



Hulton Deutsch

Theodor Herzl

Born a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl was the creator of political Zionism and hence the founding father of the state of Israel. Appalled by the anti-Semitism which accompanied the Dreyfus Affair in France, he abandoned the prevailing liberal ideas of Jewish assimilation and in his 1896 pamphlet *Der Judenstaat* proposed a sovereign Jewish state as the guarantor of Jewish life and liberty. In 1897 he organized the first World Zionist Congress, which settled on Palestine as the site for the Jewish state and established the World Zionist Organization. The rest of his life was spent in promoting his dream, and in 1949 his remains were transferred to Israeli soil.

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Zionism

I INTRODUCTION

Zionism, movement to unite the Jews of the Diaspora (exile) and settle them in Palestine; it arose in the late 19th century and culminated in 1948 in the establishment of the state of Israel. The movement's name is derived from Zion, the hill on which the Temple of Jerusalem was located and which later came to symbolize Jerusalem itself. The term Zionism was first applied to this movement in 1890 by the Austrian Jewish philosopher Nathan Birnbaum.

II HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Zionism as an organized political movement originated in the 19th century, but its roots go back to the 6th century BC, when the Jews were carried off to captivity in Babylon and their prophets encouraged them to believe that one day God would allow them to return to Palestine, or Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel). Over the centuries, the Jews of the Diaspora associated the hope of the return with the coming of the Messiah, a saviour whom God would send to deliver them. Individual Jews often migrated to Palestine to join the Jewish communities that continued to exist there, but they remained a small minority among a largely Arab population.

A The Haskalah and the Move to Assimilate

A secular Zionism could not emerge until Jewish life itself was to some extent secularized. This process began in the 18th century with the Haskalah (Hebrew, "enlightenment"), a movement inspired by the European Enlightenment and initiated by the German Jewish

philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. The Haskalah marked the beginning of a move away from traditional orthodox Judaism and created a need for Jewish national feeling to replace religion as a unifying force. Initially, however, the trend was towards assimilation into European society. The liberal Jewish reform movement in Germany sought to reduce Judaism to a religious denomination, allowing Jews to adopt German culture. The achievement of political equality by European Jewry began in France in 1791 during the French Revolution and spread over most of Europe in the next few decades.

B The Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism

Political emancipation, however, proved to be a false dawn. In the second half of the 19th century organized anti-Semitic parties emerged in Germany and Austria-Hungary. In Russia, where the emancipation had in any case been superficial, the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 unleashed a wave of nationalist feeling, and anti-Jewish riots (pogroms) spread across the country. The 1881 pogroms were as much a turning point for Russian Jewry as the French Revolution had been for French and Western European Jewry.

To escape persecution, large numbers of Russian Jews migrated to the West, primarily to the United States. A smaller number, believing that Jews living in the Diaspora were destined for the eternal role of scapegoat, and that their only security lay in a homeland of their own, went to Palestine, which was then under Turkish rule. They were given financial support by the French Jewish philanthropist Baron Edmond de Rothschild, but many did not persevere, and this early Jewish immigration was insignificant.

III PRECURSORS OF ZIONISM

In the mid-19th century, two European Orthodox rabbis, Jehuda Alkalai and Zevi Hirsch Kalischer, adapted the traditional belief in a Messiah to modern conditions by teaching that Jews themselves must lay the groundwork for his coming. In 1862 the German Jewish socialist Moses Hess, inspired by the Italian nationalist movement, published *Rom und Jerusalem* (Rome and Jerusalem, trans. 1918), a book in which he rejected the idea of assimilation into European society, insisting that the essence of the Jews' problem was their lack of a national home.

IV THE FOUNDATION OF THE ZIONIST MOVEMENT

In 1896 Theodor Herzl, an Austrian Jewish journalist, published a short book aptly called *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State), in which he analysed the causes of anti-Semitism and proposed its cure, the creation of a Jewish state. Although Herzl secured audiences with the German emperor William II and Sultan Abdulhamid II of Turkey, he was unable to secure their support. Nor would the wealthy among the Jews put up the money to back his project.

