

BOOK REVIEWS

They Fought Back, by YURI SUHL, Editor and Translator (New York: Crown Publishers, 1967).

Reviewed by Victor Solomon

They Fought Back is more than a book. It is an eloquent memorial to the heroism of the millions of Jews who perished in the Nazi holocaust. The enormity of the genocidal carnage and the bestiality of sadistic perversion and torture unparalleled in the annals of man try the adequacy of human language as an instrument of communication. The remarkable silence of responsible world statesmen and churchmen further compound the tragic enigma.

Just as scandalous is the popular notion that the 6,000,000 martyrs were herded to the concentration camps, gas chambers and death factories like docile sheep. Yuri Suhl has set the record straight. Many facts cited in this monumental work have been known to students of holocaust history. (An excellent anthology, *The Fighting Ghettos*, edited by Meyer Barkai was published by Lipincott in 1962.) Nevertheless, mountains of new data

and fresh insights add to the power of the book.

Of greater significance is the fact that this bloody chapter in inhuman history, which a busy world wishes to forget, is again accessible to Everyman in readable English.

The reader is quickly disabused of the canard that the 6,000,000 victims of Hitler's "Final Solution" did not offer resistance. In every ghetto and concentration camp heroic men, women and even children fought hopeless battles against overwhelming odds. Starved, tortured and betrayed, Jewish fighters from Italy to Poland and Byelorussia exacted a heavy toll from their oppressors.

Suhl chose his material with the discretion of a dispassionate eyewitness determined to share his experiences with others. He focuses on the dignity of men, not the inhumanity of beasts, the heroic not the gruesome. This is not another "atrocities" book, but a tribute to the indomitable courage and indestructible spirit of European Jewry.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

Hitler's henchmen employed every means of duplicity to lure their victims to their doom. Suhl calls it "the greatest confidence trick the world has ever known." The Jews were fooled, duped and stunned . . . like the "outside" world which refused to believe the veracity of the reports smuggled out of Auschwitz and Treblinka. As Suhl points out, "the crimes committed by the Germans in Auschwitz were too staggering for the human mind to comprehend . . ." To this day, die-hard skeptics everywhere refuse to believe that such enormous atrocities could take place in the twentieth century.

Indeed, many of the victims did not offer resistance. They were infirm, too old or the young; the book is dedicated to the 1,200,000 children who perished in the holocaust. Others simply could not comprehend the insanity of the Nazis. However, when those with an ounce of strength learned the brutal facts,

they fought back and wrote their own blood, a noble chapter in the book of man.

Yuri Suhl is to be commended for his efforts, and *They Fought Back* deserves to be read by every person who still believes in the dignity of man. Yet, Suhl's volume is only half a book. The other half consists of the unwritten *Ani Ma-am'n* chapters of the countless Kedohim who "fought back" against tanks and machine guns with Talis and Tefillin, prayer and hope. They were the giants of the spirit who soared above the chaos of a mad world — of German, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Polish murderers, and their co-conspirators in the Western democracies. In the final reckoning, their part in the agonizing struggle will be seen as the most lustrous victory of the entire war; a triumph of the spirit, of light and love in a depraved, dark hate-filled world bent on its own annihilation.

Zion Reconsidered, by JACOB J. PETUCHOWSKI (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966).

Reviewed by Sol Roth

The emotional climate that pervades a community can easily interfere with detached and objective analysis of the fundamental propositions to which its members are committed. It is difficult for the patriot to scrutinize the ideological principles to which he bears eloquent witness. The Zionist cannot, without exerting considerable effort, apply the methods of critical inquiry to the axioms of Zionism.

In *Zion Reconsidered*, Dr. Jacob J. Petuchowski attempts to expose the weaknesses of some current Zionist doctrines in the light of rational examination. The result is a challenging essay that sometimes provokes and, on occasion, reveals. The independent and enlightened thinker will object to many of the author's conclusions but he will grant that he was compelled, during his reading, to consider, probably for the first time, the evidence for certain crucial claims to which he

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had heretofore given his uncritical assent.

Some of the views expressed will find easy acceptance. The author underscores and illustrates dramatically the role which the religious dimension of Judaism has played historically, and must still play, in binding together Jews, removed by continents, from each other. The indifference to, even hostility for, the religious aspect of Jewish life exhibited by some Israelis has alienated them from Jews who reside beyond the borders of the youthful state (p. 39).

