and that the principle of national self-determination required that each of these two peoples be given the right to decide for itself the kind and form of national existence it wanted to have.<sup>85</sup>

But Bittelman acknowledged a rare event: internal communist opposition to the partition plan.

Some comrades had difficulties for a while in seeing that the Jewish people in Palestine had the right to self-determination. The source of these difficulties was the inability to recognize that the Jewish people of Palestine was not just an aggregation of so many immigrants or children of immigrants, but that, in the course of recent history, a Jewish community had arisen which had begun to develop all the characteristics of a nation—and every oppressed nation is entitled to the right to self-determination.<sup>86</sup>

In other words, “some comrades” were still hanging onto the previous position that the Jews did not constitute a nation (not having a common territory, language, economy and culture) whereas now, only

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<sup>83</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metzudat\\_Koach](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metzudat_Koach), [www.israelandyou/metzudat-koach](http://www.israelandyou/metzudat-koach), <https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/israel/off-beaten-track-metzudat-koach-koach-fortress/>; [www.zochrot.org](http://www.zochrot.org).

<sup>84</sup> *Antisemitism and the American Far Left*, Stephen H. Norwood and Stephen Harlan Norwood (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 133.

<sup>85</sup> *Political Affairs*, “The New State of Israel,” August 1948, Alexander Bittelman, p.720.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

months later, the Jews in the Yishuv had become a nation and thus the state of Israel was, doctrinally speaking, okay.

### **8. Lead-Up to UN Resolution 194/The Nakba**

The Nakba (the “catastrophe”) began on the first day of hostilities, November 30, 1947, and continued into 1949, ultimately resulting in some 750,000 Palestinians having to leave their homes.<sup>87</sup>

At the time, readers of the *New York Times* knew that a humanitarian crisis was taking place. Any casual browse of articles during the summer of 1948 reveals the signs of catastrophe. (On August 17, 1948, Count Folke Bernadotte, the UN mediator shortly to be assassinated by the Stern Gang, described the then-acknowledged 330,000 Palestinian Arab refugees as “comparable to an earthquake or tidal wave”<sup>88</sup>).

Let’s say that the readers of *Jewish Life* and the *Daily Worker* didn’t believe anything they read in the capitalist mainstream press. They still would have known from the communist press that at least from July 1948 that a refugee catastrophe was happening. That’s because A. B. Magil, far and away the most interesting writer for the communist publications on the subject of Palestine and Israel, told them so.

In the July 4, 1948 issue of the *Daily Worker*, Magil, writing at the time from Israel, gave the staggering figure of “over a quarter of a million”<sup>89</sup> Palestinian Arabs who had already left their homes, a smaller estimate than that of historians, but still a full 20 percent of the Palestinian Arab population.<sup>90</sup>

Prior to this July article, the paper ran isolated comments that Palestinian Arabs had left or were forced to

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<sup>87</sup> The extent of agreement on the figure of 750,000 is almost risible. A partial list follows of organizations that agree on virtually nothing else: the United Nations:

<https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/38D6C47FC5FB0CDD852575D6006C70D4>;

The Anti-Defamation League: <https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/palestinian-refugees>; the Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU): <https://imeu.org/article/quick-facts-the-palestinian-nakba>; CAMERA:

<https://www.camera.org/article/backgrounder-palestinian-arab-and-jewish-refugees/>; the American Friends Service Committee: <https://www.afsc.org/resource/palestinian-refugees-and-right-return>). Even those who claim that the Palestinians “fled,” rather than being “expelled,” agree on the total number. I myself don’t care if the refugees were sunning themselves on the Riviera—which they decidedly were not. They lost their homes, they lost everything. The main thing is not why they left; it’s that they weren’t permitted to go back. Readers interested in the issue of Palestinian refugees should peruse the works of Ilan Pappé, Tom Segev and Benny Morris.

<sup>88</sup> *New York Times*, “Bernadotte Bids U.S. Aid Refugees,” August 18, 1948, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> *Daily Worker*, July 4, p. 11.