In 1897 Herzl organized the first Zionist Congress in Basel. Attended by nearly 200 delegates, the congress formulated the Basel Programme, which remained the basic platform of the Zionist movement. The programme defined Zionism's goal as the creation

“for the Jewish people of a home in Palestine secured by public law”. The congress also founded a permanent World Zionist Organization (WZO) and authorized it to establish branches in every country with a substantial Jewish population.

When Herzl failed to obtain a charter from the Turkish sultan, he directed his diplomacy towards Britain, but the British offer to investigate the possibility of Jewish colonization in East Africa—the so-called Uganda scheme—nearly split the Zionist movement. The Russian Zionists accused Herzl of betraying the Zionist programme. Although Herzl was reconciled with his detractors, he died soon after, a broken man. When the 7th Zionist Congress (1905) rejected the East Africa scheme, Israel Zangwill formed the Jewish Territorial Organization, the goal of which was to seek territory anywhere suitable for Jewish colonization. Zangwill's organization, however, never attracted a large following and faded after his death.

V VARIETIES OF ZIONISM

Zionism has spawned a profusion of different ideas and ideologies. The cultural Zionists, whose chief spokesman was the Russian journalist Ahad Ha-am, emphasized the importance of making Palestine a centre for the spiritual and cultural growth of the Jewish people. Another variety of Zionism was elaborated by A. D. Gordon, who wrote of and practised the “religion of labour”, a Tolstoyan concept that conceived the bonding of people and land through working the soil.

Socialist Zionists tried to give a Marxist justification for Zionism. The Jews needed a territory of their own in which to set up a normally stratified society, where they could then engage in class struggle and thus hasten the revolution. Social experiments in cooperative agriculture led to a uniquely Zionist creation, the kibbutz (Hebrew, “collective”), which provided the political, cultural, and military backbone of the *Yishuv* (Hebrew, “settlement”, the Jewish community in Palestine) before the state of Israel was established and for many years thereafter.

Religious Zionists saw their goal as steering the Jews' national regeneration on to more traditional paths, but those religious parties that shared political authority have been criticized for compromising their beliefs in return for the material trappings of power.

VI ZIONISM IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The two greatest achievements of Zionism in this century are the commitment made by the British government in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the establishment of Israel in 1948.

During World War I, the British wooed the Zionists in order to secure strategic control over Palestine and to gain the support of world Jewry for the Allied cause. The declaration, contained in a letter from Foreign Secretary Arthur J. Balfour to a British Zionist leader, approved the establishment in Palestine of a “national home for the Jewish people”. As

Palestine had passed from Turkish to British control, this provided the Zionists with the charter they had been seeking.

A The Inter-war Period

After the war Zionism faced two critical setbacks. Russian Jewry, the traditional source of Zionist migration, was sealed off by the new Soviet regime. In addition, a dispute arose between the leader of American Zionism, Judge Louis Brandeis, and Dr Chaim Weizmann, the man credited with obtaining the Balfour Declaration. The dispute involved both personal issues and an ideological debate over the future of Zionism. Weizmann's "synthetic Zionism", which advocated both political struggle and colonization, won out over Brandeis's pragmatic approach, which concentrated on colonization without reference to future nationhood. Weizmann emerged as unchallenged leader, but Brandeis and his group seceded, and until World War II, American Jews directed the major part of their philanthropy to the relief of European Jews rather than to Palestine.

In 1929, Weizmann set up the wider Jewish Agency, a body that harnessed the financial support of Jews who were willing to aid their brethren in Palestine but did not subscribe to the political goals of Zionism.

During the period of the British mandate (1920-1948), the Yishuv grew from 50,000 to 600,000 people. Most of the new immigrants were refugees from National Socialist persecution in Europe. In 1935 a revisionist group led by Ze'ev Vladimir Jabotinsky seceded from the Zionist movement and formed the New Zionist party. During the late 1930s, Jabotinsky, who advocated a Jewish state on both sides of the River Jordan, devoted himself to a fruitless campaign to arrange for the mass evacuation of European Jews to Palestine.

