

geoisie. The assimilationist theories run counter to the realities of the Jewish community, *as well as to the activities of Jewish progressives* which are concentrated to a great extent around work for progressive Jewish culture. Assimilationist theories can only undercut these activities.

The burning issue in the Jewish community, as well as among the peoples generally, is *unity*—unity in the struggle against the ultras, the warmongers and cold warriors. Assimilation is not the issue. It would be criminal, I think, to leave it to the ultras to champion the cause of national interests—that is, to *harm* these interests—as the Goldwaterites did among the national groups during the election campaign. I wonder what Lenin would have said of such tactics, stemming from national nihilism or a false internationalism.

Let us recall the words of Georgi Dimitroff in his warning of how national nihilism among Marxists played into the hands of the fascists who appropriated to themselves national traditions—such as the heroic traditions of Garibaldi in Italy (G. Dimitroff: *The United Front*, pp. 79-80, International Publishers). Progressive people among the national groups must certainly participate in the general struggles of the American people, of whom these groups are an integral part. They must participate in the struggle of the labor movement, for civil rights. This goes without saying. To separate oneself from general struggles would certainly mean falling into nationalism and playing the game of reaction by undermining thereby the general struggles through separatism and segregation along national lines. But there is no contradiction between these struggles and the particular interests of the given national group. On the contrary, only by applying correctly general slogans to the demands of this or that group, both the interests of the nation generally and of the particular group will be served. It is dead wrong, however, to consider work among the national groups, activities for progressive national culture as something “nationalistic,” having no relation to the general struggle against reaction. Some progressives, unfortunately, think this way, thereby leaving the field to the reactionaries among the national groups and harming the general struggle to boot.

Marxism and Assimilation

Comrade Novick's criticism of the July editorial centers mainly around the contention that the quotation from Lenin was improperly used. He argues, first, that it was taken out of context, and second, that Lenin subsequently changed his position in the light of new historical developments and stressed not assimilation but the durability of national differences. In line with this, Comrade Novick maintains that the trend among American Jews today does not bear out the thesis of assimilation. He argues, finally, that to accept such a thesis is to espouse national nihilism and is, moreover, tactically wrong.

I believe that Comrade Novick misinterprets both the editorial and Lenin on this question. Before we proceed to examine this, however, a word is in order on the general use of quotations from the Marxist classics. A quotation from Marx or Engels or Lenin does not *as such* constitute proof of the validity of a theoretical proposition. It may at times be offered as containing supporting argument, but otherwise it is used (or should be used) simply as a means of illuminating a particular point—as an apt expression or summarization of it.

It is in this sense that the quotation from Lenin's *Critical Remarks on the National Question* was employed in the editorial. The point which the editorial makes is simply this: A historical tendency toward the amalgamation of nations and toward assimilation exists, and this tendency has manifested itself in the case of the Soviet Jews. Consequently the use of Yiddish has declined, and will continue to decline, entirely apart from any question of forcible repression. More, the greater the freedom from persecution and discrimination, the more rapidly does this process take place.

What is primarily at issue is the validity of these propositions, not what Lenin may have emphasized at various times under various circumstances. It is with this substantive question that I propose to deal.

Two Tendencies

Nations, Marxism holds, are a product of capitalism. The geograph-

ical division of labor and economic interdependence generated by capitalist production have led to the fusion of the smaller self-sufficient communities of feudal society into the larger, more complex entities which we today call nations. This has been accompanied by the development of national consciousness and cohesiveness and by the evolution of national cultures. But the process does not stop there. More and more, capitalist development has gone beyond this to a division of labor and interdependence among nations—to the growth of a world economy. And this, in turn, has been accompanied by a breaking down of national barriers, of national isolation and exclusiveness.

This latter phase was already clearly evident in Marx's day, and Marx and Engels describe it in the *Communist Manifesto* in these words:

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionaries, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature. (International Publishers, New York, 1948, pp. 12-13.)

Thus, in capitalist society there exist two tendencies which operate side by side: toward national identity and discreteness on the one hand, and toward national fusion on the other. It is this basic fact which forms the starting point of Lenin's polemics against the Jewish Bundists in *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, and he sums it up as follows:

Developing capitalism knows two historical tendencies in the national question. First: the awakening of national life and national movements, struggle against all national oppression, creation of national states. Second: development and intensification of all kinds of intercourse between nations, break-down of national barriers, creation of the international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science, etc.