<sup>90</sup> See p. 4 of this manuscript and footnote 1.

leave this or that specific place, but Magil's estimate is the first overall figure available to the Communist readership. Although the actual figure was higher, knowing about even this extent of exile should have given the principled readership of the *DW* and *Jewish Life* pause.

Magil followed his July numbers with an article published in the January 1949 issue of *Jewish Life*; in an article entitled, "I Meet the Arab Progressives," he wrote,

Some *four hundred thousands* of these working people [Palestinian Arabs] are today refugees, homeless and wretched. They are sick of a war they didn't want and in which, with few exceptions, they took no part.<sup>91</sup> [My italics]

Magil repeated the figure of 400,000 displaced Palestinian Arabs (now more than 50 percent of the actual total) in the July 1949 issue of *Jewish Life*, saying, "The housing crisis [for Jewish refugees] was also temporarily covered up by an unexpected 'godsend': the flight of 400,000 Arabs from the territory of the Jewish state."<sup>92</sup> And he repeated this sentence almost word for word in his book, *Israel in Crisis*, published in 1950.<sup>93</sup>

### **9. The Israel-Soviet "Romance"**

Unquestionably, in the period immediately after the partition vote and through 1949, the U.S.S.R. became a mainstay of the new state of Israel.<sup>94</sup> In addition to military support, the Soviets also ran frequent diplomatic interference for Israel at the UN, for example, after May 1948, by supporting Israel's refusal to engage in various truce efforts when the state was in a good military position and wanted to fight on.

Several historians attest to this "romance," one, for example, saying that "In fact, in the period following Gromyko's speech [in May, 1947], the Soviet Union became the best and most constant ally of

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<sup>91</sup> *Jewish Life*, "I Meet the Arab Progressives," A. B. Magil, January 1949, p. 11.

<sup>92</sup> *Jewish Life*, "Immigration Crisis in Israel," A. B. Magil, July 1949, p. 15.

<sup>93</sup> *Israel in Crisis*, A.B. Magil (International Publishers, 1950), p. 151.

<sup>94</sup> Soviet support was known to the *DW* readership as early as December 15, 1947, five months before the establishment of the state of Israel in an article (p. 7) under the headline "Rabbi Silver Hails Soviet Aid to Jewish State," in which Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, the national chairman of the Zionist Emergency Council, was quoted as saying, "the Soviet Union is a powerful ally to the national aspirations of the Jewish people in Palestine."

the Zionist Movement”<sup>95</sup> and “from 1947 to 1948, the Soviet Union provided political, military and demographic support for the Zionist movement.”<sup>96</sup> In addition to arms, “it organized an airlift under the code name Balak to transport the military equipment to Palestine in the spring of 1948.”<sup>97</sup> and “In all, the Jewish Agency and the Israeli government purchased about \$22 million worth of military supplies from Czechoslovakia, which also organized the training of Israeli pilots and paratroopers. This military cooperation continued until 1951.”<sup>98</sup>

A story in *Ha'aretz* offers an explanation of why Czech aid was virtually ignored for decades, saying that “The downplaying of this episode and the conscious ignoring of it for over half a century in both countries is a result of clear and understandable political reasons,” which include the fact that Israeli administrations “were uncomfortable recalling the fact that the weapons that saved the IDF in 1948 actually came from the Communist bloc” as a result of “the arms embargo the United States imposed on Israel . . . The Soviet Union hoped that the military assistance to Israel would promote its transformation into a pro-Soviet state.”<sup>99</sup>

According to Martin Kramer, “The arms deliveries made it possible to provide every Israeli recruit with his or her own weapon and ample ammunition.”<sup>100</sup> Not only that, “They saved the country, I have no doubt of that,” Ben-Gurion would say two decades later. “The Czech arms deal was the greatest help, it saved us and without it I very much doubt if we could have survived the first month.” Golda Meir, in her memoirs, similarly wrote that without the arms from the Eastern bloc, “I do not know whether we actually could have held out until the tide changed, as it did by June 1948.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> See footnote 11 of this manuscript, Rucker, p. 22.

