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Fire and Water: Ze'ev Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement

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Someone said that redemption will be brought about by blood and fire, not by water. Why not water? In order to build the Jewish State we need fire and water — everything is sacred. Let no one say, I will work with water, therefore you are forbidden to work with fire. *Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Congress of The World Revisionist Movement, 1932.*

1. *The Idea of the "Leader"*

In a short article entitled "Leader," published in 1934, Ze'ev Jabotinsky was asked to clarify his ideas on the subject.¹ It was not the first time, for we know that he was preoccupied with the question of his status as leader of his movement. The clarification of this issue was important to him both for himself and in relation to others. "Is it a law," he queried, "that the more one deals with a phenomenon, the more enigmatic it becomes?" How did Herzl become a leader? Was it because he had "the character of a leader?" What is "the character of a leader?" In the same article he continues:

Nowadays there is a fashion for leaders. In almost every nation we find a romantic longing for adventurism, and when there is no suitable leader around, they fix on an unsuitable one, bestow a title upon him, and try to relate to him as a bona fide leader. We, the Jews, even at the height of our Zionist enthusiasm, are deferring to the dictates of assimilation and aping this trend. We are as taken with the search for a leader as are our neighbors, and with the same results.... Our children will be astounded when they read the *real* biographies of these leaders, so numerous in almost

* This article is based on a lecture delivered at a symposium sponsored by the Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies, Tel Aviv University and the Jabotinsky Institute, on December 4, 1980.

¹ Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *Memoirs of a Contemporary* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv-Jerusalem, n.d., pp. 213-217.

every country. They will be astounded when they discover that much of the time, many of them were no more than clay in the hands of chance. What is especially hard to understand is the character of those who so long for leaders.

Against the background of this phenomenon, he saw Herzl as a leader of a completely different mold. He was not a leader because of his title or his role, but because the public "simply obeyed him." He was, in the words of a Russian writer, "a conqueror of thoughts." He did not demand leadership; the people were simply carried away by him in the same way "that they are carried away by a great singer, because his singing expresses our own longings. And there is still another sign: when a man like Herzl dies, he remains our leader even thirty years after his death."

In this article, Jabotinsky was attempting not so much to evaluate Herzl as to clarify the character of his own leadership. He did not see himself as a leader who aimed to satisfy the impulse of adventurism and the longing for leadership at any price; nor a superficial leader who was actually a creation of the imagination of the masses; nor a leader by dint of official titles; he was rather a leader who conquered the minds of his contemporaries, who gave expression and direction to their experience and to their deepest emotional makeup and, by so doing, actually structured their world. There is no doubt that what he said about Herzl applies to him and to his movement even more so. The phenomenon of a leader remaining a "leader" and "conqueror of minds" (even "controller of minds"), for those who see themselves as his disciples forty years after his death, is a phenomenon worthy of note.

It is unique not only because Jabotinsky retained his status in the face of a general "idol-smashing." No other Zionist leader aroused such extreme views within the Zionist movement. His opponents saw him as a politician and leader who erred and caused others to err all the way down the line, an unrealistic, superficial mouther of empty phrases. His adherents, on the other hand, saw him as the perfect leader, unerring in his presentation of goals and in his diagnosis of problems, versatile, talented in every field of endeavor, in short — perfect. These extreme opinions underwent further polarization for as long as Jabotinsky was at the center of ideological conflict and all-encompassing political rivalry. He was a man who attracted a wealth of descriptions, characterizations, and definitions, a man whose words and personality became "canonized" in his movement. Today, forty years after his death, not only is his glory undiminished, unfaded, but there are people who still draw inspiration from his writings, who attempt to act according to them, who search them out in order to justify every important move they make. It appears that they are seeking a

sense of continuity, not merely with a set of ideas or a political party, but with one man and his teachings, with Ze'ev Jabotinsky.

2. *The Personification of the Movement: Internal Dynamics*

In the remarks that follow, I do not intend to evaluate Jabotinsky, his teachings, or his historical activities, where he was right and wrong, where he was "ahead of his time," or where he was out of step with his times. Most studies of Jabotinsky and his teachings are too heavily weighted by political considerations, either for or against. In the context of this article, I will avoid taking sides. It should be seen rather as an attempt to examine the relations that existed and developed between Jabotinsky and the Revisionist movement or the "Jabotinsky national movement," as it was sometimes called.

Epithets like this give credence to the notion that this was a movement created by one man, who formed and led it, conquered the minds and emotions of its members, directed them and continued to direct them even beyond the grave. Indeed, the movement as a whole saw in Jabotinsky an undisputed leader, a guide, and even more — a way of life. He was a man who shaped the biographies of individuals and of an entire generation of followers. Without doubt, he was a man whose relationship to his movement (which was not just a small faction or limited group of zealots) can not be compared with that of any other Zionist party leader. However, the aim of this article is to point up another phenomenon hovering behind the solid image and the political myth: the phenomenon of a dual relationship and a set of mutual tensions between the movement and its leader. The personification of the movement in the image and personality of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, so emphatically expressed by both followers and adversaries, is *not* an unequivocal historical fact. Moreover, such a one-dimensional and unequivocal representation of the facts not only creates a political myth; it also blurs one of the most decisive and important factors in the inner dynamics of the history of that movement.

3. *Jabotinsky's Attempts to Mix "Fire" and "Water" in Method and Ideology*

Our interest here is not with the question "What kind of man was the 'real' Jabotinsky?" Or if there was a cleavage between his public image, as reflected in some memoirs, evaluations, and his own public appearances, and — on the other hand — his "intimate," private image as seen in other memoirs and personal letters not intended for publication. The plethora of

documentation does not present a single, clear, unequivocal image. Practically every person has "his own Jabotinsky"; and beyond the common denominator there are contradictions and contrasts. The versatility of the figure, his talents and occupations, tempted many to try and clarify whether Jabotinsky had synthesized his many facets into one integrated personality or, perhaps, was well aware of his internal contradictions but could differentiate sharply among them (c.g., between Jabotinsky the esthete and man of the arts, and Jabotinsky the public, political figure).² Or perhaps, as one of his sharpest critics put it, he was a very spotty figure, full of numerous inclinations, which never coalesced into a unified whole.

