THE JEWS AND PALESTINE

HISTORICAL CONNECTION

and

HISTORIC RIGHT

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This pamphlet has been compiled, with some expansion and revision, from a number of articles printed in 1936 and 1937 in the Yiddish "Day" of New York, and a section of an essay on Ber Borochov which appeared in the Hebrew "Davar" by Tel Aviv on December 16th, 1937. It is an attempt to answer a question whose clarification will assist Socialists, both Jews and non-Jews, to determine their attitude to the Palestine question, which has become so tragically acute. The question is the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and—what goes with it, though it is not identical—its historic right to the land.
1. Early Period.

THE problem of the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine is one which the Jewish Labour movement encountered in a primitive form at its very inception. The minutes book of the first Jewish Socialist Society in London, whose founder and Secretary was Aaron Lieberman, the “father” of Jewish Socialism, contains a report of a meeting held on 22nd July, 1876, at which the following characteristic debate took place:

Finally, the Secretary (Lieberman) brought up the question of the next meeting. Next Saturday night would be the Ninth of Ab. Might it not be better to shift the meeting to another day?

Citizen Saper contended that this day was no concern of us Socialists. We had discarded the old traditions, and therefore we should not put off our meeting because of this day. All we know is our cause, which is at the same time the cause of humanity as a whole, and that is all.

The Secretary thereupon remarked that meanwhile the Ninth of Ab had the same significance for Jewish Socialists as for all our other co-religionals. So long as the Social Revolution had not taken place, political liberty was of great importance to every nation. This day, the Ninth of Ab, was the day when we lost our independence, and for that our people mourns still now, more than eighteen hundred years. It should have so much significance for us that we should shift the meeting to another day.

[51]
The meeting voted on the question and decided to hold the next meeting on Sunday night, 10th of Ab, July 30th, 1876. (Quoted by A. Tschernikover in the Historical Publications of the Yiddish Scientific Institute (Yivo), Vol. 1.)

At bottom, this debate was the beginning of the conflict in the Jewish Socialist movement over the question of the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine. That controversy is not yet ended. Sapers' dogmatic anti-religious assimilationalism is still dominant in many minds, not only among anti-Zionists. But Lieberman, too, has his followers, who have developed his ideas even outside the Zionist-Socialist ranks. One of the best known of them, Dr. Chaim Jilitovsky, wrote as far back as 1911:

"Therefore the Jewish people has one sacred spot, which is of special poetic national significance. That is the Holy Land, the Land of Israel, where the Jewish people was born, the scene of the most important events in its history, the soil in which rests the dust of its noblest heroes, the place where it created the greatest and finest elements of its culture. This land is indeed enshrined in the heart of every religious Jew, and of many—a great many—who are not religious.

Suppose that the Zionists are wrong in thinking that settlement in Palestine can solve the Jewish problem, and make it possible for the whole Jewish people to live a decent, free, rich and secure life. That is perhaps an impossible utopia. But for the national-poetic regeneration of the Jewish religion that is not so important. What is important is that the Holy Land will forever remain sacred to the Jewish people. It will not suffice, however, if the memory of the land of Israel lives on in the minds of the people, as some non-Zionist nationalists desire. If the land of our great past is for us indeed a holy land,

then our feeling for it cannot possibly be reconciled with the thought that our holy land should remain in foreign hands, should be desecrated and waste, so that even a Zionist tourist will find in it with his heart wrong with anguish, because of its desolated state. The national-poetic regeneration of the Jewish religion imposes a sacred duty upon every nationally minded Jew to redeem the land from alien hands—whether the land is to be "secured by public law" or to be privately secured. The main thing is that it should pass into Jewish hands, which would transform it into a Paradise, into the most beautiful place on earth, to the condition which it deserves, in accordance with our love for and devotion to it. And from this aspect it makes no difference how much it may cost and whether it will be economically worth while. Sanctuaries are not subject to six per cent. per annum." (Dr. Ch. Jilitovsky, "The National-Poetic Regeneration of the Jewish Religion").

2. Historical Connection and Spontaneous Process.

The question of the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine has long been, and partly is still, a most complex and delicate question for the Zionist-Socialist movement. It manifested itself in a particularly acute form during the split in the Poale Zion movement over the Uganda question, and afterwards over the question of Palestine or a territory anywhere. The Socialists, Ugandists and Territorialists allowed no significance, or at least no decisive significance, to the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine. To some it was actually a negative point. The political literature of this school of thought often speaks disparagingly of the "Romanticism of the Cave of Machpelah, the Wailing Wall and Mother Rachel's Tomb." The intention was to suggest that the whole Palestine idea was reactionary in character and utterly remote from real life. Above all it was the fact that according to the spirit of the times—be it essentially a religious or a nationalistic character, to a large extent determined the negative attitude of many Socialists, and in general of those Jews whose approach to the Jewish problem was secular.

[4] Fourteen years earlier, Moses Hess, the founder of Socialist Zionism, had written in his "Rome andJerusalem": "I cannot remember ever being more deeply moved than by the scenes which I witnessed in my grandmother's house in B'nai that the procession of the day of the destruction of Jerusalem. In the first years of the month of Ab the mourning which had commenced three weeks before this disastrous Ninth of Ab assumed a gloomy character. Even the Sabbath lost its festivity during these days of national mourning, and it is characterizedly designated the 'Black Sabbath'.

