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The class character and political origins of Zionism

written by Lev Koufax
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On Oct. 28, as the Israeli occupation forces began their brutal ground offensive into Gaza, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant declared in earnest, “This is a war where there is no choice: either them or us.”

Translated as: We are justified in our genocide of the Palestinian people.

This sort of false paradigm has been at the core of Zionism ever since its inception in Europe around the turn of the 20th century: Palestine is the true Jewish homeland; only we Israelis have the right to it, and anyone who dares thwart our genocidal aspirations will be deemed an anti-Semite and terrorist.

As Israel intensifies its genocidal war against Palestine, now is as good a time as ever to examine the true nature of Zionist ideology, its class character, and its benefit to imperialist powers. By understanding Zionism’s origins, we can better challenge the mythology that leads to the sort of fascist lunacy that Gallant and many like him consistently spew.

According to the Zionist narrative, Palestine is the long-lost homeland of the Jewish

people. Under this fallacy, because one community of Jews was predominant in the land called Palestine several thousand years ago, my community now has the right to colonize this land on behalf of the Western powers. Now, if you ask a Zionist, they will tell you that Israeli apartheid isn't colonial but the only way to guarantee Jewish survival.

However, revolutionary socialist Jews and anti-Zionists polemicized against this mythology before Israel even existed. In particular, one of these Jewish revolutionaries, Abram Leon, wrote prolifically about the state of the Jewish community in the mid-20th century. As European Jewry faced pogroms, exile, and eventually, the Holocaust, Leon hoped to direct his community toward building socialism as the main method for the defeat of Nazism and the liberation of not just Jews but all oppressed people.



Abram Leon (1918-1944) was a Jewish

communist leader in Belgium who died in Auschwitz concentration camp.

A Marxist interpretation

At that time, Leon could not write on this topic without addressing a fringe, but growing, petit bourgeois ideology at the time, known as Zionism. After the outbreak of World War II, Leon was forced to flee his homeland of Poland for Belgium, where he helped found the Belgian communist party. While participating in the Belgian underground and on the run from Nazi forces, Leon wrote "[The Jewish Question: a Marxist Interpretation](#)." In this piece, he details the history of the Jewish community, the need for Jewish support of socialism, and the dangers of embracing Zionism.

To adequately understand the threat Zionism posed to the entire Middle East, as well as the Jewish people, Leon analyzed the origins of the ideology that eventually grew into the fascist state of Israel.

At the core of Zionist ideology is the assertion that Palestine has always been the ancestral Jewish homeland. Zionist history asserts that return to this homeland has been the sole focus of the Jewish community since the Babylonian expulsion of the vast majority of Jews from Palestine in the 6th century BCE and the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans several hundred years later.

This narrative also pushes the idea that the only way to guarantee Jewish security and safety is not only to return to this supposed homeland but also to establish a secular Jewish state.

The problem is, this narrative is almost entirely based on a false version of history. In fact, Zionism is a particularly young ideology. While there was always a certain romanticization of the Holy Land within the Jewish community, the idea that the only way to secure a Jewish future was to build a colonizer government in Palestine did

not crystallize as a political tendency and school of thought until the late 19th century.

In 1896, Theodore Herzl wrote his Zionist treatise, "The Jewish State," where he argued that the only reasonable response to mounting pogroms and anti-Semitism in Europe was a mass migration of Jews to Palestine. Herzl's crowning fascist work came only two years removed from the anti-Semitism of the [Dreyfus Affair](#), where a French army officer was prosecuted for his Judaism.

Required backing of European powers

Herzl didn't stop with Jewish emigration to Palestine. He openly asserted that the key to achieving this dream would be backing from European powers. This sentiment is at the core of the growth of the Zionist movement over time. Herzl was not the only affluent Jew in Europe who was concerned about growing anti-Semitism.

Across Europe, Jewish tradespeople, business owners, and academics were tired of living under the specter of anti-Semitism. For Jewish businesspeople, Zionist ideology presented an opportunity for rapid investment from the West and their own share of imperialist profits. For this reason, the Zionist ideology grew rapidly among the wealthier portion of the Jewish community between 1896 and 1918, when Abram Leon was born into an affluent Zionist Polish Jewish family.

As Leon grew and delved deeper into socialism and the struggle against all forms of oppression, he grew to reject his parents' Zionist ideology based on the same history and analysis reviewed above. At this same time, Nazism was also growing in Europe. Fascism and anti-Semitism spread like wildfire, deepening the crisis for the Jewish community and Leon himself.

However, even with the rise of fascist movements and governments throughout

Europe in the 1930s, Zionism still did not become the predominant ideology in the Jewish community until after the horrors of the Holocaust. During the political struggles of the 1930s and World War II, most of the Jewish community lined up with the international left. Jews were labor union leaders, [Red Army soldiers](#), and [anti-fascist organizers](#).

One such anti-fascist organizer was Abram Leon. In 1940s Nazi-occupied Belgium, Abram was a leader in the Belgian communist party and the militant Belgian resistance. Leon never stopped fighting. This is exactly why, in 1944, Nazi forces raided an anti-fascist meeting and captured Leon. Several months later, he died after prolonged torture while interned at Auschwitz concentration camp.

It is unknown when Leon wrote “The Jewish Question: a Marxist Interpretation,” but it was presumably while he was on the run in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Even though Leon died before the horror of Israel began, he condemned Zionism as an ideology of the few and the oppressive. He wrote that a Western-backed Jewish state in Palestine “would do nothing to improve the situation of international Jewry.”

Today, he is more right than ever.

As Leon did, all Jews must reject the poisonous ideology that has turned us against our Palestinian siblings. Zionism is an ideology meant to benefit the United States and its partners in imperialism. It will never benefit the Jewish people.

Lev Koufax is an anti-Zionist Jewish activist.