It is the presence of these contradictions, or this integrity, which is of primary interest to the biographer. The historian is more likely to be interested in the source or sources of the diametrically opposed interpretations of Jabotinsky's political philosophy.

Was Jabotinsky different in 1905 from what he was in 1919, or 1931, or 1939, or is it possible to find a continuity, differing perhaps in shading but not in content? What is the source of the continuing discussion, not only of the "rightness" or "wrongness" of his views and ideas, but even of their actual content? Is one side interpreting his figure correctly while the other is spreading error and falsification? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to turn to a precise examination of the development of Jabotinsky's ideas in the specific historical context in which they crystallized. Moreover, we must examine what role these ideas played and what role they were intended to play. Jabotinsky was a political figure, and we must therefore examine his ideas in relation to the audience to whom they were addressed. I shall attempt to show and prove that Jabotinsky was, to use his own metaphor, simultaneously a man of "fire" and "water," and a man of both in content and method. He tried to synthesize these two elements, but the inner dynamics of his movement resulted, first and foremost, from the continual tension between the elements of "fire" and "water" within it and within him.

4. The Development of the Differences of Opinion between Jabotinsky and the Labor Parties

There is a solid line of continuity in the views of Jabotinsky, his behavioral patterns, his reactions, the means he recommended, his moods, etc. However, from the minute he decided to leave the official Zionist

2 Itzhak Oren, "Between Conflict and Harmony" (Hebrew), in: *Vladimir Jabotinsky and I*, Tel Aviv, 1980.

establishment and become the leader of an opposition movement, a certain change occurred. This change took place not in his formal positions (that is, his basic views), but in his status and position in the Zionist movement. The same Jabotinsky who wrote in a moment of respite (or inner truth) "I am by nature a tent-dweller, and it was others who always dragged me into politics,"³ became once more the Jabotinsky who saw in statesmanship the highest form of art. There is a decisive difference between a statesman actively bearing the formal responsibility for the implementation of policy and the leader of a popular activist-radical political movement.

When Jabotinsky first began his oppositional activity, Moshe Glickson, editor of the daily, *Ha'aretz*, tried to explain certain changes which, in his opinion, had their origin in Jabotinsky's resignation from the Zionist Executive in 1923. Before this, Glickson wrote, Jabotinsky was a clear-eyed, far-seeing leader. He was a realist, pragmatic in his assessments and a man of the highest integrity. He was unable to head a political party because of his moderation and desire to compromise. This spiritual wholeness and moral strength, wrote Glickson, were "disastrous and sinful in a political leader." And indeed, in 1927, he found Jabotinsky excessively paradoxical, demagogic, full of destructive contradictions, and deprived of his sense of reality. He explained that Jabotinsky acclimated quickly to the "brushfire of the Revisionist clubs in Palestine."⁴ It is interesting that years later, within the party itself, there were those who accused Jabotinsky, on the one hand, of adapting too much to the mood of "general Zionism" in the movement, and, on the other, of an inability to reach necessary compromises and a total lack of tactical sense.

Jabotinsky had ideas and views before he became the leader of a political party. One can find much continuity in his views, but there were certain changes in his stance on some basic issues. He had an outlook before he had a movement which followed him; he had ideas and views before that movement made him its leader. The movement had heroes (Herzl, Trumpeldor), but it had no leader. When Jabotinsky was called upon to unify the different and divided activist groups in both Eastern and Western Europe, he became the leader of groups whose image had already been established. Moreover, although he was the "crowned and uncrowned" leader, and his personality drew people to the movement, the movement was nevertheless established first and foremost because it

3 Joseph B. Schechtman, *Rebel and Statesman, The Vladimir Jabotinsky Story* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1959, p. 18. (English ed., New York, 1956.)

4 Moshe Glickson, *Writings* (Hebrew), vol. 1, Tel Aviv, 1940, pp. 117-128. See also "Bad Service" (Hebrew), *ibid.*, pp. 128-131.

answered the social and ideological needs of a wide stratum of Jews. As a result, Jabotinsky never had the possibility of controlling and directing the development of the movement in its broad social makeup. To a certain extent it is possible to say that Jabotinsky's fate was similar to that of Herzl. Herzl established an organizational framework on the basis of an already-existing organized popular movement which itself had deep and diverse roots and aspirations. In its new unity, the World Zionist Organization was conditioned by Herzl's conception of it and his expectations from it.

One can understand the changes which evolved in several of Jabotinsky's positions and in the role he filled, by studying the development of his relationship with the Palestine labor movement. In spite of the general coldness which existed between him and the labor parties, stemming from their differing ideologies and backgrounds, Jabotinsky showed a pragmatic appreciation for the labor movement as a movement of pioneering-elistist Zionist fulfillment. He saw it as a suitable partner for his activist policy. In spite of certain disagreement over the defence of Tel Hai and what followed, he still described the Third Aliya in sympathetic terms. His attitude at the time was much more supportive than Weizmann's, who in 1920 described the communal settlements as tending to sectarianism: "The overwhelming extent of Russian assimilation and this sectarianism leads to fanaticism," which in turn produces a "union of the bitter."⁵ Only after 1924 did the labor parties become — in Jabotinsky's eyes — spoiled children, dependent on Weizmann's handouts. Only then did a total political and ideological struggle emerge in the course of which each side endeavored to destroy the ideological and moral basis of the other.