[5]
Not romanticism, not nostalgia—ran the argument—but the vital interests of the people, and of the working-class, must decide the choice of the future Jewish territory in which Jewish immigration is to be concentrated. Therefore, not definitely Palestine, or even definitely not Palestine. Even that section of the Poale Zion movement which remained stubbornly loyal to the Palestine idea showed several different ideological tendencies, especially in Russia, with regard to the question, “Why only Palestine?”

“Palestinianism en principe” answered this question very simply: “We want, or more correctly the Jewish people wants Palestine because of its historical connection with the land throughout the centuries since the destruction of Jewish independence.”

“Practical” Palestinianism attached no importance to this historical aspect of the question or actually denied it.

It took its stand in favor of Palestine on the basis of geographical, economic and other factors which made this particular country suitable—in fact the only suitable—place for Jewish concentration and colonization.

And then there was the “prognostic” Palestinianism which proclaimed that “an exact analysis of the objective tendencies of Jewish immigration points to that concrete territory where Jewish immigration will spontaneously concentrate.”

“Just as Socialism is realized in a spontaneous process of concentration of production, independent of any conscious will, so the Jewish wandering masses begin spontaneously to concentrate in a specific territory without it being dependent on anyone’s wish. This territory is Palestine.” (B. Borochov, “What Do The Poale Zion Want?”)

And Borochov, with a great deal of knowledge and acuteness, seeks to find the Marxist explanation why, of all countries, the spontaneous process will select Palestine to which to direct the Jewish migration stream. Basing himself on what, considering the time (1905), is a most original analysis of the laws of general and Jewish migration, he came to the conclusion that Jewish immigration is being eliminated from both the highly industrialized capitalist countries, and also from the agricultural lands. The economic activity of Jewish immigrants tends to lose its industrial and commercial character, and to turn...

...towards producing the means of production and towards agriculture. But the transition cannot take place all at once; therefore Jewish emigration must be directed to a land whose economic life is neither that of a highly industrialized capitalist country, nor of an agricultural country, but semi-agricultural—a transitional economy.” And: “the land of this spontaneously concentrating Jewish emigration will be Palestine.”

It will not be derogatory to Borochov to declare very categorically that neither this nor other similar attempts have succeeded in proving the argument here set out. For it is not possible to prove that all the qualities that Borochov ascribes—only in part justifiably—to the land of the future concentration of Jewish migration exist only in Palestine, and are not to be found anywhere else in the world. That is why this particular link is the weakest in the very formidable chain of reasoning on which Borochov has erected his theoretical structure.

Borochov himself has in his later works moved very far from this theory, which some of his followers still consider sacrosanct. Unfortunately Borochov’s premature death prevented the realization of his dream of revising his “Platform” in the light of events since the first Russian Revolution, including the Great War and the second Russian Revolution. That is why we have no exhaustive work from his pen on the question with which we are here concerned. But there is sufficient evidence in his writings of this period to show in what direction his thoughts were moving.

First of all, it is important to remember that even at the time of the “Platform” Borochov was not one of the most extreme antagonists of the historical “heresy.” It was only as an ideological element of the Party programme that he did not accept the historic basis of the Palestine idea. But as far as individuals are concerned he had already laid it down that “some of us Palestine may be sacred as our ancient fatherland. Some may think that the ideology of the national liberation movement also includes the love of Palestine.”

Five years later, in his essay “The Anti-Zionist Consecration,” which is in many respects unique among his writings, he includes among the forerunners of Zionism also “the theological ideology of national restoration by miracle—the Messianic idea.” He sees in Zionism the “revival of the slumbering hopes of the Jewish masses” and finds that “Zionism has translated into
the language of mundane achievement what the people had previously conceived as transcendental, celestial promises. For the Jewish masses it has illuminated the essence of their past and their future road upon this earth.

He regards abstract Territorialism as a branch of Diaspora nationalism. "No matter how fundamentally our Territorialists love the Diaspora they are bound to it with all their soul. They are totemized in the Diaspora by boycott, pogroms, emigration. Their understanding of the Jewish problem is not national and historical, it is not even economic, it is simply geographical. Anyone who the Jewish problem becomes a question of finding a home-land—somewhere in the antipodes—has not liquidated his accounts with the Diaspora." I can hardly imagine a more thoroughgoing acceptance in principle of the historical conception of the Palestine idea.

In an article called "The Terrorist and the Watchman" Borchov speaks not only of the heroin of the Jewish watchmen and the peaceful labour of the Jewish workers in Palestine, but he also points out with pride that this watchman, this worker "has changed his glorious name for a national name linked with historic illusions and hopes." The Jewish heroes of the non-Jewish revolutionary movement transformed themselves from Velvets and Berds to Antonys and Kondratays; these new heroes, our heroes, the heroes of Palestine have adopted new names, names that indicate their own soil and liberty: Shamali, Abudari, Haemani are their names.

In the same way his terminology changed in regard to the land, the movement and its more profound significance. Instead of the foreign and historically false "Palestine" he substituted to an increasing extent the simple and more popular term "Land of Israel." Instead of the "realization of Territorialism," he spoke of the creation of its own home for the Jewish people.

In 1913 he wrote very plainly:

"There are a number of historical colonizing and practical reasons that lead us to the conviction that our people can have its own home only in Palestine." Borchov's emancipation from anti-historianism need not mean also his complete repudiation of the idea of the spontaneous process. On the contrary, it is only on the basis of the historical aspect that this obtains profounder significance as the spontaneous selection of Palestine by the people based on the historical connection which the people has never forgotten.