The author insists, and rightly so, that the particularistic impulse of the Jewish people, and Zionism is perhaps the most characteristic expression of that impulse, does not annul Jewish universalistic commitments. And his further claim must also be granted, namely, Jewish communities rooted in the Diaspora *can* contribute to the fulfillment of the prophetic visions which include all of mankind in the messianic blessings. (It is conceivable, however, and the author appears implicitly to reject this notion, that were all the Diaspora Jews gathered in Zion, they could still advance human ideals, and perhaps just as effectively. Success in the task of influencing the nations does not appear to depend on dispersion among the nations.)

Dr. Petuchowski is on weaker ground when he attacks what he identifies as accepted Zionist dogma.

Against the Zionist doctrine that the only place where the Jew can escape persecution, and the only place where he can survive, is the autonomous Jewish State (p. 30),

he cites the facts of history—the destruction of two ancient Jewish commonwealths — to demonstrate that survival is not assured in Israel. Even if this doctrine were understood by the Zionists who formulated it in the identical way in which it is construed by Dr. Petuchowski who attacks it, and this is doubtful (I have not understood Zionists to be saying that the future survival of the State of Israel is, in some sense, necessary), the argument, at most, refutes only one part of the doctrine. It leaves unmolested the more important part, namely, the only place in which the Jew can escape persecution for no other reason but that he is Jewish is the State of Israel. And, if 'persecution' is interpreted generically, to cover, not only acts of violence, but the subtle forms of social, economic, and educational exclusion as well, one would be hard put to find any grounds that will support the rejection of the Zionist claim.

The author also attacks the Zionist contention that American support of Israel and its institutions constitutes genuine philanthropy. Observing, in the first place, that Zionists during World War II were more concerned with the political aim of establishing a Jewish State than with the philanthropic aim of saving Jewish lives (p. 54), he adds, by way of evidence, that Zionists knew that the immediate result of the emergence of the state would be the violent dislocation of half a million Jews in Arab and African lands. The figures speak for themselves. They simply rule out philanthropy as the true motivation for the whole enterprise (p. 57).

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This charge is clearly unwarranted. To begin with, philanthropy must be understood as an effort to improve upon the *long term* well-being of the Jew, rather than as an attempt to alleviate the pain and hardship of the *immediate moment*. It is true that when Israel became the home of a large number of displaced persons, recently released from the concentration camps, an even larger number of Jews in Arab-controlled lands were turned into displaced persons. But the question whether the establishment of the State of Israel was also the fulfillment of a legitimate philanthropic aim cannot be decided by weighing the immediate pain produced by the State's creation against the total volume of momentary pain which it reduced or eliminated. It is also essential to compute the quantity of happiness that it brought to the Jews around the world as well as to generations of Jews yet unborn.

It is, furthermore, difficult to justify the author's conclusion that Zionists were more interested in the achievement of the political than the philanthropic objective. The two are inseparable. Even if Zionists channelled most of their energies in the political direction, it was because they regarded autonomy as a necessary condition of well-being. Shall we, if we may suggest an analogy, conclude (and we must if Dr. Petuchowski's reasoning is correct) that the head of a family is more concerned with his business than his children merely because he spends more of his energies on his enterprise than on his family?

Most interesting perhaps, is the author's repudiation of the Zionist dictum that identifies Israel as the spiritual center of world Jewry. He notes that "spiritual center" may be assigned a secular or religious interpretation and argues that, in either case, the claim cannot be defended. In response to the suggestion that Israel functions as the spiritual center, in the religious sense, he declares that present day realities as well as theological considerations fail to justify such a conclusion.

The theological considerations offered do not constitute an argument but an appeal. Linking gods, cults, and territories is no particular Jewish achievement (p. 84). If this statement is meant to stress Judaism's universalistic commitments, then there is no argument. But if it is intended to mean that the land of Israel is not a crucial ingredient in the faith of the Jew—and this is apparently what is meant, for Dr. Petuchowski repudiates the notion that "Israel's faith is for all time bound up with a certain territory" (p. 85)—we must reply that his theology has no appeal to the traditionally-minded Jew.

Nor is it fair to judge the idea of Israel as the spiritual center by present day realities. The classical Zionist is not a sociologist who studies *facts* but a visionary who strives for the realization of a dream. It is part of the vision of the religious Zionist that Israel will one day become the spiritual center for world Jewry. And if present day facts do not lend support to such a hope, the religious Zionist

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will be no more discouraged by realities than was his political counterpart half a century ago.

Zion Reconsidered, if read for the stimulation it will provide, must be read with care.

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

RABBI VICTOR SOLOMON is Rabbi of Congregation Ahavath Achim in Fairfield, Conn. and serves as instructor of Sociology and Philosophy at the University of Bridgeport.

RABBI SOL ROTH of the Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach teaches philosophy at Yeshiva University. His recently published *Science and Religion* is discussed elsewhere in this issue.