

Zionist Crackup

CHANDLER BURR

The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul, by Yoram Hazony (Basic, 433 pp., \$28)

THE controversy that Yoram Hazony's *The Jewish State* has generated in this country is probably due both to the book's subject—the argument that there can and should be a modern democratic state defined by an ancient religious and ethnic identity—and to the fact that it rather breathtakingly encompasses at once the most intractable armed conflict in the world and the thorniest intellectual question of the early 21st century: What role should race, ethnicity, and religion play in the value of the human being? It's a big book on a big subject, and it raises a big question—one that is being devoutly ignored by most American Jews because answering it would mean to them, in an almost literal sense, the end of the world.

The thesis presented by Hazony, an American-born Orthodox Israeli and a political conservative, echoes that of Zionism's father, Theodor Herzl. Herzl believed that "a strong Jewish political and military power . . . alone could guarantee the Jews as a people security and freedom." Given history's bitter lessons, Hazony argues, with Herzl, that "only in an independent Jewish state can Jews participate fully in every aspect of the society and the state" and thereby achieve "inner wholeness." The question he asks in this book is whether the Israeli Left could achieve what Israel's Arab enemies could not—the destruction of the Jewish state—by transforming Israel into "precisely that which the early dreamers of Zionism fought to

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escape: a state devoid of any Jewish purpose and meaning, one that can neither inspire the Jews nor save them in distress." His answer is a resounding yes—if something is not done about it quickly.

Hazony's description of what he calls post-Zionism (by which he really means anti-Zionism) is suitably eye-popping. He quotes staffers from the liberal daily *Ha'aretz* likening Israel's citizenship laws to the Nuremberg laws and calling the Law of Return—which allows any Jew who wishes to emigrate to Israel to become a citizen—"overt discrimination." Israeli public figures demand the dejudaization of the Israeli flag and national anthem, seek actively to downgrade Jewish content in the public schools, and attack the concept of

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Jewish sovereignty. Former education minister Shulamit Aloni has called the notion of a Jewish state "antidemocratic, if not racist" and has done her part to reverse the State Education Law (passed by the Labor Zionists in 1953), which sought to inculcate "the values of Jewish culture" and "loyalty to the Jewish people." ("What's important," Aloni explained, "is that they [become] better human beings, not better Jews.") Hazony notes that "not once" in the introduction to the Ministry of Education's new archaeology curriculum is there "a single reference to Jews, Judaism, the Jewish people, or Jewish history, or to the fact that students are going to dig in the Jewish state. Instead there is a profusion of distilled universalism: 'the spirit of man,' 'the culture of mankind,' 'human culture and its contribution to mankind.'"

So much for education. Hazony's attack on Israeli high culture focuses mainly on the novelists David Grossman, Amos Oz, and A. B. Yehoshua, who write movingly about the suffering of Arabs at Israeli hands. The Israeli courts are no less problematic: Supreme

Court chief justice Aharon Barak has essentially declared that democracy is incompatible with the legal elevation of one group above others. Hazony ends his survey with the military, where he finds post-Zionist ideas robbing the Israeli Defense Force of its purpose. The mission of the IDF, he writes, "has never been the safeguarding of 'state, citizens, and democracy.' Its purpose was to . . . serve as the guardian of the Jewish people." Universalism, for Hazony, is a demoralizing, disorienting blow to the Jewish aspect of a decreasingly Jewish state.

How, then, to keep Israel Jewish? Hazony's answer is simple: ideas. Quoting Herzl's dictum that "only an idea" can move a people, Hazony argues that the old Zionists were undone by their "abandonment of the deep end of the pool of cultural and political ideawork." This is where Hazony's book really gets interesting. Some reviewers—like Walter Reich, director of the Holocaust Memorial Museum—have alleged that in this book devoted to the notion that ideas will redeem the state of Israel, Hazony provides no ideas. This statement is technically wrong. Hazony does have an idea, though one that is frankly unworkable: 20th-century Jews should return to 19th-century ethnonationalism.

Hazony is exquisitely specific on this point. He presents two alternatives. Jean-Jacques Rousseau proposed a "social-contract state" in which all individuals are equal, regardless of natural or historical differences. Herzl, who had witnessed the tragedy of the Dreyfuss affair and concluded that Jews would always be vulnerable since gentiles would always be anti-Semitic, subscribed to the idea of the nation-state—the idea of ethnicity determining a state for and of one group of people. "We are a people—one people," Herzl wrote emphatically.