Until 1923 there were differences of opinion between Jabotinsky and the labor parties, stemming from a difference of approach and tactics and from their divergent backgrounds. But it wasn't until the political and organizational polarization occurred, and Jabotinsky became the leader of a socio-ideological movement fighting for power and the Zionist "soul," that he realized the necessity for formulating a total oppositional ideology.

As early as November 1925, Jabotinsky wrote that, without a doubt, from the point of view of caliber and ability, the central social class of Zionism was the Jewish proletariat or — what he meant in effect — the educated Jewish workers. They were the "best material in the world," intelligent youth who desired "simple reform."⁶ The "trouble" with this

5 January 7, 1920, *Minutes of the Zionist General Council, 1919-1920*, vol. 1, Tel Aviv, 1975, p. 266.

6 Letter to Oscar Gruzenberg, in: Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *Letters*, Tel Aviv-Jerusalem, n.d., pp. 72-74.

high-caliber social class was that it had become imbued with socialist ideology and retreated into national and political minimalism. The Ahdut Ha'avoda movement had given up its political activism in deference to Weizmann, because it needed his material help to realize its practical socialist-Zionism.

5. *The Importance of the Middle Class in the Eyes of Jabotinsky*

If the pioneering intelligentsia could not provide the social support for Jabotinsky's political ideas, which other social class could? In the wake of the Fourth Aliya, among other things, Jabotinsky came to the conclusion that any serious revision in Zionism must be based on the middle class which had no ideology outside Zionism proper.

The choice of the middle class was problematic in many ways, not the least of them ideologically. The "common people," which Jabotinsky called the "intermediate class," were not necessarily composed of the property owners who came to Palestine, and he himself had difficulty in characterizing them precisely. "Believe me," he wrote to a close friend, "it is more in sorrow than in anger that I say that I myself know that all these other [social] elements are unstable and cannot be counted on."⁷

He felt that he was being forced to rely on unstable and indefinable social elements who were powerless to organize, lacked motivation, and were not, in his opinion, the most suitable element to begin with. It was difficult if not impossible to assign a major economic and settlement role together with an activist national outlook to a class which was — in Revisionist terms — minimalist in its Zionism. This contradiction, in my opinion, was not resolved in either theory or practice. But the attempt to do it had far-reaching results. It became apparent that in order to provide the movement with an ideology, a political viewpoint was not sufficient. One needed a full set of ideas and an all-inclusive program for every area of life. The middle class had to be given a sense of mission. The result was inevitable — new areas were opened to Revisionist-labor conflict.

Of course Jabotinsky made studious attempts to solve this inner contradiction. For example, he made a distinction between the narrow-minded "bourgeoisie" — enslaved by private property, politically conservative and passive — and the "citizen," the patriot activist endowed with political consciousness. His movement would be made up first and foremost of "middle-class youth," a young, popularly-based cadre, like the members of the Hashmonai student organization he had addressed in Riga

7 Schechtman, *Jabotinsky Story*, pp. 309-312.

in 1923. He claimed that his movement was classless and neutral, "monistic" because of its popular nature and because it did not represent any clearcut economic and social interest. But the contradictions were not solved by these distinctions. The movement continued to represent a certain social class. Meanwhile, another part of this class — which ostensibly lacked clear economic interests — found itself in open alignment with a specific side in the discussion of social and settlement policy, not only because of their Zionist reasoning but also from clearcut, succinctly stated ideological considerations.

This development had been clearly diagnosed by Jabotinsky himself, years before it actually surfaced in the Zionist movement. When, in 1915, he analyzed the nationalism of the middle class in Eastern Europe, he wrote:

Dyed-in-the-wool, abstract liberalism, whatever its authorization, is beyond their attainment. The middle class does not yearn for liberalism if one has the wisdom to offer them something else. Organically, the middle class cannot respond to socialist propaganda; the economic ideals of these circles must of necessity be reactionary... There is only one ideal which, in these circumstances, can raise the masses of the urban class, can purify and ennoble their outlook: the ideal of nationalism. If they are now attracted to the Right, it is not only because they preach "a hard hand and a mighty arm," but also because the Right have succeeded in touching their nationalist sympathies.⁸

Neither ideas of abstract liberalism nor the ideological defense of a certain economic class motivated that political, social, and ideologically cohesive movement; it was rather a deeply emotion-laden nationalism, rich in symbols, hopes, and expectations that animated Revisionism; neither economic nor political liberalism, but a combination of anti-socialism and active nationalism. In order to respond to the demands of its following, it was necessary to combine anti-socialism and even virulent anti-socialism (which did not sit well with Jabotinsky's assertion that he was not an adherent of virulent anti-Marxism), with simple, straightforward, unequivocal nationalism.

6. *Jabotinsky's Status in the Revisionist Movement*

It was, therefore, necessary to "find" the public to address and recruit, to define its character and quality, and to diagnose its aspirations and

⁸ "The Lesson of Schevchenko's Jubilee" (Hebrew), in: Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *Art and Literature*, Tel-Aviv-Jerusalem, n.d., pp. 134-140.

respond to them. This public needed a leader. As we have already seen, Jabotinsky was well aware of the deep psychological roots of this need, yet maintained an ambiguous attitude to the unquestioned leadership status so quickly accorded him by the movement. He had even tried to fight against it at first, to no avail. The second and third generations of the movement exalted the leader even more.