At that time the programmes of the Palle Zion parties outside Russia endeavoured to create a synthesis between the historical and the practical colonization motives in establishing the basis of "Palestinianism." The most mature formulation of that period is found in the draft programmes of the Austrian Palle Zion (Third Conference 1906).

"The masses of the Jewish people being for centuries town-dwellers find transition to agriculture a difficult process, and consequently the colonization of these masses of uncultivated virgin territory or such as will for a long time be suitable only for agricultural colonization cannot achieve the aim of national colonization. The Jewish stream of emigration must be directed to such a land whose geographical and economic situation can make possible a large-scale industrial and commercial colonization, a country which has a power of attraction capable of keeping the Jewish masses on the soil, and which can thus overcome the difficulties of creating an agricultural base for the Jewish society.

These prerequisites exist only in the historic fatherland of the Jews—Palestine—which is part of a State still in a state of natural economy, which lies between important trade routes and in the vicinity of markets that can be developed, and which has in addition remained for thousands of years in the minds of the Jewish people as the only country of its future and its liberty.

This synthetic conception was also adopted in the first joint memorandum of the Palle Zion parties of Russia, Austria and America to the International Socialist Bureau (March 1907).

"Jewish emigration cannot be directed, like the emigration of agricultural peoples, to countries with a developed agrarian colonization. Its trend is determined by the specific economic structure of the future Jewish colonists, who have for hundreds of years been exclusively town-dwellers. Jewish emigration is beginning to turn to a land whose geographical and economic situation makes possible commercial and industrial colonization on a large scale, and eases the difficulty of transition from town to agriculture by means of intensive cultivation, which is
more adapted to town-dwellers, in a land which has the power of attraction that will keep the Jewish masses attached to the soil. This land is the Land of Israel, the historic home of the Jewish nation."

(Both documents, composed by S. Kaplan, are quoted from his collected writings, "From Promise to Realization," Warsaw 1932.)


"On the day when the Temple was destroyed, the Messiah was born." How wonderfully this expresses the faith of the people that its servitude from the land would be only temporary, an unhappy episode in its history, whose further development would merge it with the land of its former liberty and greatness. This Messianic faith elevated to one of the main essentials of the Jewish faith—what else is it then the religious-romantic expression of the consciousness of the people that its status among the nations is abnormal, that the source of this abnormality lies in the loss of its own land and that the only remedy is the return to that land? In other words, the Messianic belief is nothing else than the religiously tinged forerunner of modern Zionism.

Incidentally, like modern Zionism, the Messianic belief combined in a remarkable organic form, metamorphosed into one unity, the desire for national renewal and the hope of human moral improvement, of better and nobler relationships between individuals and nations. Messiah Ben David in the mind of the nation is not only the restorer of Jewish independence in our ancient homeland, but is at the same time the leader of a mankind spiritually and morally renewed and united, living in perpetual peace. It is the perpetuation in the nations of the people of the vision of Isaiah—"and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Maimonides formulates the Messianic ideal in these amazingly simple words:

"The Sages and Prophets did not long for the days of the Messiah for wielding dominion over all the world or of ruling over the heathen, or being exalted by the peoples or of eating and drinking and rejoicing. Their desire was to be free to devote themselves to the Torah and its wisdom, without anyone to oppress and disturb them, in order that they might merit the life of the world to come. In that era there will not be famine or war, jealousy or strife."

Jewish mysticism dreamed of the salvation of the whole world in the Kingdom of God. And the Jewish New Year service prays for the time when all men "will form one league."

"The saints will see and will rejoice, and the just will be glad, and the righteous will sing songs of praise, and injustice will shut its mouth, and all evil will end like smoke, because they will destroy the rule of evil in the world."

How feeble against this are the objections of Zionist "patriots" that you cannot serve two gods, that the association of national liberation with the ideals of humanity is unnatural!

4. The Land of Israel—Palestine.

There are countless manifestations of the perpetual association with the land in the minds of the people. Take the name of the country. The war waged by the outside world against its Jewish name is as old as the Jewish exile. When the Roman conqueror wanted to wipe out the last vestige of its Jewish character he imposed officially the name "Palestine." It is true that he did not invent the name. It was a heritage from the Philistines who had dominated the southern coast. Herodotus used "Palestine" as the name for the whole country as far back as the Fifth century B.C. The Christian world has over a period of nearly 2,000 years employed many names—Palestine, the Holy Land, the Promised Land, but never, or barely at all, the Land of Israel.

The Jews too have called the country by several names, the Holy Land, the Land of the Fathers, and even Palestine. But the most popular and the most widely used name in all languages and dialects adopted by Jews in various times and countries remained, or rather, more properly, became Eretz Israel, Land of Israel. The other names stood for something
exceptional, something festive in the relationship of the Jews to the country, or in the case of the name "Palestine" its generally accepted geographical designation, but the name Eretz Israel expressed the natural, intimate, warm feeling of a man or of a nation to their home. It was moreover only in the dispersion that this grew to be the normal usage, for it expressed so simply the sense of Palestine being "home." In contrast to the countries of the dispersion, if no other memory of the land had remained in Jewish life than this name in the mouths of the people it would itself be sufficient evidence that the people still consider it their land and have neither forgotten nor abandoned it.

