

PARADOXES OF ZIONISM

(From page 2)

Weltbürgertum (citizenship of the world) to an anachronistic mode of tribal nationalism.' Such people bitterly resented being lectured by Zionists about what it meant to be a Jew; they did not relish having their faith impugned or their patriotism."

In America, with its growing Jewish community, Zionism made little impact. Its message seemed not to relate to the reality of life in the free and open American society. An early Zionist, Joseph Zeff, insisted that even in America Jews must not "fool yourselves that you are Americans. You are not counted as Americans and never will be." Others might be assimilated, he declared, "but not the Jews. The Jew will always be alone. Against his own wishes, he will remain loyal to his race and his past."

Few American Jews accepted this pessimistic assessment. Even when a number of prominent American Jews joined the Zionist enterprise, they redefined it as something which was, in fact, quite the opposite. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, for example, told Americans that they could be good Zionists without actually leaving the U.S. He said that being a Zionist actually made a Jew a "better American." Wheatcroft writes that, "To some rigorous Zionists, this was nonsense. Zionism must mean a commitment not to live in Vilna, Vienna — or New York. It was in this light as absurd to say that you could be a good Zionist without making aliyah as to say that you could be a good Catholic without ever going to Mass. The logical Zionist agreed objectively with assimilationists: you were one of the other, you either stayed in the Galut and rejected Zionism, or left it and rejected assimilation. But Brandeis's argument was of immense importance for the future: fifty years later his principle would underlie the development of American Jewry into Israel's lifeline and mainstay."

Zionism Widely Rejected

Among American Jews, Zionism was widely rejected. In the case of Reform Judaism, Wheatcroft writes, they "had anyway put aside the ancient and profound belief that the Jews were a people with a Messianic mission, or even a 'people' at all. Moses Hess insisted that the Jews were a race. Reformism insisted not. The Jews, it said, were not a racial or ethnic group

but a religious faith, scarcely different from Roman Catholics or Episcopalians or Unitarians. They were no more than 'Americans of the Mosaic faith.'"

After the first Zionist Congress, "The American Hebrew" said that "the entire Jewish press of the world, with less than half-a-dozen exceptions, has been opposed to the Congress." The "Menorah Monthly" reminded Jews that the Holy Land was holy to Christians and Muslims as well as Jews. The banker and philanthropist Jacob J. Schiff said, "Speaking as an American, I cannot for one moment concede that one can at the same time be a true American and an honest adherent to the Zionist movement." Henry Morgenthau, Sr., stated that, "We Jews of America have found America to be our Zion. Therefore I refuse to allow myself to be called a Zionist. I am an American."

The vast majority of American Jews, Wheatcroft declares, "instinctively sympathized" with the views expressed by Schiff and Morgenthau. "They rejected Herzl's solution to the 'Jewish Question.' Why should they need it? They had made their decision, that heroic generation, voted with their feet, two million of them, in crossing the Atlantic to a land founded on the very principles of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They had no need of any other way to pursue it. They had found in America much prejudice and hardship, but they had also found something unknown to them before: a land where a poor Jew could live freely without fear, and a rich Jew could live openly without evasion. They had solved their own Jewish Question by becoming Americans. From the bottom of their hearts, they spoke the same words: 'America is our Zion.'"

Even within Zionist ranks there was much criticism of the path the movement was taking, particularly its indifference to the position of the Arab inhabitants of the Holy Land. In 1891, not long before Herzl wrote *The Jewish State*, the Russian Jewish writer Ahad Ha'am had visited the Holy Land for the first time, and his description of his visit, *Truth From The Land of Israel*, is far-seeing. Max Nordau, a prominent Zionist had supposedly discovered the "Arab question," and told Herzl they were committing an injustice. "But it is not true that the early Zionists had been ignorant of the existence of an Arab population in Palestine," writes Wheatcroft. "They had merely, in one way or another, wished it away ... Herzl had vaguely hoped that the

Arabs would welcome a Jewish state for the material benefits it would bring. Not only were these Zionist Europeans of the age of imperialism that supposed, without formulating the thought, that the Arabs were malleable and quite without national consciousness. And this was indeed the case at the time. In the 1890s, and for some time after, most of those living in Palestine were less conscious of their identity than those French or Sicilian peasants earlier in the century."

Palestine Not Deserted

Ahad Ha'am pointed out that this would not always be the case. "We tend to believe that Palestine is nowadays almost completely deserted," he wrote, "a non-cultivated wilderness, and anyone can come there and buy as much land as his heart desires. But in reality this is not the case. It is difficult to find anywhere in the country Arab land which lies fallow."

The German Jewish philosopher Martin Buber also expressed concern. He believed passionately that the Jews had an historic role but that their role was not mere assertive nationalism. He stayed in Frankfurt even after Hitler came to power, bravely helping to organize the Jewish community in the face of persecution. In 1938 he left for Palestine where with the same courage he advocated cooperation with the Arabs and a binational state.

What became clear as Zionism proceeded was the fact that anti-Semites embraced it while most Jews rejected it. In an essay entitled "The Perils of Zion," the British Jewish leader Claude Montefiore harped on the theme that "those who have no love for the Jews, and those who are pronounced anti-Semites, all seem to welcome the Zionist proposals and aspirations. Why should this be, unless Zionism fits in with anti-Semitic presumptions and with anti-Semitic aims?" Writing in *The New York Times*, Henry Moskowitz, in an article entitled *Zionism Is No Remedy*, described the curse of nationalism which hung over the world as World War I raged, "in which the idea of domination has given certain nations a form of megalomania" and he had no wish for the Jews to join this game. The whole nature of Jewish nationalism was reactionary and an unsatisfactory philosophy of life, he argued. What the Jews needed rather was a revival of the Hebraic spirit which gave birth to Israel's vision, to David's psalms, to Spinoza's God.