When he went out to "conquer the congress" (the Fourteenth Zionist Congress, 1925) from without — not from within — he at first examined the possibility of forming a properly organized political party with means at its disposal. In August 1925 he wrote:

...and as long as it has no real federation, with organized branches in every important place, with active offices and officials, and with party propaganda as well, I will not agree to any outside "activity." [There can be no "attacks" while] there is no army, no tents, and no rifles.... We need a network of societies and offices ... a bureaucracy which functions like clockwork, so that we can press a button in Dan and hear a bell ring in Beersheba. For that we need propaganda and organization.... I can't see it any other way.⁹

The army became a reality. But it was not an army of "tents" and "rifles" or a well-oiled bureaucratic machine. The movement was, on one hand, a core of activists, a cadre and, on the other, a broad public. There were no resources, no organization, no phalanx of organized supporters, but rather diverse groups which had coalesced very quickly. The "leader" held the movement together by force of his personality and his personal authority. The Revisionist movement was not satisfied with a guiding idea: the idea had to be personified in the image of a leader. Jabotinsky was wary of the status of charismatic leader, inundated with displays of admiration and zeal. He tried to separate his informal from his formal status as head of the movement. But it soon became clear, at the cost of internal rifts and the resignations of his old friends, that he must combine his formal and informal status. He understood the reasons which obliged him to become the crowned "leader," even though he did not cherish them. He formalized the relationship between himself and his movement, and acknowledged the profound necessity of the movement to give him unquestioning admiration. In a recently-published letter to the secretary of the head office of the Revisionist Executive in London, written in 1930,

⁹ Letter to Eliahu Ben-Horin, August 9, 1925, Jabotinsky Institute, 15/2/1/A.

he argued against the "cult of leadership" and the sense of "elitism" which prevailed in the movement.¹⁰

You touch on problems which worry me deeply. There are two questions: (1) we, and (2) myself. Even to my closest friends I seem ridiculous if I speak of "ourselves" as an elite. The word "race" has turned into a good joke, and it is not difficult to joke about it. The present composition of the movement is far from elitist; perhaps even the contrary is true. This is nothing new; movements of the kind which sanction inner moral purity are usually the ones which have impure elements. That is what happened to the early Christians, and the beginning of the Quaker sect. There were many who honestly wanted to improve themselves, but there were doubtless also those who saw in the new adventure a good way to seem better without actually becoming better. Perhaps, and it seems so, we have many of this type. And nonetheless I am sure I am right: the essence of the movement is the desire to help bring the world a better, nobler Jew with fewer of the defects of the ghetto and more of the virtues of Biblical times. In order to understand this, one must perhaps close one's eyes occasionally, eyes used to looking through the microscope, and turn an ear inwards to the murmuring of the soul. I am certain that the storm of Revisionism — perhaps after years during which it will reach its height — will bring a lofty generation to the Jewish people.

I am much more pessimistic with regard to the second question. I have an organic hatred for personality worship, and I am repulsed by it. Fascism has some good ideas, but I am simply physically unable to discuss them serenely and directly; I am repelled by the worship of the *Duce* as I am by any public dishonesty. When something similar happens among us, I see it as a real danger. Twice in *le murmure des âmes*, I protested the title "leader." In Basel I had my friends grant the title "president" to the late W. Tyomkin. I would have done the same in Prague as well (for Grossman), but at a time when I was forbidden entry to Palestine, this gesture was considered unfitting. I go to meetings of student groups, but I don't sing well, something I hate. [I want] no remnants of an idol's pedestal to remain, and to no avail. The need on the part of today's generation to take a person and turn him into a myth, is inevitable. Even if I were to declare that I am the man who stole Susskin's pocket watch, it would be of no avail. I am beginning to fear that in my constant concern not to play "leader" for fear of [over-] influencing the movement, I keep

¹⁰ Letter to Mrs. Miriam Lang, August 27, 1930 (German), *Ha-Umna*, vol. 3/4, (61/62) (September 1980), pp. 332-337.

silent when I should speak out and even insist on my opinion, like anyone else.

As concerns this problem, I am at a loss....

There are two important assertions in this letter which is somewhat apologetic in tone: (1) the Revisionist movement was one into which divergent elements entered. (Jabotinsky said elsewhere that he couldn't vouch for the "human crop" that his propaganda reaped.) According to Jabotinsky, although the movement's ideas were correct, there was not always perfect harmony between the idea and those who carried it out. At any rate, the objective was paramount, not those implementing it. (2) He personally rejected the hero worship which surrounded him, but he saw in it the "need of the times." He had attacked this manifestation sharply when Weizmann was on the pedestal; he now found himself able to understand its roots. In order to preserve the unity of the movement, in order to satisfy demands from within it, he had to assume all the titles, as he actually did in 1933. He wrote sarcastically to his friend Yaakobi at the end of that year: "You and your whole fascist generation were right about one thing. One cannot camouflage leadership."¹¹ In any event, even if out of some honest aesthetic revulsion, he had attempted to reject the position forced on him, it would probably not have made much difference. An abstract idea and solid principles were not enough. It was necessary that they be epitomized in a single man.

7. *The Political Party and the Youth Movement*

The need for a leader was in part a result of the gap which existed between the various components of the movement: between the Revisionist party and its youth movement, Betar, and later between these two and its military arm, the *Etzel* (Irgun Tzvai Leumi). Jabotinsky was aware of the differences in background and mentality between these organizations. Revisionism, he said, was one stout trunk from which several main branches sprouted. Such a situation, nonetheless, creates conflict and tension. Almost from the outset there was an obvious incompatibility between the legalism of the political party and the nationalist radicalism of the Betar youth movement. This polarization was exacerbated during the thirties as a result of political events in the Diaspora and in Palestine. The differences between Betar and the party, and their attempts to interfere with each other's development, greatly pained Jabotinsky. He tried to

¹¹ Letter to Shlomo Yaakobi, in: Schechtman, *Jabotinsky Story*, p. 235. See also Yaakov Shavit, *From a Majority to a State* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1978, pp. 98-106.

preserve Betar's autonomy, describing it as an educational movement which was creating a new Jew, rooted in a national ideology and psychology. As such it would be in the movement's interests not to impair this attempt at self-education and responsibility. Still in all, the different roles which they were called upon to play in the Zionist political system created deep cleavage. For example, a political party had to employ tactics which a youth movement could not accept. In July 1931, Jabotinsky wrote to the Secretary-General of the Betar Executive:

A party which participates in Zionist congresses must agree to tactical compromises whose usefulness is in doubt, while their decided educational value is in no way in doubt but, rather, completely negative, dangerous and harmful, and likely to embarrass the ranks of Betar youth... Trumpeldor Youth is above all an educational institution. We have the great responsibility for the souls of youth, and we must not be allowed to misdirect them in any way which suggests a dangerous compromise, a compromise which might affect the holy of holies of the Zionist idea. A youth movement must be hard line: "yes" must be "yes" and "no" must be "no."¹²

At its founding meeting in 1925, the Revisionist party was able to decide upon a moderate wording of its political demands. They could assert that Zionism desired "the gradual transformation of Palestine (including Transjordan) into a Jewish community, that is, an *autonomous community* led by a Jewish majority which will have come into being." This wording was considered the only possible definition of "National Home."¹³ It was followed by an enumeration of the practical steps which would be taken with regard to taxation, land laws, etc. Betar, on the other hand, could not agree to this in any form. There could be no substitute for the term "state" in its charter. "The Betar Idea"¹⁴ opens in a totally different style by stating: "The role of Betar is simple in object, yet very difficult: to create the type of Jew which the nation needs in order to create the *Jewish state as quickly as possible* and in the best way possible." The idea of the creation of the state as a gradual process, to be completed only once certain conditions are fulfilled, is almost absent from Betar ideology.

It is my contention, therefore, that the changes in Jabotinsky's political

¹² Letter to Arich Dissenchik, Jabotinsky Institute, 2/21/2/1 A.

¹³ *Grundsätze des Revisionismus aus den Resolutionen der I, II und III Weltkonferenzen der Revisionistischen Union*, Paris, 1929.

¹⁴ "The Betar Idea, Principles of the Betar Outlook, 1934" (Hebrew), in: Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *B'sa'ar*, Tel Aviv-Jerusalem, 1958, p. 308.

terminology and declarations of purpose were not only a reaction to the political events which changed Jewish and Zionist perspectives. They were also a reaction to pressures from the radical maximalist factions in his movement. They could not reconcile themselves to compromise, or "moderate" wording or any substitute for the clear, unequivocal idea in which they believed and to which they were educating others.

8. *The Dialectic of Relations between Jabotinsky and the Movement*

It is obvious that changing historical circumstances are the major cause for changes in Jabotinsky's views at different periods. In 1905, for example, in the spirit of practical Zionism, he wrote: "Don't clamor about Palestine, don't shout about achievements; and when there are achievements, don't shout about plans."¹⁵ Later he wrote that for as long as Zionism needs diplomacy and statesmanship, Weizmann must remain the leader. One must evaluate these statements in light of their historical context and of Jabotinsky's status at the time. It is possible to interpret his articles (and one should interpret their content *and* their style), not as part of a closed ideological system, but against the background of the times, and bearing in mind the audience to which they were addressed. No one who attempts, for example, to draw specific conclusions about Jabotinsky's credo on the basis of articles he wrote in his "Russian period" can ignore the political-cultural context in which these articles were written and the special phraseology they employed.

The combined weight of changing historical circumstances and of the movement's inner conflicts and development on the real or imagined paradoxes in Jabotinsky's Zionist outlook, do not accord with the views held by both his followers and adversaries. Both sides like to describe his credo and actions as unequivocal, one-dimensional. The following subjects will serve to substantiate these assumptions:

- (1) The relationship between liberalism and monism.
- (2) Social considerations in monism.
- (3) Was Jabotinsky really the architect of the movement's outlook?

Liberalism and monism. In the Betar Idea there is no sympathy for what Jabotinsky called "abstract liberalism." In it only the idea of monism comes across clearly. And if monism is the banner, then nationalism and national fulfillment cannot be linked with either socialism or liberalism. There is no mention of the middle class being the preferred class to settle

¹⁵ "What Is To Be Done? 1905" (Hebrew), in: Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *Articles*, Tel Aviv-Jerusalem, n.d., pp. 163-214.

Palestine. There is, rather, a setting forth of a mechanism whose objective is to create social-economic harmony out of national, "neutral" considerations. The synthesis to which the Betar Idea aspired was not a synthesis of social ideas and national outlook, but a synthesis of free will, discipline and hierarchy. This point of view inevitably troubled the party. The exclusion of social conflict from the pale of Zionist endeavor — at least during the period of the upbuilding of Palestine — contradicts to some extent the view of Jabotinsky (and his party) as upholders of a liberal social philosophy. Yet, nationalism and national fulfillment were seen in Jabotinsky's monistic view as being above all other considerations. This view is called "integral nationalism" by the more moderate of his critics. Extreme commentaries on Jabotinsky clash over this point. Liberal or anti-socialist? Democrat or authoritarian, even totalitarian? I would suggest that Jabotinsky consciously suited the content and style of his words to whichever sector of his movement he was addressing, thus giving rise to two versions of his outlook.

In a letter to David Ben-Gurion in March 1935, directed to the radicals in Mapai and perhaps, incidentally, to his own party, Jabotinsky responded to Mapai's rejection of the "London Accords." (These accords were proposed to end the hostility and violence between the Revisionists and the labor movement in Palestine.) He wrote:

How will you fight this brutality, what is your prescription? Will you try to teach them your art (that is, the art of the delicate balance between Zionism and socialism)? I doubt if this generation has the ability to understand it, or if it even has the desire to. *This generation is very "monistic."* Perhaps this is not a compliment, but it is the truth.¹⁶

And so, the generation of the labor movement, whom he accused of having a hodge-podge of ideas, at a stroke becomes a "monistic" generation, similar to that part of the same generation of which he is the leader. Further, this is a fact that needs to be understood, and taken into consideration, even though it is not praiseworthy.