The struggle that centred round the Jewish name of the country did not end with the preamble to the British Mandate, which definitely recognised the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine. It was natural, after this preamble, that the Hebrew text of the first public proclamations and publications of the British Army of Occupation employed the term Eretz Israel. But the British Administration soon yielded to the protests of the Arab nationalists, and withdrew the complete Jewish name from official documents. It could not, however, entirely ignore it, and therefore decided on one of its characteristic compromises. It adopted as the official Hebrew name of the country the formula "Palestine (E.I.)" the letters in brackets being the initials of Eretz Israel. And in this form it appears in the legislation, and on the coins, notes, postage stamps, etc. of the country.

It is superfluous to explain that Jewish opposition to this linguistic monstrosity is based on more than philological and aesthetic grounds, though the formula does violence to the sense and structure of the Hebrew language. But it is essentially a political demonstration, and as such it was understood by both Jews and Arabs. The Jews felt from the beginning that this cutting down the Jewish name of the country to its initials and enclosing it in brackets compelled the non-Jewish world to forget the meaning of the true Jewish word "Palestine" and symbolize the restrictive conditions imposed upon their work of developing the country. And who will say that their feeling was not justified? Or will be surprised that the Jews have never accepted this unnatural twin, though they have had to make the best of it as an administrative imposition?

The matter became more serious when the Palestine Broadcasting Station was opened at the beginning of 1936, and the Hebrew announcer at the inaugural ceremony did with the Hebrew name what every Jew usually does with initials—proounced it in full: Palestine—Eretz Israel. And that was to have been his formula day after day: Palestine—Eretz Israel.

The Arab politicians and their press immediately started an agitation against it. They objected to the name Eretz Israel, when tradition under the British Mandate provided only for the two initials, and these, moreover, in brackets.

After long consideration the Government hit upon two acute ideas. The first was to omit the name of the country altogether from the announcement of the Station's name, and to use the word Jerusalem instead, and the second that when the name of the country must be used, the Hebrew spoken term should be: "Palestine Ay"—a further step in the direction of obliterating the Jewish name of the country, and moreover, an absurdity, which sounds laughable.

5. Historic Aspect and Socialism.

What do these and a thousand similar facts taken from the life of the people say to the modern Jew, and especially to the Socialist? Can he learn anything from the Messianic belief which has dominated the religious life—which for very long periods was the whole life—of the Jewish people throughout the centuries of its dispersion? Can he learn anything from the historic upheavals of Jewish life in various times and lands, due to the so-called false Messiahs, David Alroy, Reuben and Melech and Sabbathai Zvi? May he not contemplate the magnetic force which through the centuries has radiated from this land to the Jewish settlements in the Diaspora, in all the corners of the earth, and which has provided an almost uninterrupted stream (sometimes feeble, sometimes—for the conditions of the time—very strong) of Jewish emigrants to Palestine, from the Yemen, from Spain, from England, France, Germany, Poland, and which never for one moment allowed the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel to disappear completely? May he not reflect upon the journeys of Nehuda Habari and Mahomides, of Rabbi Judah the Haskid and Mendel of Vitebsk, of Rabbi Gershom Kotever and the Baal Shem...
The Rabbi, Cabbalist, and Hasidism. May he not feel some respect for the countless thousands of rabbis and Hasidim who, in the course of generations went to Palestine (there) and for those, more numerous still, who enable to do that, wished to be united with Eretz Israel at least after their death by having a little of its earth buried with them. And may he not ask what is the inward significance of the old Jewish custom of leaving a bare patch on the wall of one’s house in memory of the destruction? Or of the “Rabbi Meyer Butt Ha’Nees” as the symbol of responsibility and care for the poor, small settlement, which, by its presence in Eretz Israel, preserved the breaking of the chain of association of land and people.

May he not seek to understand, may he not admire the frustration of Jewish poetry through the Palestine idea, from the early liturgy, through Yehuda Halevi’s “Zion,” to Bialik? May he not recall the spring and liberation festival of

6. The People Have Not Forgotten.

These facts all go to prove that the people have not forgotten. This is a historic truth that cannot be denied or ignored. And it is foolish to be annoyed by it.

There is no need to invoke mysticism, or a belief in supernatural forces, to realize why the people did not and could not forget. The conditions under which they had to live in the lands of the Diaspora were not such as could destroy the natural instinct of self-preservation which tells each people that it must defend itself against annihilation, especially when this is a particular people a priori more different from its new environment by reason of its distinctive historic experiences and the body of spiritual, moral and religious baggage which it took with it into the dispersion. This is not the place to trace all the phases and forms of contact between this immigrant people and the autochthonous peoples among whom it dwells, from the days of the Roman Empire down to the Europe, especially Eastern and Central Europe, of to-day (not forgetting the lands outside Europe). It does not now concern us which was cause and which effect—antisemitism in its various forms from Tacitus to Hitler, exclusion from agriculture, economic isolation (which always returns after each period of economic assimilation), restriction of Jewish economic activity to usury and certain branches of commerce, segregation in the ghetto and the Pale of Settlement, political suppression, social ostracism, physical persecution and expulsion. It will serve our purpose suf-
ciently to know that all these forms of exclusion existed and still exist, and that they are largely responsible for the fact that the instinct of self-preservation has not been destroyed. There is much truth, though not the whole truth, in Herzl's phrase that "our enemies make us a nation." The contact between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds has never been such as even to weaken, let alone destroy in the Jewish people its feeling that it is alien, and make it forget its own past history. The people always felt that there was something not altogether normal in its relations with the outside world and, like the rest of the world, it found the explanation in the plain fact that the contact was never one of equals with equals, but of aliens with natives. That is why the sense of "homelessness" has persisted uninterruptedly—though in varying degrees of intensity. And out of this sense of homelessness gradually grew the nostalgia for its own home, or to put it more concretely, since a people thinks most easily in concrete terms, the longing to return home, which means the Land of Israel.