<sup>96</sup> Rucker, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Rucker, p. 27.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> “The Communists Who Saved the Jewish State,” Aryeh Dayan, *Ha'aretz*, May 9, 2006, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4904990>

<sup>100</sup> Martin Kramer, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2017/11/who-saved-israel-in-1947/>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

In October 1948, the *Daily Worker* confirmed this Czech military assistance when it reported that “Czechoslovakia will continue to aid Israel and will not yield to any ‘outside pressure’ for cancelling such aid. . . .”<sup>102</sup>

### **10. UN resolution 194**

Perhaps the most disquieting action in this history took place when the question of the Palestinian Arab refugees came up before the UN General Assembly. On December 11, 1948, the UN General Assembly passed a 15-part resolution entitled “Palestine—Progress report of the United Nations Mediator,” which established a Conciliation Committee regarding the Middle East conflict. It contained, as paragraph 11, here in full:

*Resolves* that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible; *Instructs* the conciliation Committee to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation, and to maintain close relations with the Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and, through him, with the appropriate organs and agencies of the United Nations.<sup>103</sup>

This 11<sup>th</sup> article is one of the international human rights underpinnings for Palestinians’ “right to return.”<sup>104</sup> The 15 articles of the omnibus resolution included a “recognition” of the late Count Folke Bernadotte’s work, the establishment of a Conciliation Committee, demilitarizing Jerusalem, establishment of an international zone, protection of holy places, the functioning of the Conciliation Committee and . . . refugee issues: one article, the 11th.

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<sup>102</sup> *Daily Worker*, “Czechs Pledge Aid to Israel,” October 1, 1948, p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> A/RES/194 (III)

<sup>104</sup> For a very cogent description of the events leading up to the passage of 194 and its significance to the Palestinian community, see Badil, the Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights, <http://w.w.w.badil.org/en/component/k2/item/3-resolution-194-iii-a-retrospective.html>.

Resolution 194 carried, with 35 votes for, 15 against, and 8 abstentions (there were 58 members of the UN at the time; Israel was not a member). The United States voted yes. The U.S.S.R. voted no. So did the entire Communist bloc and the six “Arab” countries.

The *Daily Worker*'s sole coverage, if you can call it that, of the passage of UNGA Res. 194 consisted of one article under the headline “Western Bloc Snubs Israel, Splits Korea as UN Closes,” which mainly described the acrimonious division of Korea into North and South and asserted that “On the Israel question the UN not only began another maneuver to decimate Israel’s territory and deprive it of victory, but also pigeon-holed Israel’s bid for membership.”<sup>105</sup> Only one sentence concerned the resolution: “35 to 15, with 8 abstentions adopted the British resolution for the creation of a three-man committee to establish peace in Palestine.”<sup>106</sup> The Resolution was unnamed and unnumbered. Readers of the *Daily Worker* might be forgiven if they missed the import of this resolution.

The readers of the *New York Times* fared somewhat better. The *Times* ran the information as the lead article on page 1, under the headline and subheads “UN CREATES COMMISSION ON PALESTINE CONCILATION; U.S., FRANCE, TURKEY NAMED; Plan Wins, 35 to 15; Arab and Soviet Groups Vote Against Board in the Assembly; Adjournment is Blocked; Filibuster by the Eastern Bloc on Korean Issue Forces Another Session Today.”<sup>107</sup> The paper even reprinted the entire Resolution on a back page.<sup>108</sup>

But the *Times* addressed the issue of refugees only in the eighth paragraph of their story:

The Commission also was instructed to facilitate the “repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the “refugees” and payment of compensation for destroyed property. Although it did not specify what refugees, this referred mainly to the estimated 500,000 Palestinian Arabs and possibly 10,000 Jews for whose benefit the General Assembly already had established a relief agency.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Daily Worker*, December 13, 1948, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Daily Worker*, December 13, 1948, p. 2.