Both tendencies are a world-wide law of capitalism. The first predominates at the beginning of its development, the second characterizes mature capitalism that is moving towards its transformation into socialist society. The national program of the Marxists takes both tendencies into account, and demands, firstly, equality of nations and languages, prohibition of all *privileges* whatsoever in this respect (and also the right of nations to self-determination . . .); and secondly, the principle of internationalism and uncompromising struggle against the contamination of the proletariat with bourgeois nationalism, even of the most refined kind. (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954, pp. 21-22)

Clearly, the *ultimate* tendency is toward national amalgamation, toward the eventual disappearance of discrete nations through their fusion into a larger, international form of social community. This is the fundamental historical direction of the process, growing out of the development of modern productive forces.

In capitalist society, however, the two tendencies come into sharp conflict, for capitalism knows no other manner of establishing international ties than through exploitation and oppression of other nations. In the imperialist stage of capitalism, with the dominance of foreign investment and the emergence of modern colonialism, national oppression reaches its extreme development, as does its ideological baggage of national and racial supremacism. In reaction to this, the struggle for national freedom and national identity grows to new proportions and assumes a new level of importance on the world scene. Under these circumstances it is the first of the two tendencies which occupies the forefront and is most sharply expressed.

Nevertheless, the tendency toward amalgamation and assimilation continues to operate. And just as every intensification of national persecution accentuates the first tendency, so does every victory against it accentuate the second. To illustrate the point, when the oppressed African countries had yet to achieve their liberation from colonial status, their emphasis was quite naturally placed on the goals of national independence and freedom from all foreign encroachment. But now that the great majority have won their inde-

pendence, the emphasis shifts more and more to questions of closer economic, cultural and political ties among themselves—questions posed with growing insistence by their very efforts to build modern industrial economies.

Assimilation in the U.S.

Every struggle for national freedom and equality, therefore, only contributes toward creating the conditions for national union—toward establishing the status of equality which alone makes possible the voluntary coming together of nations. The full achievement of this status is reached under socialism, which abolishes the economic basis of national oppression. Marxists fight against national oppression with the conscious recognition that such amalgamation is the ultimate goal. As Lenin expressed it in his 1916 theses (*The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954, p. 169): “The aim of socialism is not only to abolish the division of mankind into small states and the segregation of nations, not only to draw the nations together, but to merge them.” And further (p. 170): “Just as mankind can achieve the abolition of classes only by passing through the transitional period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, i.e., of their freedom to secede.” And as the editorial indicated, in the Soviet Union the process of merging is already under way.

Such is the Marxist conception of the relationship between the amalgamation of nations and the fight against national oppression. It is clear that there is no conflict between the two; on the contrary, they go hand in hand.

But if the historical outlook for nations is one of ultimate fusion, this is all the more true in the case of national minorities, including the Jewish minorities in the various nations in which they live. Here the process takes the form of growing assimilation into the surrounding economic, political and cultural life.

Here, too, the process is a two-sided one: on the one hand the pull exerted by national ties and national consciousness; on the other the pressure to become integrated into the surrounding community, to absorb its culture, to intermarry—to become assimilated. And here, too, every increase in national persecution and discrimination strengthens the first tendency, while every advance toward full democracy and equality strengthens the second.

In the case of American Jews, *both* tendencies are clearly evident. It is quite plain that among them, as among Jews everywhere, the rise of fascism and the Hitlerite slaughter of six million Jews have produced a great upsurge of Jewish consciousness and attachment—and, it must be added, of Jewish nationalism. This has been further encouraged by the emergence of Israel. It finds expression today, as Comrade Novick notes, in a higher degree of organization around Jewish activities than ever before. Simultaneously, however, assimilation is proceeding, not only in the continued drastic decline of Yiddish (despite increased attendance at Yiddish schools), but in other ways as well, most notably in the rapid growth of intermarriage.

A study in Washington, D.C., presented in the 1963 *American Jewish Year Book*, shows an intermarriage rate of 1.4% among first generation Jews, of 10.2% in the second generation and 17.9% in the third (among those with a college education the rate was 37%). An Iowa study shows a rate of 42% in the years between 1953 and 1959. Analyzing these studies in the *Yearbook*, Dr. Erich Rosenthal concludes that the Jewish community “is subject to a process of assimilation” and that the “ethnic and religious bonds that weld the immigrant organization into a highly organized community are becoming progressively weaker.”

There is perhaps no more striking indication of the reality of assimilation than the widespread alarm with which this development has been greeted, particularly in religious and Zionist circles. Thus, to cite a typical reaction, Rabbi Leon I. Feuer, president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, recently requested special funds to combat the “growing crisis” and “serious threat” created by the rise in mixed marriages (*New York Times*, June 17, 1964).