7. Attitude of Non-Jewish World.

The historical connection of the Jews with Palestine is not disputed. Let us see how the non-Jewish European civilization has reacted to it during the centuries. History and literature are both emphatic on this point. They tell us that in the minds of the non-Jewish world, too, friends and enemies alike, the Jewish connection with Palestine remained a living fact throughout all the centuries of Jewish dispersion. In the same way as the Jews developed homesickness as the result of feeling alien and homeless, so the non-Jewish world, which looked upon the Jews as an alien body, was forced to the conclusion that if this people was not at home then it must be at home there, in the place from which it came.

This is confirmed by the Christian conception that the expulsion of the Jews from Palestine was a divine punishment for their refusal to accept Christianity and for their treatment of the founder of Christianity. In this way Christianity tried to find an explanation of the extraordinary appearance of the eternally homeless "wandering Jew" and a facile excuse for its own behaviour towards the Jew. Yet even if it thus demonstrated to its own satisfaction that the separation of the Jew from his land was eternal and he would never return to it, Christendom thereby admitted, as a corollary, that this separation from its land was, for the homeless people, a disaster; one that it had deserved, yet nevertheless a terrible disaster for a people that had lost its home, could not find another, and had not forgotten and never would forget its old home. For were it otherwise—could it forget—then the punishment would not be a punishment at all.

But the Christian world did not always and everywhere uphold this doctrine of the finality of the separation between the Jewish people and Palestine. More humane voices have also been heard, especially since the beginning of the seventeenth century, which refused to reconcile themselves to the idea that the Jewish tragedy would never end, and foretold the reunion of the people and the land in a near or distant future. Some, like Milton, in his "Paradise Regained," linked the return, of course, with the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. Others considered the return of the Jewish people to Palestine as a prerequisite of the millennium, and the sympathy shown by many people in England for Manasseh Ben Israel's efforts to bring about the readmission of the Jews to England was due to their belief that the Jews must first be dispersed in all countries before they could return to their own land.

It was certainly not accidental that this idea became so prevalent at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries. It was closely connected with the upheavals that occurred in Europe at that time, and more especially with the grave situation in which the Jews found themselves then in a number of countries. The appearance of David Ryben and Shlomo Molcho in the sixteenth century, and of Sabbatai Zevi in the seventeenth century not only convulsed Jewish life but also created intense interest in the outside world. The disturbances of the Thirty Years' War, which to many seemed a sign of the coming of the End of Days, and the persecutions of the Jews (from the expulsion from Spain in the West to the Chmielnicki massacres in the East of Europe), compelled the best minds in Christendom to give serious consideration to the position of the Jewish people, and many of them came to the conclusion that the only way out was the restoration of the Jewish home in Palestine. And this trend of thought has persisted unbroken till our own day.

[18]
The late Dr. Nahum Sokolow collected in his "History of Zionism," which appeared in English in 1919, a great mass of material which illustrates this trend of thought among a large number of Christians, especially in England, from the beginning of the seventeenth century till our own time. There is a great deal of similar material, too, in Dr. Gebber's "Early History of Zionism," which appeared in German in 1927. These two books by no means exhaust the material that exists on the subject. Sokolow confines himself mainly to English sources, and Gebber is only interested in Jewish State projects, and omits all other phenomena, literary, religious, etc. But during the three centuries that elapsed between the Sabbatian Zeddi movement and modern Zionism there was a long line of non-Jewish theologians, poets, thinkers and statesmen who realized the tragedy of Jewish homelessness, and tried, each in his own way, to devise means of reuniting the Jews with the mother soil in Palestine.

Each century in its own way. In the seventeenth century Christian conversionist speculations concentrated on the expectation of Jewish redemption as a result of world-shaking events which were linked up with the idea of the Jews correcting their historic error in respect of Christianity. The most representative publication of this period is characterized by the title "The World's Great Restoration, or the Calling of the Jews and with Them of All the Nations and Kingdoms of the Earth to the Path of Charity" (Sir Henry Finch, London, 1621), and the text foretells that "The Jews and all the remnant shall return to their land and ancient seats, conquer their foes, have their soil more fruitful than ever. They shall create a glorious Church in the Land of Judah itself and bear rule far and near." During this period we have only speculations concerning the fulfillment of the Biblical prophecies by Divine Power. There is no call for action of any kind.

The eighteenth century continued this trend of Christian speculative thought, but there were already attempts to suggest a programme of activities which would make it possible to realize these plans of redemption. In 1695 a Danish merchant, Holger Paulsen, submitted to the Kings of England and France and other monarchs a plan for the restoration of the Jewish State in Palestine. There were several other similar projects put forward during the eighteenth century (as well as a number of "Territorialist" proposals).

In 1799 Napoleon issued his famous proclamation to the Jews of Asia and Africa "to range themselves behind his banner in order to restore ancient Jerusalem." And presently this idea of giving back Palestine to the Jewish people became a serious consideration in international policy. About 1840 the statesmen of the Great Powers, on the initiative of Lord Shairtesbury and of the British Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, seriously discussed such a proposal both as a means of grappling with the Jewish question, and as an attempt to deal with the problem of the political future of Palestine, which was then in the melting pot. In the course of the nineteenth century Russian Decembrists, Polish Liberationists (Lelewel, Mickiewicz), and French and British statesmen came to think of the restoration of Jewish Palestine not only as the answer to the Jewish question, but (some of them, at least) as also the logical conclusion of the liberation of Greece and Italy. It is not chance that the same Lord Byron who fought and was killed fighting for Greek liberation, wrote the lines:

"The wild dove hath her nest, the fox his cave, Mankind their country—Israel but the grave!"