<sup>107</sup> *New York Times*, December 12, 1948, p. 1, continuation page, 32.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*



Other than the article just quoted, the DW did not run any further stories—or make any additional comments—about the passage of the resolution in the remainder of December 1948 and through May 1949.

In *Jewish Life* and *Political Affairs* for the year 1949, there were many articles about Israel—the problems facing the new state, and so on—but I found only two mentions about Palestinian refugees. Both articles were in *Jewish Life*, were written in the context of what the magazine felt was encroaching American influence as the new imperialist power, and the two contradicted each other.

In the first instance, in an August 1949 editorial entitled “Cold War Against Israel,” *Jewish Life* stated that

If Israel were to accept in principle the rights of the Arab refugees to return to their homes and make this an integral part of the whole problem of the independence of Palestine, it would be undertaking a step of tremendous significance for itself as well as for the entire Middle East, of which it is an integral part.

And . . .surprisingly,

The Zionist leadership continues to disregard the whole question of the creation of an independent Arab state, whose formation would be as beneficial to Israel as to the Arab masses themselves.<sup>110</sup>

But another *Jewish Life* editorial writer had different thoughts. In the second instance of reference to Palestinian refugees, an editorial in the November 1949 issue (“Heat on Israel”) objected to the “pressure . . . being applied on the Israeli government behind the scenes” for “acceptance of several hundred thousand Arabs without assurance of a satisfactory peace settlement,” which added up to a “new, thinly disguised version of the ill-fated Bernadotte plan, which would clamp imperialist American domination on the Middle East and Israel in particular.”<sup>111</sup>

Whether these contradictory remarks were the result of internal disagreement or carelessness, I cannot say. But this rare support for either Palestinian refugees or for a Palestinian state was not accompanied by any reports of action by the Jewish communist left.

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<sup>110</sup> *Jewish Life*, August 1949, p. 4.

<sup>111</sup> *Jewish Life*, November 1949, p. 5.

## 11. *Questions—and some possible answers.*

### a. *The U.S.S.R. Changed Its Mind Because. . .*

Most of the people who heard about this article's main thesis have asked why the U.S.S.R. suddenly did a 180, going against its long-held principles. According to historians, no official Soviet documents have yet turned up indicating the exact reasoning for the turnaround of the U.S.S.R., but there are many theories.<sup>112</sup>

The most widely held is that the Soviet Union wanted to weaken global imperialism by eliminating British influence from the Middle East, and if the Soviet Union were to succeed at that, "the Zionist movement was the only means of doing so."<sup>113</sup> To the modern eye this may appear as simple Big Power politics jostling for dominance in the oil-rich neighborhood of the Middle East. I believe it could be more.

According to Laurent Rucker, the Zionist leadership had had contact with the U.S.S.R. as early as 1939 and it was possible that the Soviets identified with the "socialist" characteristics of the Yishuv, particularly the kibbutzim.<sup>114</sup> Perhaps there was a political judgment that a new Jewish state could be an ally, or failing that, a neutral factor in the nascent Cold War. Perhaps the new Jewish state's Declaration of Independence quieted any doubts, especially that

"The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; *it will ensure complete equality of social and*

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<sup>112</sup> "Moscow's Surprise: The Soviet-Israeli Alliance of 1947-1949," Laurent Rucker, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/moscows-surprise-the-soviet-israeli-alliance-1947-1949>, July 7, 2011. "The Soviet Union and the Creation of the State of Israel," Gabriel Gorodetsky, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/jewish/soviets-israel.pdf>, December 2001. "Russia's forgotten role in the creation of Israel," Jonathan Adelman, Ynet news, December 12, 2015, <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/O,7340,L-4737624,00.html>. "The Forgotten Alliance," Michel Real, *Le Monde diplomatique*, September 2014, <https://mondediplo.com/3024/09/07israel-russia>. "The Communists who saved the Jewish State," Aryeh Dayan, *Haaretz*, May 9, 2006, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4904990>. *The Forgotten Friendship Israel and the Soviet Bloc 1947-53* (University of Illinois, 1974), Arnold Krammer. *Between East and West: Israel's Foreign Policy Orientation 1948-1956*, Uri Bailer (Cambridge University Press, 1990). *The Jews in the Soviet Union Since 1917: Paradox of Survival*, Nora Levin (New York University Press, 1988).