Indeed, there are widely expressed fears that the very easing of anti-Semitism in recent years itself constitutes a threat to Jewish survival. For example, in a speech made some years ago, Dr. Nahum Goldmann, president of the World Zionist Organization, declared that the growing “process of emancipation” had produced a “danger greater than all that has threatened Jewish survival in previous centuries.” He added: “We have learned in past centuries to survive bad times. Now we must learn what is more difficult—to survive good times and remain Jews.” (*New York Times*, May 27, 1959.)

Such reactions are a recognition, even though in a negative fashion, that assimilation exists and is progressing. Comrade Novick should take this tendency into consideration also.

The fact that American Jews are today affected by both tendencies is clearly indicated in an interview some months ago by Sanford

Solender, executive vice-president of the National Jewish Welfare Board. The *New York Times* (April 19, 1964) reports it as follows:

As American Jews "have become acculturated with an American society," Mr. Solender said, "they encounter an ambivalence between emulation of non-Jewish neighbors in all aspects of social and cultural life and the desire for Jewish group survival."

Mr. Solender said that "concern over interreligious dating and intermarriage on the one hand and eagerness to take full advantage of the open American society on the other create an emotional tug-of-war."

In this tug-of-war, there is no doubt that it is the side of greater identification with American society which will ultimately win out. This is far from saying, however, that the Jews as a group are about to disappear, that Jewish life will not continue to exist as a distinct entity for a considerable time to come. Nor is Jewish culture by any means about to be wiped out.

Assimilation is not a process in which the culture of the minority is obliterated; rather, it is one in which this culture becomes fused with that of the majority, making its own distinctive contribution to the totality. Increasingly, as English replaces Yiddish, an Anglo-Jewish literature develops, with newspapers, magazines and books in English appearing in growing numbers. But unlike Yiddish literature, this literature is not the property of Jews alone. On the contrary, since it is accessible to all who know English, it is read increasingly by non-Jews as well. Today books written by Jews about Jews and Jewish life have a wide audience, and a book like Saul Bellows' *Herzog* swiftly becomes a best-seller. Also, in English translation the Yiddish classics acquire a universal appeal. We may recall, for example, the wide popularity of "The World of Sholem Aleichem" on the stage and on television. And today, in "Fiddler on the Roof," we witness the appearance of Sholem Aleichem's Tevye the milkman as the protagonist in a Broadway-style musical show.

It is clear that Jewish culture is far from dead. But it is equally clear that it is becoming more and more a part of *American* culture.

Assimilation in the USSR

If, then, such a process of assimilation is a reality in the capitalist United States, why should it be any less a reality in the socialist Soviet Union, where the Jewish people enjoy a far greater degree of economic and social freedom than they do here? Indeed, the evidence is unmistakable that it was already well under way in the

thirties when Yiddish cultural activities were at their zenith. This is a widely acknowledged fact, and the editorial cited some examples of such recognition. Here I should like to add one more. In his *Pictorial History of the Jewish People* (Crown Publishers, New York, 1958), Nathan Ausubel speaks of the extensive government-supported cultural activities of those years and goes on to say:

Yet for all this unprecedented, large-scale Yiddish cultural activity, its decline was already in evidence at the very time of its flowering. Although hundreds of thousands of Jewish youth had been raised in Yiddish-language schools, the political and cultural pressures from without proved well-nigh irresistible. . . .

In time, there was a sharp decline in the attendance of the Yiddish-language schools. . . . the youth turned more and more to reading Russian newspapers, periodicals and books. In a late census, before the Nazi attack on Russia, more Jews claimed Russian than Yiddish as their mother tongue. Furthermore, with the process of cultural fusion, with the weakening of religious ties, and with the enjoyment of full equality, intermarriage for Jews was not only inevitable but was considered by some even desirable. This was based on the Communist principle which rejects the socio-biologic separation of races and peoples. It is precisely this process of cultural assimilation and biological amalgamation which largely accounts for the steady disintegration of Jewish group life, culture and identity in the U.S.S.R. (P. 253.)