Not only the content, but the style changes. In a certain context Jabotinsky had deep reservations about the style of the party newspaper, *Hazit Ha'am* (*Popular Front*), of the early thirties. He wrote that since most readers did not understand symbolism, one should avoid using strong language, unverified accusations and historical references. Only later did he show tolerance for the style of the paper, when he discovered "the ugly

¹⁶ Letter to David Ben-Gurion, March 30, 1935, in: Jabotinsky, *Letters*, pp. 42-45.

group they must fight against."¹⁷ He himself did not avoid symbolism and "strong language." The writing of publicists, he explained, has a "cadence" which differs from that of poetry or even essays. And, in fact, the cadence of Jabotinsky's poetry and literature differed completely from that he used for ideological and political battle. Further, the Jabotinsky who wrote for the Revisionists used a different cadence from that he used when he wrote for Betar.

Social considerations in monism. Monism was ostensibly meant to separate social considerations from those of Zionist ideology and Zionist fulfillment, at least during the interim period before the establishment of the Jewish state. The realization of national-political aims was to be the only goal during this period, and there was no need to discuss the type of society which would come into being in Palestine. Such monism, however, was impossible to maintain, not only in practice, but even in theory. Thus, Jabotinsky, who dealt with problems of settlement and society in a great many articles addressed to members of the party, was obliged to explain the importance of social questions to the members of Betar. The political dimension of the Zionist idea could not exist alone; the social dimension was also necessary. The plan which Jabotinsky set forth envisioned a bourgeois state with elements of a welfare state. But what interests us here is not the plan itself but whether or not its existence did not, at least partially, contradict the monistic character of Betar ideology. And another question presents itself: Why did he feel that the members of Betar should be aware of the importance of social problems and not merely satisfied with a knowledge of the central principles of the Betar Idea?

The answer, perhaps, is that Jabotinsky was more interested in social questions than is usually conceded; that he was aware of the fact that the process of creating a Jewish majority in Palestine — as a prerequisite for the establishment of the state — was not just a political process, but a social process as well. Moreover, Betar members in Palestine were not just proponents of the *idea* of the Jewish state. They were also a social group involved in the daily social and economic problems of Palestine. It was necessary to explain to them why they were not just "political beings," but "social beings" as well; to explain how they were involved in the crystallization of the society and economy of the Yishuv. From this followed the attempt to infuse social-economic theory into the monistic idea, whose essence was educational-national-political.

Ostensibly, the idea of a "national compromise" and the formulation of

¹⁷ Letters to Shlomo Gabstein and Oscar Gruzenberg, December 7, 1930 and September 27, 1927, in: Jabotinsky, *Letters*, pp. 82-93.

various methods for labor arbitration were supposed to blend into the monistic idea. But this was not sufficient. What really gave Jabotinsky's social ideas a monistic flavor, as he set them forth for Betar, was their Biblical garb. Party interpreters of this socio-economic credo wrote: "The well from which Jabotinsky drew his ideas was Jewish," or "In the Bible of Israel, Jabotinsky has found the general groundplan for the structure of the ideal society of the future Hebrew state."¹⁸ The general admiration was such, that there were even those who saw in him one of the most important social thinkers of the twentieth century.

This is puzzling. Jabotinsky was deeply rooted in universal culture. His diary emphasizes the conscious adaptation of ideas of various Western philosophers. He himself admitted that his social theories were based on assumptions acquired, in one way or another, from the teachings of the major philosophers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Anyone familiar with these ideas can easily arrive at the sources of most of his assumptions and conclusions. He himself never aspired to be an original thinker in social matters. Why then did others endow him with the image of a social philosopher who based his teachings solely on ancient Jewish sources?

The answer seems to be that articles such as "The Idea of the Age," "Class," "The Social Philosophy of the Bible," and others, were all written for Betar youth. In view of the background of this youth, it was clearly impossible to write an article based on the ideas of Antonio Lavriola, Benedetto Croce, Josef Popper or Max Weber. These names meant nothing to most of them. They had been brought up on a monism rooted in Judaism, in a kind of national-cultural autarchy. They did not feel at home in the languages and culture of the Western world as Jabotinsky did. Their horizons were much more limited. They could best understand symbols which were familiar to them. Thus, an "original Jewish" theory was offered which could pass as monist. Here was an idea whose essence was Jewish nationalism (or, more precisely, "Hebrew" nationalism), combined with original Hebrew social ideas. Liberalism and socialism had never been part of traditional Judaism, and were therefore inimical to monism and the singularity and unity of the idea. Here again, the intended audience for the ideas, the character, education and goals of this audience, determined their content as well as their style.

Was Jabotinsky really the architect of the movement's outlook? The third subject is perhaps the most crucial in understanding the development of the

18 Articles by Yosef Nedava and Yehuda Benari, *Ha-Umma*, vol. 3/4 (61/62) (September 1980), pp. 386-396.

movement. Did Jabotinsky really play such a dominant, even exclusive role in the shaping of the movement, its methods and its immediate goals?

In order to answer this question we must differentiate between long-term goals and immediate ones, and between declared goals of the movement and the means used to achieve them. Jabotinsky indeed determined the long-term goals and basic tenets, but there was a good deal of tension between him and the movement in relation to immediate goals and the means for achieving them. Even in those years when he was the supreme authority, perhaps especially during those years, decisive policies were resolved in which — initially — Jabotinsky had no part. It is true that he unified Betar and the Revisionist party and stood at their head; it is also true that he brought about the break with the World Zionist Organization and the creation of the New Zionist Organization. But he was not the creator of the military arm — the Etzel, nor the initiator of its actions. It was not Jabotinsky who directed the Etzel's endeavors in the Diaspora to gain influence in the Betar cells. He was not, in my opinion, the spiritual father of the "uprising" of the Etzel against the Mandatory regime in 1944.