And from Byron there is a straight line that leads to Disraeli's "David Abély" and George Eliot's "Daniel Deronda," which proclaimed that "when Israel shall have an organic centre the world will gain as Israel gains."

[20]

On the Ninth of Ab, corresponding to August 1843, Adam Mickiewicz and some members of his group in Paris visited the Jewish synagogue in the Rue Notre Dame de Nazareth, and in inviting his friends wrote to them the following: "We are bound up with the suffering of Israel who in every corner of the globe weep in-day for the desolation of Jerusalem. We Tooles must raise similar feelings in our selves when we remember the massacre in Krajno" (in 1831), when the Cossacks massacred thousands of people in the Warsaw suburb of Kajno) "and the capture of Warsaw. To the French it is Waterloo. Come, let us bow down before the people of Israel which has for eighteen centuries known how to keep alive its anguish as if the disaster had occurred only yesterday." After the reading of Lamentations in the synagogue Mickiewicz delivered a fiery oration in which he cried out that the "most beautiful, the most glorious day in the life of a people is the day on which the whole people rise." And he consoled the Jews, and urged them not to lose hope, because the redemption was near, and "we shall help you so that you shall be delivered from dispersion." [21]
8. The First “Charter” Plan.

It is an interesting and little known fact that the first proposal for a charter for Jewish colonisation in Palestine came in 1875 from the Palestine explorer, Sir Charles Warren, who wrote several books on Palestine exploration, and made a number of maps of Palestine. He proposed that Palestine should be handed over to a company similar to the old East India Company, to be developed and governed for a period of twenty years, “with the avowed intention of gradually introducing the Jews, pure and simple, who would eventually occupy and govern this country.”

It is true that Sir Charles had in mind colonising mainly Berber and Moorish Jews, whom he considered a good element for agricultural colonisation. But it is certainly of great importance that the famous explorer, writing more than sixty years ago, made the following remark about the extremely topical question of Palestine’s absorptive capacity:

“Palestine is about the size and shape of Wales, and has now a population of about one and a half millions. Give her good government, and quicken the commercial life of the people, and they may increase tenfold, and yet there would still be room for more. The soil is rich, the climate so varied, that within ordinary limits it may be said that the more people it contains, the more it may. Its productiveness will increase in proportion to the labour bestowed on the soil, while a population of fifteen millions might be accommodated there.”


So we see that the Jewish people has, over a period of centuries, not only preserved its historical connection with Palestine, but also continued to believe in its historic right to return there. And that in the course of centuries many of the finest and most far-seeing minds among non-Jews have also come to the conclusion that the ultimate answer to the Jewish problem is the satisfaction of this particular right. Consequently, when the preamble to the Palestine Mandate says that “recognition has thereby been given to the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and to the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country” it is not a new conception, but the logical conclusion of a long chain of history.

Yet the question must be faced whether this subjective historical connection is still a legitimate ground for establishing the historic right of the Jewish people to Palestine. Is not this right revolved by the living right of another people, the Arab people, which has been living in the country for centuries?

These are not only questions of external politics, but primarily and, above all, moral questions, questions of conscience, which must be seriously considered.

The controversy between the Jews and the Arabs (as well as between the Jews and the world) with regard to our title deeds to Palestine is today to a large extent different in character from what it was in 1921 or even in 1929. The supposed danger to the Moslem holy places, which played such a sinister part in the massacres of 1920, has lost much of its old appeal. It is still used, of course, for home consumption, as a means of exciting the masses of the Moslem population in the country. It is also still being successfully employed as an article of export to mobilise the Mahomedan world against Jewish constructive work. But it cannot now expect to be treated seriously in either Europe or America, and least of all in Great Britain, simply because no unbiased person can treat it seriously. Everyone knows that such things do not enter into all Jewish calculations with regard to Palestine. The question of the Wailing Wall, which had at one time cause considerable friction, has now been settled—whether satisfactorily or not makes no difference. The International Wailing Wall Commission has given its ruling, and the responsible Jewish representatives consider the question closed from the point of view of practical politics. And no matter what some people may think will happen when the Messiah comes, it plays no part in the practical politics of today.*

*It is interesting in this connection that, though the Mufti of Jerusalem, in his evidence before the Royal Commission, again brought up the question of the “Jewish perfidy” in regard to the Holy Places, the Commission did not even mention it in its Report as a motive for the Arab attitude. Even the former Chief Secretary of the Palestine Government, Mr. H. H. Balfour, who was not particularly friendly to the Jews, called it, when he appeared before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, the “alleged” Arab fear with regard to the Holy Places.
of the country, and to ensure it for all time irrespective of
the wishes of the Jewish minority. This is supposed to justify
the Arabs not only in resisting any attempt to create a Jewish
majority by means of immigration, but in resisting any
kind of change in the structure of the country’s population
—which means shutting the doors against Jewish immigration,
whether there is room for it or not, and whether it brings
economic loss or gain to the Arab population.