This process, be it noted, cannot at all be attributed to forcible measures, whatever effect repressive actions may have had at a later time. Moreover, thanks to the nature of socialist society it was far more extensive than in capitalist countries. This fact is noted, with much anguish, by the European Yiddishist I. Efroykin in his book *In Dream and in Reality* (New York, 1944). He writes (pp. 259-260):

. . . one cannot and dare not close his eyes to the terrible ruination which assimilation—linguistic, religious and social—has wreaked in this land of complete equality for Jews. Never in Jewish history has the objective danger of assimilation been as great as it is in Soviet Russia. . . . Assimilation has always been a matter of [economic] improvement and up till now has always and everywhere meant a transition to or a moving closer towards the higher classes of the surrounding peoples, to the richer and the more educated. That, however, used to be possible only for those Jewish circles who from a social viewpoint, at least, were the equals of these ruling classes. Soviet Russia is the first case where it is precisely the mass, the workers and peasants, who are simultaneously the politically and

culturally dominating classes. Therefore assimilation has become here more possible and accessible, not only for a small group of Jews, but for the whole people. This is one of the reasons why the national Jewry of the entire world . . . is instinctively more frightened at the manifestations of the assimilation process in Soviet Russia than in any other country. . . . What causes such fear is the mass scale of the assimilation in Soviet Russia and the perspectives for the future. (Translated from the Yiddish.)

Again, this clearly has nothing to do with forced assimilation.

To be sure, the Nazi atrocities and the subsequent repression under Stalin served greatly to heighten Jewish consciousness among Soviet Jews, as the editorial points out. But with the rectification of the Stalin crimes the tendency toward assimilation was bound to express itself with increasing force. Mistakes have been made, as the editorial indicates. But certainly the waging of an all-out campaign against the remnants of anti-Semitism, together with the insuring of the full availability of Yiddish cultural institutions and materials, would only lead to hastening the process all the more.

Marxism vs Bourgeois Nationalism

To bourgeois nationalists, cultural fusion is anathema. Motivated by ideas of narrow nationalism and exclusiveness, they seek "Jewish survival" as an end in itself. To many of them the criterion of "Jewishness" is adherence to the Jewish religion. And this is not infrequently accompanied by the chauvinist concept of the Jews as the "chosen people." It is not surprising that to such people a decline of anti-Semitism should appear as a source of problems.

Marxists, on the other hand, fight against all anti-Semitism, for full democracy and equality, not in order to perpetuate national exclusiveness but to enable the Jewish people to enter fully and freely into the mainstream of American life, and to make their fullest contribution to its cultural and intellectual enhancement. Such an outlook has nothing in common with national nihilism, nor does it militate against the need to fight for progressive Jewish culture, both in Yiddish and in English. It is not national nihilism which is the main problem in the Jewish field today but Jewish nationalism, which seeks to separate Jew from non-Jew and to isolate Jewish workers from the working class as a whole. It is a function of progressive Jewish culture to combat such nationalism and to present an internationalist outlook.

Comrade Novick not only takes a dim view of assimilation as such. He also apparently feels that to recognize assimilation as a historically progressive trend is tactically wrong—that this would isolate Marxists

from the main currents and movements in the Jewish community. But the correctness or incorrectness of a theoretical proposition is not determined by tactical considerations. To approach the question in this way can lead only to opportunism—to accommodation to the influence of bourgeois ideology. On the contrary, only if we start from a correct theoretical position can we arrive at a proper tactical line.

Finally, since Comrade Novick takes the editorial to task for not quoting *all* that Lenin had to say on assimilation in his *Critical Remarks*, I should like to say that I believe he is himself guilty of an important omission. He quotes the following sentence: "Whoever does not recognize and does not champion equality of nations and languages, does not fight against all national oppression or inequality, is not a Marxist, is not even a democrat." But then Lenin says (and this is not quoted): "This is beyond doubt. But it is equally doubtless that the alleged Marxist who fulminates against a Marxist of another nation as an 'assimilator' is simply a *nationalist philistine*." (P. 23. Emphasis in original.)

What Lenin was driving at was that a Marxist cannot take a one-sided view of the question. To do so is to land either in the Scylla of national nihilism or in the Charybdis of bourgeois nationalism. The road to correct methods of struggle and correct policy lies only in understanding properly the *two* tendencies in the national question and their interrelationship. Toward this we should all strive.

We Communists are Americans. We love our country and its varied people. We know them well. We are of their flesh and blood. Nothing and nobody can take our country away from us. We know its vastness—3,000 miles from sea to sea of rich and beautiful mountains, rivers, plains, cities. Its defacements are by the hands of greed. We know our country's history. Our forebears were pilgrims, pioneers, revolutionists, abolitionists, anti-imperialists, agitators—all who fought for freedom. We know the courage of our people and, in their overwhelming majority, their goodness and kindness. We know our people's technical skills, their potentials for the abundant life. We have great faith in our country and its people. Socialism will be established by the free and democratic choice of the American people. The Communist Party believes that it can come peacefully, through the united political action of workers, farmers, Negro people, and all who labor by hand and brain.

ELIZABETH GURLEY FLYNN, *Horizons of the Future*.