But here is the big and essentially unaddressed question Hazony's book raises: What does a Jewish state—and by extension, Jewishness itself—really mean in today's world? This has proved a tricky question for American Jews, which is a polite way of saying that the debate over *The Jewish State* has



been screamingly incoherent. Take columnist Charles Krauthammer. Here is an American conservative who derides the PC victim mentality, rejects the destructive belief of many blacks that no whites can be trusted because whites will always be racist, and exhorts feminists, gay-rights advocates, et al. to embrace color-blind universalism. Yet in his strong public support for Hazony, Krauthammer prescribes exactly the same kind of identity politics for Jews that he attacks in other contexts.

This kind of inconsistency is not limited to conservatives. The Jewish-American Left is caught in the same bind—indeed the hypocrisy on that side is even more striking. In *Slate*, columnist Judith Shulevitz simultaneously condemned Bob Jones University for its anti-intermarriage philosophy and—in the same article—defended the anti-intermarriage philosophy of Judaism.

Hazony likewise contradicts himself. He derides the Catholic Church's infamous 1871 rejection of secularism, liberalism, modern civilization, and religious tolerance, saying that it demonstrates the need for a Jewish Israel; yet he also demands that Israel reject secularism, liberalism, and religious tolerance because Israel is for Jews. Opposing arguments are used to buttress an identical conclusion: Religious intolerance is good when Jews do it to Muslims but bad when Catholics do it to Jews.

Elsewhere in the world, Europe's nation-states are uniting, transcending ancient ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences. Salman Rushdie attacks the rise of violent Hindu nationalism in India as "the triumph of sectarianism over secularism, of hatred over fellowship, of ugliness over love." Everyone condemns the nationalist ethnic slaughter in ex-Yugoslavia. Yet Hazony promotes theologically based ethnocentric nationalism as a conservative ideal.

The Jewish State is, particularly in its detailed presentation of the state of the state of Israel, an excellent book. Or rather, two excellent books: The evidence it presents could sustain either side of the argument. Hazony quotes Shimon Peres—"We do not need to reinforce sovereignty, but rather to strengthen the position of humankind"—and Amos Oz—"I would be more than happy to live in a world com-

posed of dozens of civilizations . . . without the tools of statehood. . . . Nationalism itself is, in my eyes, the curse of mankind." To a true-believing Zionist, these statements are self-evidently horrifying. To an equally committed post-Zionist, they are wonderful. The choice is one that puts both Jewish Israelis and Jewish Americans in a tough position. For Israelis—let us be clear—such universalism means the death of the Jewish state and of a nation in which Jews can say, with Herzl and Hazony, "We are a people—one people." But it will hardly be easier for American Jews who yearn to preserve their Jewishness, yet who live (and firmly believe) in a country whose coins are imprinted "E pluribus unum." **NR**

The Statist Temptation

FRED SIEGEL

It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States, by Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks (Norton, 379 pp., \$26.95)

ALMOST twenty years ago, just as François Mitterrand's Socialists were about to come to power with the promise of "Bread and Roses," I was sitting in a Paris auditorium listening to a debate on the question, "Why is there no socialism in America?" Today the better question might be, "Why is there no socialism in Europe?" but at the time the question that had haunted generations of American and European intellectuals was still on the table. The speaker was Seymour Martin Lipset, a tall, stocky, enormously learned middle-aged man whose very presence seemed to annoy the audience of young left-wing academics. But when Lipset explained that socialism in America had

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failed in large part because the distinctly American and liberal principles on which the country was founded were shared by Whigs and Democrats as well, the audience became positively apoplectic. One of the New Leftists could barely contain himself and whispered loudly enough for everyone to hear, "Enough of this dinosaur." Lipset was unruffled, but I was dismayed. He had laid out a strong case, and I wanted to hear a response that met the argument on its own terms. It turns out that there is no effective reply—and today it's the New Left that's extinct.

Now Lipset and his coauthor, Gary Marks, have elaborated on Lipset's persuasive argument with *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States*. The question is worth going over once again precisely because arguments once made for socialism will reappear in new forms in the coming years.

The intensity of the clashes between American workers and capitalists during the industrial strikes of the late 19th century made it appear that socialism was on the horizon. Indeed, the German sociologist Werner Sombart thought it axiomatic that the United States, as the most advanced industrial country, should be leading the way to socialism. The problem, as the European socialist Max Beer explained, was

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that the United States was a "living contradiction . . . of Marxian theory," a contradiction that generated enormous anxiety among socialists. Trotsky, who briefly lived in the Bronx with his family in 1917, provided an answer of sorts when he explained that their apartment "in a workers district" was "equipped with all sorts of conveniences that we Europeans were quite unused to: electric lights, gas cooking range, bath, telephone, automatic service elevator and even a chute for the garbage. These things completely won [his children] over to New York."