Jabotinsky's dramatic protest at the Seventeenth Zionist Congress in 1931 did not result from the Congress's rejection of the Revisionist formula calling for the immediate establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. It was not even suggested that it be done at once. The Revisionist resolution simply called for a public declaration to the effect that the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine was the goal of Zionism and, specifically, that the area of the Palestine Mandate on both sides of the Jordan be transformed into a Jewish state, that is, a commonwealth with a Jewish majority. Opinion was divided mostly over tactics and timing (with, of course, a strong dash of ideology thrown in). In 1938, when war was in the offing and shortly after the partition plan of the Peel Commission had been retracted (to Jabotinsky's satisfaction), Jabotinsky suggested a "Ten-year Plan" as an alternative to partition. It was a ten-year plan of settlement, of mass immigration (1,500,000 immigrants) and of economic development which would lay the groundwork for the state. "After ten years of such a regime, the Mandate should be abolished and Palestine given the right of autonomy." He added: "... In spite of all the storms raging now, we see the future of the League of Nations as strong and steadfast, and the Mandate for Palestine as a valid contract..."¹⁹

The basic tenet in Jabotinsky's political outlook was that the means existed for using the legal possibilities provided by the Mandate to create a Jewish majority in Palestine as a pre-condition for the establishment of a

19 "Pre-Conditions for the Ten Year Plan" (Hebrew), in: Jabotinsky, *B'sa'ar*, p. 241.

state. These possibilities could be realized if the Zionist movement would *publicly* declare its aims and then activate English public opinion on its behalf. For this reason he attempted, until 1935, to gain a majority within the World Zionist Organization. One major field of action which, he felt, would advance his political aims was based on the distress of the Jews in the Diaspora and action to arouse English public opinion to alleviate this hardship. Thus, Jabotinsky organized a mass petition signed by hundreds of thousands, addressed to England and the League of Nations. At the Fifth World Convention of the Revisionists in 1932, his description of the petition, meant to put moral pressure on Britain, was rather high-flown rhetoric:

This is not merely a verbal formulation with lots of signatures. This is a movement, a vast mass movement, whose stage is the entire world, and not just one country. This is a process which will electrify the soul of the world, and the presentation of the scroll will only be the final scene in the last act of the play. Millions of hands, all extended in one direction.²⁰

When he spoke of British opposition, he did not speak of an armed uprising, but of a political offensive "which will force England to change her policies and return their rights to the people of Israel." When he spoke of real opposition in Palestine, not "verbal opposition," he spoke of all manner of civil rebellion — rebellion without revolt, active protest and not war against the Mandate. When he was under pressure from the ranks of the activists in his movement to express his stand on "the question of opposition," he answered that "we will have to think out ways of making the life of the government miserable while still being able to use the situation to our advantage,"²¹ and he suggested, for example, a tax strike. The idea of giving up the Mandate or perhaps forcing Britain to give in through active resistance did not come primarily from Jabotinsky. One need only compare the wording, style and reasoning of Jabotinsky's speech to the Peel Commission in 1937 with the fervid tone and contents of a book of poems, *The Book of Accusation and Belief*, by Uri Zvi Greenberg, composed at the same time. The latter had an enormous influence on that generation of the movement. To a certain extent these are two different worlds.

The first document presented to the institutions of the Revisionist movement which included a demand for the immediate establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine was presented in 1938 and it was

20 "Petition in the Diaspora, Opposition in Palestine (1932)," in: Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *Writings*, pp. 144-146.

21 *Ibid.*

not worded by Jabotinsky. It was first set forth in the pamphlet, "Our Eyes are on the Government," which was published earlier in serial form in the daily *Hayarden* as a personal opinion, by Uriel Halperin (the poet Yonathan Ratosh).

Jabotinsky did not demand the immediate establishment of a Jewish state until 1939, nor did he call for its creation through revolt against the British government and the destruction of the Mandate. His concept was gradual, not revolutionary, legal and political, not underground-military. But the radical-activist current in the ranks of the movement grew, and in 1937 the Etzel was established. From then on, Jabotinsky's movement was composed of a political party cum independent Zionist organization, a national youth movement, a national workers' organization and an underground military organization. The internal tensions among them were deep, sharp and all-embracing. All the attempts at compromise, which were tried continuously until 1939, failed. Jabotinsky's attempt to differentiate between the movement's responsibility and the "irregular" actions of individuals in the movement also fell flat. The famous petition was not even a "bridge of paper." While it was an authentic expression of Jabotinsky's political outlook and the popular character of the movement, it had no substance.

What happened ultimately was that Jabotinsky's movement revealed the weakness which lay at the root of his Zionist outlook: the great gap between the idea of the Jewish state and the education towards the realization of national goals, on the one hand, and the methods and means of arriving at this goal, on the other. To one part of his movement Jabotinsky spoke the language of gradualism and legality, while to the other he spoke a language of nationalism which brooks no delay in the complete fulfillment of Zionism. The part of the movement that was to carry the idea into action discovered that it had to detach itself from the political methods suggested by its teacher and leader, and to choose its own mode of action. The basic weakness in Jabotinsky's political system was not, as has recently been claimed,²² that he demanded a policy of force when the system had no real strength to back it, but rather that he made political demands in the name of "morality" when moral considerations had little force. Jabotinsky once said that whoever does not believe in the world's conscience should drown himself in the Vistula. He could hardly have known how soon this "conscience" would be indicted.

It is true that Jabotinsky supported the paramilitary activities of the Etzel (as against the Hagana's policy of "restraint") and encouraged them after they had already begun. He advocated daring and encouraged illegal

22 Shlomo Avineri, *Varieties of Zionist Thought* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1980, pp. 214.

immigration; but none of these were a substitute for his basic political system, only an addition to it. In general he strayed only in moments of disappointment. This he did principally in order to weaken the foundation of the "fraudulent" Mandate, and to pressure the British government to change its policy. Even the hazy and unrealistic "Plan for Rebellion" (on the eve of the Second World War, which created the myth of continuity between Jabotinsky's activities and the Etzel uprising in February 1944), was only formulated in response to pressure from activist groups in Betar and the Etzel. And if it was a departure from his essential stance, it was a very short-lived one. Nor was the plan to land forces on the shores of Palestine at the end of 1939, which was meant more as a protest than an attempt to bring down the government, typical. Much more organic to Jabotinsky's political views, from 1917 until his death in 1940, was his attempt to create a Jewish army within the framework of the allied forces during World War I and of a Jewish Legion under British command in Palestine after the conclusion of peace.