The Arabs set their thirteen hundred years of residence
in the country against the eighteen hundred years that we have
been cut off from it. They stress their own history, which
is presented as the foundation and the forerunner of the present,
against our older history which was broken off almost two
thousand years ago, and in which the present is supposed to
bear no relation. In this way they emphasize their historic
right to the country, and reject ours.

At first sight, one cannot deny the force of this line of
argument for people who hold democratic and Socialist views.

10. “Historic Right” and Imperialism.

“Historic right” is a discredited conception in the
democratic, and above all in the Socialist world. It has too often
in the course of history been put forward as a blind for wars
of conquest and territorial annexations. It is in this sense that
Kautsky defines “historic rights” as the demand of a
nation to restore its national frontiers as they existed centuries
ago under entirely different conditions.” (Kautsky, “Race and
Judaism,” 1921). In the same way “historic right” has served
as a pretext for retaining conquered territories against the wishes
of the population.

It was in the name of historic right that Germany annexed
Alsace-Lorraine in 1870. In the second address of the General
Council of the First International, Marx writes with biting
irony, “Yet the soil of those provinces once upon a time belonged
to the wildest German Empire. Hence, it seems, the soil and
the human beings grown on it must be considered and im-
perishable German property.” And he adds sarcastically:
“If the map of Europe is to be re-made in the antiquity’s
vein, let us by no means forget that the Elector of Brandenburg,
for his Russian dominions, was the vassal of the Polish Republic.

In the name of historic right, Turkey dominated the South Slavic nations and Greece, and till recently the various Arab countries, Germany ruled Posen, Austria a chosen non-German nationalities, Hungary oppressed Slavic and Rumanian areas, and Italy after the Great War occupied German South Tyrol.

In the name of historic right Hitler dreams of re-incorporating Alsace-Lorraine in Germany, and perhaps also the Baltic lands. The number of such examples might be multiplied ad infinitum.

"Historic right" has thus become the antithesis of the democratic principle of national self-determination. And it is only natural, therefore, that the international Socialist movement as a whole should repudiate this entire conception. The hostility goes so far, in fact, that "historic right" is not recognized even as a ground for righting former injustices. Thus there were many Socialists who, though they knew that Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in 1870 had been an injustice, nevertheless, both during and after the Great War opposed French "re-annexation" of these two provinces without a preliminary plebiscite. As a general rule, Socialists insisted on plebiscites in all areas where the will of the people with regard to their allegiance was not immediately and unambiguously clear.

For historical injustices do not last for ever. What was injustice and an act of violence may, in course of time, lose this character, either by the integration of the population into the new State or by changes in the composition of the population, or in other ways. It may happen that the population of an area originally annexed by force may grow to be content to live in the State to which it belongs, and may not wish to revert to its former status, as part of the old State. In this way the old historical injustice has become present right. And it would be a new historical injustice to put right the old injustice in the name of historic right.

This general negation of historic right together with several other factors like anti-nationalism generally, the belief in Jewish assimilation, etc. made it for a long time difficult for a section of the Socialist and progressive world to orientate itself in the matter of Zionism. And though understanding and sympathy for the Zionist idea has been growing in the International Labour movement during and after the Great War, the hostility and, even more, the hesitation and vacuousness, have by no means disappeared. Karl Kautsky, for instance, writes: "Among the large number of antiquated claims of right the most obsolete is the historic claim of the Jews to Palestine" (Kautsky, "Race and Judaism," 1921).

Inside the Jewish world too, Bundists and Communists find their most convenient target for attacking Zionism in its historical aspect. Even a thinker like Dr. Jilovksy, whose sentiments with regard to the historic connection of the Jewish people with Palestine are, as we have seen, categorically and explicitly positive, rejects historic right, not because he denies the Jewish right to Palestine, but on the contrary, because he wants to free that right, on which he insists, from a fundamental formulation which in his view is wrong, and which he fears may put the whole thing in a false position.

"Our so-called 'historical' right to the land of our fathers," says Jilovksy, "is another pure fiction, and its value is nil. It was a justified comment that was recently made by an Arab publicist that if the historical right to countries is to be recognized, Andalusia in Spain ought to belong to the Arabs. As we know from our histories, England once belonged to Rome, and America to the Red Indians. Who now contests such historical facts? And why should we consider them? There is no such thing as 'historical right'." (Dr. Ch. Jilovksy, "Our Human Right to Palestine," "Day," New York, June, 1936.)

What answer have we?


The first thing we have to say is this—our claim to Palestine does not depend only on our historic right. Even if history were not on our side, if the entire historical basis of our right could be dismissed, it would not in the least justify the Arab objection. The fact is that we have here a typical example of the extensively held, yet false, interpretation of the principle of national self-determination as the absolute right of every nation to have the sole say, no matter what the conditions, in deciding the future of the territory in which it lives, irrespective of whether this decision marries with the justified interests of other nations or of humanity as a whole. This interpretation arises from the doctrine that a nation has an unrestricted right
of ownership to its land, and can do with it whatever it pleased. This is very far from being the true meaning of the right of national self-determination as it should be understood by international democracy. The right of self-determination is limited, and under certain conditions must give way to the higher international interests of mankind as a whole. And Zionism is one of these higher interests of humanity. It is no longer possible for anyone to deny that the Jewish people cannot solve the problem of its life and development unless it has a place of its own somewhere in God's world. After all, it has a right, like any other people, to its own home, to a land where it can live and work freely. This fact alone, that the Jewish people stands in need of territorial concentration and return to the soil and that this need can be satisfied in this particular country, without ejecting or displacing or harming anyone, is enough to justify the Jewish claim to come and settle in Palestine and there build its home. One might here put the question that in fact put by the Arabs—admitted you need a land, why this land? Why should we, more than any other nation, be expected to make room for you?