<sup>113</sup> Rucker, p. 35.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, pps. 1-3.

*political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.*<sup>115</sup> (My emphasis)

- The Soviets also seemed to be genuinely empathetic toward the remnants of European Jewry. This may sound odd for a country that had such a fraught relationship with the Jewish community, but they might have felt a connection with the Jews based on mutual—and unappreciated—suffering. (Although it is outside the scope of this paper, there is reason to believe that the Soviet Union saved many hundreds of thousands of Jews after the Nazi attack of June 1941 by including them in a vast civilian and industrial evacuation to safety on the other side of the Ural Mountains.<sup>116</sup> In addition, its own Jewish community was, at war's end, the second largest remaining in the world.<sup>117</sup>)
- The Jewish community, though badly hurt, still lived all over the world. This community could have been a source of support for the Soviet Union. A change in doctrine, they might have figured, was a small price to pay.
- Opposition to partition and support for any form of bi-nationalism—as in the many iterations of the Palestinian Communist Party, Hashomer Hatzair and the bi-national movement supported by Judah Magnes, Albert Einstein and others—was weak on the ground. Just issuing statements about a single democratic state was not enough to effectively oppose partition. So why take a chance on a single state that did not have the requisite local support?

***b. And the Soviet Union Voted No on UNGA Res. 194 Because. . .***

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<sup>115</sup> [https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat\\_eng.htm](https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm)

<sup>116</sup> See *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union*, eds. Edele, Fitzpatrick and Grossmann (Wayne State University Press, 2017). For example, “According to current estimates, between 1.2 and 1.6 million Soviet Jews did escape the grip of the Nazis through evacuation or flight.” (p.111) and “. . . most remained alive because the Soviet Union had provided an involuntary, and by and large extremely harsh, refuge from genocide.” (p. 1). However, an earlier article in 1980 calls Soviet policy toward Jews trapped in annexed countries “complex” and “inconsistent.” See Ben-Cion Pinchuk, “Was There a Soviet Policy for Evacuating the Jews?: The Case of the Annexed Territories,” *Slavic Review* (published by Cambridge University Press), Vol. 39, No. 1 (March 1980), pp. 44-55.

<sup>117</sup> [http://www.ajarchives.org/AJC\\_DATA/Files/1946\\_1947\\_13\\_Statistics.pdf](http://www.ajarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1946_1947_13_Statistics.pdf), p. 606.

An even more disturbing question, from my personal vantage point in 2019, is why the U.S.S.R. and the socialist bloc voted against allowing Palestinian Arab refugees to return home (while the U.S. voted for). The sole reason for the Soviet vote seems to lie in loyalty to Israel, which, though it was not a member of the UN when Res. 194 passed, had made its intentions perfectly clear that it would not extend the welcome mat to Palestinian Arab refugees.

What did this loyalty mean in respect to Res. 194? As early as August 1, 1948, Ben Gurion had signaled publicly that the displaced Palestinian Arabs would not be welcomed back to their homes unless a long list of conditions were met in a “general settlement,” which, when secured, it would be decided “*whether, to what extent, and under what conditions, the former Arab residents of the territory of Israel should be allowed to return.*”<sup>118</sup> (My emphasis)

An unusually empathetic editorial in the *New York Times* on August 12, 1948, described the condition of the Palestinian Arabs in the direst language possible (“tragedy,” “destitute,” “without food and often without water” and “face mass starvation. . .”) and went on to mention, “But the Israeli authorities object on the ground that the returned Arabs would constitute a hostile Fifth Column”—along with Israeli claims that they had “no means to care for them,” as well as another reference to a “general peace settlement.”<sup>119</sup> Some months later the future Prime Minister of Israel, Moshe Sharett (formerly Shertok) was quoted as saying that repatriation “would disturb the homogeneity of Israeli areas.”<sup>120</sup>

Therefore, the most likely reason for the Soviet vote, along with its other material support, was a “demographic contribution to the Israeli war effort. . . its noticeable support of the Jewish State’s position on the 700,000 Arab Palestinians expelled or exiled from the territories gained by the Jewish forces.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/myths-and-facts-online-the-refugees>

<sup>119</sup> *New York Times*, “The Arab Refugees,” August 12, 1948, editorial page 20.