Coexistence with the Arabs of Palestine became an increasingly intractable problem. Recurrent riots in the 1920s culminated in full-scale rebellion from 1936 to 1939. The Zionist movement adopted various approaches, including that of Judah L. Magnes, president of the Hebrew University, who advocated the foundation of a joint Arab-Jewish state, and that of future Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion, who argued that accommodation with the Arabs could come only from a position of Jewish strength, after the Yishuv had become a majority. For Socialist-Zionists, unresolvable conflict arose between the ideal of class cooperation with Arab workers and the higher national goal of consolidating a new Jewish working class in Palestine.

B The White Paper

On the eve of World War II, the British government changed its Palestine policy, in an effort to appease the Arab world. The White Paper of May 1939 terminated Britain's commitment to Zionism and provided for the establishment of a Palestinian state within ten years. The Arab majority in Palestine was guaranteed by a clause that provided for the further immigration of 75,000 Jews during the following five years, after which additional entry would depend on Arab consent.

The 1939 White Paper broke the traditional Anglo-Zionist alliance and provoked many in the *Yishuv* to violent protest. In May 1942, Zionist leaders meeting at the Biltmore Hotel in New York demanded a Jewish Democratic Commonwealth—that is, a state—in all of western Palestine as part of the new world order after the war. This “Biltmore programme” marked a radical departure in Zionist policy. The Holocaust, the systematic murder of European Jews by the Nazis, finally convinced Western Jewry of the need for a Jewish state. In 1944, the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization), a Zionist guerrilla force led by the future Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin, began an armed revolt against British rule in Palestine. Terrorist attacks were made on both British officials and troops, and Palestinian Arabs.

C The State of Israel

On May 14, 1948, at midnight, the British mandate over Palestine ended, and the Jews declared their independence in the new state of Israel. Israel owed its existence to a unique set of circumstances: Western sympathy for Jewish suffering; the political influence of American Jews in securing the support of President Harry S. Truman; Britain's loss of will to continue its rule in Palestine; and, perhaps above all, the *Yishuv*'s determination and ability to establish and hold on to its own state.

The purpose of Zionism during the first years of statehood seemed clear—to consolidate and defend Israel, to explain and justify its existence. Relations between the new state and the Zionists, however, proved problematic. Israel's first prime minister, Ben-Gurion, insisted that Zionist leaders who elected to remain in the Diaspora would have no say in Israel's policy decisions, even though Israel may have owed its existence to their influence. Ben-Gurion also insisted that, now that the Jewish state was in existence, the sole purpose of Zionism must be personal *aliya* (Hebrew, “going up”, or settling in Israel).

Nahum Goldmann, head of the WZO from 1951 to 1968, argued that Zionism must also nurture and preserve Jewish life in the Diaspora. American Zionists, notably Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist movement, have urged a redefinition of Judaism and have warned against the dangers of creating a schism between Israel and Diaspora Jewry. In 1968 the Jerusalem Programme (adopted by the Zionist Congress held in Jerusalem that year), made *aliya* the condition for membership of any Zionist group, but the new programme has brought little practical change.

During the 1970s, much Zionist activity focused on Soviet Jewry, who were finally allowed to emigrate in restricted numbers. Again, differences arose between Zionist and Jewish relief agencies over whether emigration to Israel should be the only option offered to Soviet Jews. A massive wave of emigration by Soviet Jews to Israel began in the late 1980s.

Zionism has been repeatedly denounced by the Arab nations and their supporters as a “tool of imperialism”. In 1975, the UN adopted a resolution equating Zionism with racism; in 1991, the General Assembly voted 111 to 25 for repeal. For their part Zionists have emphasized that their movement has never rejected Arab self-determination and that the fundamental meaning of Zionism has been the national liberation of the Jewish people.

Zionism today is based on the unequivocal support of two basic principles—the autonomy and safety of the state of Israel and the right of any Jew to settle there (the Law of Return)—which together provide the guarantee of a Jewish nationality to any Jew in need of it.

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