It is possible to argue with this by saying that Jabotinsky should be evaluated on the basis of his ideas and the grand goals which he set, in their own right and in comparison with the ideas and goals of leaders of other Zionist camps. From this point of view, the changes and even the reversals in his methods were only technical or organizational, never ideological. All the methodological changes arose from the same tensions between the elements of "fire and water," in Jabotinsky himself.

From the above Jabotinsky emerges as someone who set far-reaching goals and as such was "ahead of his time." But a politician is not only a person who sets and preaches goals. He does not merely make plans for a movement and give his followers a feeling of common striving. He must also fashion the tools and provide the *means* with which to realize the idea. He must work on the concrete political plane. Strategy and tactics are essentially interlocked. In August 1913, in a letter to Leopold Greenberg, Chaim Weizmann put his finger on a core problem of the entire Zionist movement when he wrote: "Differences in method matter very considerably where the 'Endziel' is so remote..."²³ And of course this was true for the Revisionist movement as well.

One could claim that the idea itself was the determining factor since it preceded its time, and pointed the way to others. If it was not Jabotinsky's movement which carried the idea to fruition, other parties adopted several of his principle ideas and did. But Jabotinsky was not satisfied with the mere creation of a political-educational movement, nor did he desire to be

²³ Letter to Leopold Greenberg, August 3, 1913, *Weizmann Letters, 1913-1914*, Series A, vol. 6, Jerusalem, p. 126.

a prophet. He wanted to be a statesman who moved the "pieces" on the historical chessboard. He created a political movement which was meant to realize its aims rather than bequeath them to others. From this point of view, the inner tensions, the conflicts and the dialectics between Jabotinsky and his movement are of great meaning.

9. How Different Images of Jabotinsky Arose

What are the deep-seated reasons for the formation of diametrically opposed evaluations of Jabotinsky as a statesman and Zionist leader? Why does one image represent him as a national leader, while another represents him only as the leader of a militant opposition? These differences derive in part from Jabotinsky's place and role in the Zionist movement, that is, his role as the leader of an opposition in the World Zionist Organization which sought to present an alternative ideology to that of the official leadership, and to gain political ascendancy in the Zionist movement and in the Yishuv. As a political, social and ideological movement, the Revisionists could not be satisfied *under any circumstances* by the exclusive emphasis on political objectives in the fulfillment of Zionism. Political principles were the cornerstone, but the building itself was constructed from a variety of ideological and emotional elements. Therefore, one must evaluate the movement not only on its political objectives, but on its full ideological and experiential content.

Close friends of Jabotinsky frequently called his attention to the fact that the movement was deviating from its principles and was being dragged into discussions and conflicts which were foreign to its nature and which had no direct bearing on "the greater goals." They claimed that the movement could not fight on too many fronts at once, and that it should restrict its field of action. They further claimed that Revisionism need not isolate itself by letting itself be turned into a movement with a separate social-ideological-cultural content. But these warnings were to no avail if only because they were not realistic. Revisionism did have a political viewpoint, but its broad base was cultural-ideological. It could not possibly exist without its all-embracing ideology. As the leader of a movement which was involved in all aspects of national life, Jabotinsky had to speak out on every issue and make suggestions on every front. Not all parts of the movement were interested in the same subjects; priorities existed, and this explains the great divergency of his utterances. He took part not only in the "serious" discussions in the movement; he was involved in the "little grey" discussions as well. His image outside the movement was constituted, as a result, not only by his political views, but also by his active involvement in a variety of matters. Thus, a caustic

article written about an apparently minor issue — the strike in a biscuit factory in Jerusalem — contributed to his image and to feelings toward him, especially on the part of his adversaries.

10. Jabotinsky's Status in the Movement

The epitomization of the movement in the person of Jabotinsky and the unequivocal descriptions of the man reduce our historical knowledge and understanding. It is unfair to the movement as a whole and to large numbers of people who helped to fashion it, its ideas and activities. Moreover, it promotes an over-simplified, one-dimensional picture which ignores the conflicts and tensions which existed in the movement itself.

That Jabotinsky maintained his authority in the movement in spite of these tensions explains his extraordinary standing. And his authority was the primary factor in keeping the movement together and preserving its organic and ideological continuity. His unique position is even more apparent in that not only those who followed him blindly, but even those who at times disagreed with him, continue to look to him for legitimization. It is as if every action draws inspiration from him and every positive deed is only a carrying out of his principles. The relationship between the ideal and the reality was determined, and continues to be determined (either sincerely or out of dogmatism), through the relationship between the teachings of the man and the partial realization of his principles — some of which may have become twisted in the course of action, some of which may not have been achieved at all. Such a position is indeed unique, so much so that it even influences the character of historical research.

It seems that no Zionist leader continues to be as relevant for his followers as does Jabotinsky, which explains their attempt to make him relevant for the entire public. The question of what elements in his credo and methods really remain relevant necessitates another discussion. It is worthy of note, however, that the one person who best described the relationship which existed between Jabotinsky and his movement was Jabotinsky himself. In *The Story of My Life*, he wrote:

In the beginning God created the will of the individual, but in old age perhaps that same individual can recognize the *echo of his desires in the hearts of the multitude*. This is not my philosophy. On the contrary, this is a philosophy which I hated all my life... No, not my philosophy, but that of reality, sometimes to my great sorrow.²⁴

²⁴ Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *The Story of My Life* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1958, pp. 177-178.