<sup>120</sup> *Dying to Forget: Oil, Power, Palestine & the Foundations of U.S. Policy in the Middle East*, Irene Gendzier (Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 259.

<sup>121</sup> Rucker, p. 33.

(And of course, ultimately Egypt controlled Gaza and Jordan controlled the West Bank, so by April 1950 the promised future independent Arab State, supposedly supported by the U.S. communist Jewish community, vanished from view in the communist publications.)

*c. And we did. . .what?*

Historians do not say “what if?” but luckily I am not a historian, so I can wonder what might have happened had the U.S.S.R. stuck to its original position. Had this stance prevailed, a single state with equal rights for all its citizens in the Middle East would have changed world politics in very many ways. How the Palestinian Arab population would have looked at this single state with a very large Jewish minority I do not know. But it seems likely there might never have been a Nakba.

This is obviously fantasy. Much more likely, if the Soviet Union had pushed for a single state, it would have been outvoted, not necessarily only on the merits but because of emerging Cold War alignments. However, the U.S.S.R. could have used the moment to educate its declared beliefs about equality and its position might have mitigated some of the disastrous effects of the Nakba.

But in view of the actual Soviet position and whether this small plucky Jewish American communist community could have done anything differently, my answer is: yes, not a lot, but yes. I agree that having to follow all the zigs and zags of Soviet policy played a major role in this story, but it doesn't account for the enthusiasm with which the Jewish communist left embraced the new state, knowing only too well that Israel was compromised from the start. Even conceding the fact that making any open criticism of any Soviet policy from inside the communist community was unlikely (some would say unthinkable), the U.S. Jewish communist left could have done a better job educating its readership during a critical time.

I've tried very hard to imagine what our thinking might have been in 1946 and 1947. As far as partition goes, maybe we mistakenly thought, after the vote, that somehow the “Arab state” would, like the Jewish state, come into being. The *DW* indicated this possibility early on when under the headline,

“Palestinian Jews Set to Defend New State,”<sup>122</sup> it said, “The left-wing parties likewise welcomed the great event, while emphasizing the need for unity of the two states and friendship between Jews and Arabs in a united Palestine.” Maybe support for a Palestinian state got lost in the shuffle. But this is significant, too.

Was fear of so-called Nazi influence on the Palestinian Arab community another possible factor in the Jewish communist left’s reaction to what was happening? This theme received some consideration, in the communist press, but not much. For example, in September 1948, *Jewish Life* ran a statement by the Young Communist League of Israel, which said, in part, “British officers and administrators encouraged the creation of Arab bands with such fascist elements and the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hitler’s agent, at the head” and “International fascist reaction was organized in and for this ‘Arab army.’”<sup>123</sup> But there was no drumbeat about Nazi influence; the predominant theme from the beginning was the fear that Israel would be swamped by the imperialist powers, Great Britain and the U.S.

And the realization that a large indigenous population was being dispossessed? I’ve considered the fact that many Jewish communists were concentrating on the aftermath of the horror of mass extermination—which for some was probably very close to home. In addition, they were thinking about refugees in many parts of the world, huge population shifts, and partitions elsewhere (India and Pakistan, for instance), not to mention world-shaking revolutionary upheavals (China, for instance). Maybe, I’ve thought, such news had dulled everyone’s perception so that everyday news of violence and huge numbers of refugees in Palestine became almost commonplace.

Nevertheless.