To that our answer is: Because from the beginning we have a stake in this land, because we have never abandoned our claim to it, because in every generation and in every part throughout the whole period of our dispersion we have considered ourselves historically bound up with this land, not only with its past, but also with its future. And because that is how the non-Jewish world also saw the question. In short, because above and beyond our human and international moral right we have also primarily a historic right to this land.

This historic right of ours bears no relation to that supposed “historic right” which in essence is no more than a blind for a present-day injustice. I have said that “historic right is a discredited conception.” But obviously it is not discredited because of its historical character, but because the conception has so often in history been misused in an attempt to justify injustice. And it is utterly wrong to suppose that every claim to historic rights must per se be spurious. We must always first examine the actual substance of the supposed right and discover what it really means.

The historic right of the Jewish people to Palestine is based on the one hand on such concrete historic foundations that there is no parallel to them among all the other “historic rights” while it is at the same time absolutely free from the negative and fictitious elements that are characteristic of those other “historic rights.”

Unlike other historic rights the aim of this particular historic right is to establish an alien rule over the population and the resources of the country for the benefit of an outside Power, but to reject in its ancient home the people that was uprooted from it, to dominate and to exploit from without, but to come there to live and to work on the land, to build and develop it, to restore it, and by its means to be itself restored—that is the aim of Zionism, not to conquer a colony for a foreign “motherland,” but to build up a home and a fatherland for a homeless people. Is it not obvious what a deep gulf lies between the two conceptions?

Such a historic right, fundamentally different both in origin and aims from other, fictitious “historic rights” which have been so thoroughly discredited in the Socialist and progressive world and capable, if granted, of solving the problem of a great historic people could be questioned only if there stood against it counter-rights and counter-interests of greater magnitude and validity; in other words, if it could not possibly be realized without committing a grave injustice against another people and its justified interests of at least equal force and weight. Only at this point need the question arise with which the Zionist argument usually begins—whether or not we harm the Arab people by our immigration and colonization. And only if it could be shown that we did harm the Arab people we would have any ground for putting forward all the question whether the basis of our historic right is sufficiently strong to support our claim to the land. And I say emphatically that even then it is not so certain that the answer would necessarily have to be in the negative. Because then there would be a clash between two conflicting rights, each of them justified, and our right could be rejected only if the other were of greater validity. And even then it would still be an open question which of the two peoples should withdraw its rights in favour of the other—the Arab people who own immense areas, to a large extent empty or only sparsely populated and little cultivated, and to whom Palestine is merely a small corner of their vast territory, so that even without this tiny
land, they would not be a homeless people, or the Jews who have no home of their own anywhere in the world, who have for thousands of years been subjected to persecution, who are faced by the danger of physical and spiritual extermination, and to whom their return to this land is the sole opportunity they have of a renewed life of independence and creative effort. Any unbiased international tribunal capable of rising above petty sectional interests and political considerations would have to ask itself, before it reached any decision, which people's withdrawal from its rights would do least harm to the general interests of humanity as a whole. I do not think that in those circumstances we would lose our case.

Fortunately there is no question of our doing harm to the Arab population, or displacing them. On the contrary, our coming into the country has brought the Arab population inestimable advantages. It has opened up to them new sources of livelihood, it has raised their standard of living, it has developed the productive capacity of the country. There can be no doubt of it, and no one who desires to be taken seriously will deny the fact that as a result of Jewish immigration the Arab in Palestine finds life easier and better than before, and that it is in the adjoining Arab lands. The legend of Arab displacement has been exposed. Thus the only argument which could have been seriously put forward in opposition to the complete realisation of all aspects of our right, and especially of our historic right, falls to the ground.

12. Zionist Constructive Work Creates Historic Right

And finally, when we speak of historic right we must ask another question—what is history? When does the past begin? Is it only what lies far back, something that we, the living generation and our own parents did not see? And when does the concept of history begin, or rather when does it in relation to our subject end? This is by no means an academic question. For in the last fifty years or so, from the time of the immigration to Palestine of the so-called "illegal" settlers to the present day a very important, a decisive chapter has been written in the history of the relationship between the Jewish people and Palestine. Since the beginning of the eighties of last century the Jewish people has demonstrated the deep and abiding character of its sense of connection with this land not only by prayer, not only by passive waiting, not even by the uprisings of sporadic Messianic hopes and futile attempts at immigration, but by systematic and increasing constructive activity. Zionism has, by its concrete achievements, strengthened the historic link between the people and the land, and has thus itself become a powerful factor in the creation of history and of historic right. This right was confirmed and sealed by the non-Jewish world in the Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate, which, ten, created rights, and not merely formal rights, because people and capital have been brought into the country, the whole face of the land has been transformed, and—what is no less important—the soul of the Jewish people has been changed, their way of thinking and of behaving, of the whole Jewish people, throughout the world. All this creates' rights, historic living rights. And so we come to the conclusion:

Our historic right to Palestine is a powerful factor in our contention with the Arab people and with the whole world. It derives its justification from the sufferings of an ancient people over a period of many generations and its unswerving, unforgetting yearning and hope; it has derived new strength through the sacrifice and the achievement of two generations of pioneers and of constructive work, and through the earnest determination of the Jewish people to build its home in this land in peace and collaboration with its neighbour-nation.