

Zionism in the age of the dictators: a reappraisal. By Lenni Brenner. London, Canberra: Croom Helm. 1983. 277 pp. Index. Pb.: £9.95.

THERE is a current fashion for 'revising' history. It having now been 'discovered' that the Nazi holocaust of Jewry never happened and that Hitler never knew about it when it did, a new 'reappraisal' puts much of the blame on the Zionists. It is in fact not really new—the story here told of 'Zionist collusion with the Fascists and the Nazis' (p. 269) has long been part of Soviet propaganda, and the present British version is original mainly in that the author is a Jew whose philosophy of history is Trotskyism.

He strongly believes that 'the masses' (p. 107) would have stopped Nazism while the 'capitalist exploiters' (p. 96) collaborated, and Zionism must be regarded as an offshoot of 'the ruling classes'. When the Zionists failed to resist in the Weimar Republic, it became 'inevitable that they would end up as the ideological jackals of Nazism' (p. 55). No less.

Mr Brenner has employed a considerable amount of literature to support his thesis, but ideology has a knack of getting in the way, and while quotations can work wonders the realities of which Brenner appears to have no direct experience tell a very different tale. It is perhaps true (as he points out) that the Zionist leaders were pessimists, but if they 'depreciated the significance of the vast Gentile sympathy for the Jewish victims' (p. 2), were they so far wrong? Such sympathy may have helped Captain Dreyfus: it did not save the million Dreyfuses a generation later. Then sympathy just was not enough and since effective action was taken neither by 'the masses' nor by governments, Jews were left to their own devices and had to make often painful choices among the priorities.

The political leaders of the Zionist movement put interests above sentimentalities, as any other politicians would have done. Trotsky would have parleyed with Hitler as Stalian did (or the Tsar did with Napoleon), and in given circumstances Churchill was prepared to sup with the devil. The *Ha'avarah* deal of which Brenner has so much to say can be defended on the ground that the Zionists were 'using the Nazis for their own purposes' (p. 61), and mistakes should not perhaps be regarded entirely with the perspective of hindsight. Today we know that 'no *modus vivendi* was ever even remotely possible between Hitler and the Jews' (p. 55) but in the 1930s this was not always clear. Besides, if the whole of Europe nearly perished in the effort to stem Hitler, how much could the Zionists have been expected to do? It so happens that in claiming 'the Jews were powerful in the emporiums of the world' (p. 57), Brenner agrees with Hitler as much as when he quotes *Mein Kampf* to prove 'Zionism's classic role as an outrider of antisemitism' (p. 79).

In its refusal to believe that, in terms of political action, the struggle against antisemitism should take precedence over the building of a National Home for victims of persecution, Zionism could by no means be described as the 'empty fantasy' (p. 104) and 'utopian cult' (p. 67) as which Brenner castigates it. If 'Hitler's antisemitism was never popular with the capitalists' (p. 178), neither could it prosper without their brand (or that of others), and to a good many people in both East and West, antisemitism was among the lesser of Hitler's evils. Brenner dubs Zionism 'naive' (p. 89) but he himself is largely an innocent in the jungle where the struggle for survival has to be fought.

Neither 'the anti-Nazi working class' (p. 32) nor the 'many Polish workers' (p. 212) would have cared for too close a link with the Jews, and if '“pride” and “dignity” are words open to interpretation' (p. 48), as Brenner says about a German Zionist document of 1933, I can assure her, from first-hand experience, that in those days, rightly or wrongly, nothing so comforted and fortified the mind of Jews as the Zionist message.

Brenner has produced a party political tract that unhinges the balance of history by ignoring too many difficulties, especially psychological. For once Stalinists will be pleased with the work of a Trotskyist.

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