The fact is that the publications, after a few weeks of confusion and hesitancy, pivoted on long-held principles and fell victim to full-throated nationalism. Very disturbing is the position of *Jewish Life*, in particular, which had taken aim at the Yishuv for years because of its Zionist leadership and because one of its main institutions, the Histadrut, was “jimcrow.” This most serious charge should have

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<sup>122</sup> *Daily Worker*, December 14, 1947, p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> *Jewish Life*, September 1948, “Israeli Youth Calls to World Youth,” p. 26.

raised questions about a possible Jewish state and what it would be like and do to protect itself, even at a time when the loss of six million souls in Europe was felt most painfully.

Could *Jewish Life* and the other publications have run articles about the Palestinian Arab community and presented their lives and their views? Yes. Could there have been articles—both prior to the Gromyko speech and afterward, and even after Israel was established—about respect for the Other (and who was the Other, in this context?), rights of indigenous people, unity of all workers, and equal rights? Yes. The *DW* ran many articles quoting the Communist Party of Palestine (then, later, Communist Party of Israel), which at least comprehended that Palestinian Arabs would continue to be a part of the new state. (Of course, the CPP was mired in the tremendous contradictions of how to build a multi-national party in a new state where one group was privileged over another.) In any case, it could have run more features about the Palestinian Arab community and therefore a deeper analysis of what was happening to and in Palestine. Regarding the actual Nakba, even articles advocating simple humanitarian concern about the huge number of refugees would have been welcome. I see no reasons why statements from Party leaders could not have been issued to this effect, despite adhering to Soviet policy vis-à-vis Israel.<sup>124</sup>

I don't know if any of this would have made a difference. Yet I can't help but believe that it might have acted as a break on some aspects of the Nakba. Not to mention what it would have meant to an intra-Jewish community discussion about Zionism, nationalism and the role of the worldwide Jewish community.

According to Bittelman, there was some dissent in the communist ranks, but obviously not nearly enough to make a dent in the Party's position. Unfortunately, the personal attitudes of the CPUSA membership and most readers of the publications remain unknown at this point. But after reading

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<sup>124</sup> Others had issued harsh public criticisms of the new state: on December 4, 1948, a week before the vote on Res. 194, Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, Rabbi Jessurun Cardozo and other public figures wrote a letter to the New York Times protesting the visit to the U.S. of Menachem Begin, leader of Tnuat HaHerut, a grouping they charged bore the "unmistakable stamp of a Fascist party."

everything I could, the question for me is whether they had the desire to do differently, not whether they had the opportunity.

Am I holding the Jewish communist left to an impossibly high standard and expecting them to be immune to the fear and panic that resulted from World War II? Perhaps I am. Perhaps I am expecting and hoping that such people would be responsible and true to their principles, no matter what.

I consider this article to be one of the first, but surely not the only, research venture into this subject. Alas, all of the principals and most of the participants and observers are long since gone, but perhaps individual letters and unpublished articles exist somewhere that will give a fuller picture of what happened between 1946 and 1949 and what the CPUSA rank and file felt and thought. In general, the discussions and debates in the Jewish communist left regarding Israel is a rich and important history, especially now when we try to work through what solidarity means. I welcome all further research, no matter what turns up.

Writing about this sad story has been painful. It is a cautionary tale that underscores the necessity of always keeping one's consciousness trained on those who are defined as the Other, and making the strongest possible fight against nationalism, which feeds on dread and alarm, as well we know in the U.S. since November 2016. And I've written it to say to today's activists: always think of possible alternatives and outcomes, always maintain your critical abilities, and learn from these bitter events. Maybe you can do better this time around.

--May 11, 2019\*

\*Any errors in this piece are mine. I thank Irene Gendzier and Constancia Dinky Romilly for their unstinting encouragement, and to Marilyn Neimark, Fred Jerome, Robyn Spencer, Shaina Low, Emilye Crosby, Donna Nevel, Jake Rosen, Gail Miller, and Felice Gelman for reading the manuscript and offering important comments.