

ZIONIST RELATIONS WITH NAZI GERMANY

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Introduction

Despite the appearance of large numbers of books on Nazi Germany's barbaric treatment of European Jews, there is widespread public ignorance on one important aspect of this question: the relationship between the Zionist movement and Nazi Germany. The information on this subject is available, but has not yet been gathered together in a single comprehensive study. This study is intended, at least partially, to remedy this deficiency.

Owing to the delicate nature of this subject, and the Zionist tendency to brand any non-Zionist or anti-Zionist viewpoint as "anti-Semitic," all the material on Zionist-Nazi relations in this study is taken from exclusively Jewish sources. The writers quoted cover a wide spectrum of views, from extreme Zionist to anti-Zionist, with various shades in between. The reader will thus be able to form an accurate and objective opinion on the basis of evidence presented by leading Jewish historians.

I.

THE EARLY ZIONIST ATTITUDE TO ANTI-SEMITISM

The central tenets of Zionism are that the Jews constitute a “nation” separate from all other nations, and that they must be “ingathered” from the various parts of the world to Palestine, to form their own nation-state there. The European phenomenon known as “anti-Semitism” maintains that the Jews are an unassimilable, alien element in European society, which should be removed from Europe.

The founder of the political Zionist movement, Theodor Herzl, was aware of the philosophical common ground between Zionism and anti-Semitism when he wrote:

The governments of all countries scourged by anti-Semitism will be keenly interested in assisting us to obtain the sovereignty we want.¹

[Herzl] frequently asserted, in all innocence, that anti-Semites would be the Jews’ best friends and anti-Semitic governments their best allies. But this faith in anti-Semites expressed very eloquently and even touchingly how close his own state of mind

¹Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (New York, 1946), p. 92.

was to that of his hostile environment and how intimately he did belong to the “alien” world...

Anti-Semitism was an overwhelming force and the Jews would have either to make use of it or be swallowed up by it. In his own words, anti-Semitism was the “propelling force responsible for all Jewish suffering since the destruction of the Temple” and it would continue to make the Jews suffer until they learned how to use it for their own advantage. In expert hands this “propelling force” would prove the most salutary factor in Jewish life; it would be used in the same way that boiling water is used to produce steam power.²

Herzl was a man who practiced what he preached. The methods he used in his diplomatic efforts to further the Zionist cause accorded with the principles he proclaimed. This is strongly illustrated by the approaches he made to Tsarist Russia, which at the beginning of this century was the power that applied the most fanatical and cruel anti-Jewish policies of massacre, expulsion, and discrimination.

Although Herzl never achieved his dream of an audience with the Tsar, he did hold talks with the Tsarist Interior Minister, Wenzel von Plehve, who was responsible for implementing anti-Jewish measures and organized massacres like the Kishinev pogrom, in which forty-five Jews were killed.

²Hannah Arendt, “The Jewish State, 50 Years After — Where Have Herzl’s Politics Led?” *Commentary*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (May 1946).

[Plehve] was brutal enough to admit that he had no objections to getting rid of as many Jews as possible; in fact, he would become a “sympathetic” supporter of Zionism. Herzl then proposed that Plehve should write him a letter that he would present before the Zionist Congress, to the effect that the Zionist movement could count on the Russian Government’s “moral and material assistance.” Plehve’s letter became Herzl’s most treasured asset. He carried it around everywhere; he showed it to the Pope. The murderer of his people had shaken hands with him, talked to him politely. Was that not wonderful? For Plehve, for the Kaiser, for the whole crowd of blackguards and reactionaries who ruled Europe, Herzl had a favorite promise: Zionism would dissolve all revolutionary and socialist elements among the Jews.³

In 1903, the founder of the Zionist movement was received in St. Petersburg by another anti-Semitic leader, the Tsar’s Finance Minister, Count Witte — who also favored the Zionist plan to remove the Jews from Europe. Witte told Herzl:

If it were possible to drown six or seven million Jews in the Black Sea, I would be perfectly happy to do so, but it is not possible, so we must let them live. But we encourage the Jews to emigrate: we kick them out.⁴

³Moshe Menuhin, *The Decadence of Judaism in Our Time* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies reprint, 1969), pp. 46–7.

⁴Quoted by Reuben Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Europe* (London, 1974), p. 151.

The most important foundations laid by Herzl for Zionism's future successes were anti-Semitic circles in Britain. A substantial number of Russian-Jewish refugees from Tsarist pogroms chose Britain rather than Palestine as their refuge, thus disappointing Zionist hopes. But the Zionists found that a number of extreme right-wing politicians in Britain were only too willing to stir up a vicious campaign aimed at denying these unfortunate refugees the right of asylum.

Herzl gave these right-wingers his blessing and encouragement. In his evidence to the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, which investigated the question in 1902 and 1903, Herzl called for the stream of migration to be diverted away from Britain. He thus agreed with the racist Arnold White, one of the leading theorists of the campaign to ban Jews from Britain.⁵

Another leader of this campaign with whom Herzl made friendly contact was Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain. In a speech in Limehouse, London, in December 1904, Chamberlain attacked the policy of allowing Jewish immigration to Britain, at the same time endorsing the Zionist idea of a Jewish state and warmly praising Herzl.⁶

The most important British anti-Semite of that age, in terms of his eventual services to Zionism, was the fanatical Jew-baiter Lord Arthur Balfour. In a parliamentary debate on the immigration issue, Balfour

⁵Report of Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, 1902–1903 (Cmnd. 1741 & 1742).

⁶*Jewish Chronicle*, December 23, 1904.

made a speech in which he put forward a case for anti-Semitism that is all too familiar. He declared:

It would not be to the advantage of the civilization of the country that there should be an immense body of persons who, by their own action, remained a people apart, and not merely held a religion differing from the vast majority of their fellow-countrymen, but only intermarried among themselves.⁷

Herzl was able to declare with satisfaction that “anti-Semitism has grown and continues to grow, and so do I.”⁸ But the fruits of his diplomacy did not ripen during his lifetime. A decade after his death, the First World War was to prove a turning-point in the fortunes of Zionism, as the Western allies planned the division of the Ottoman Empire, which was fighting on the side of Germany. Palestine was then under Ottoman control.

The Zionists followed a policy of betting on both sides in the first two years of the war. The headquarters of the World Zionist Organization was then still in Berlin, and its leaders there pursued efforts to form an alliance with Germany. At the same time Chaim Weizmann, then President of the British Zionist Federation, made parallel efforts for an alliance with Britain. Weizmann conducted an astute and energetic campaign, concentrating on canvassing the support of reactionary politicians like Balfour, Lord Robert Cecil, and the Prime Minister Lloyd George. Apart from the

⁷Hansard, July 10, 1905, Vol. 149, Col. 154–155.

⁸Theodor Herzl, *Diaries*, trans. Marvin Lowenthal (New York, 1956), p. 7.

argument that Zionism was a convenient way of ridding Europe of its Jews, Weizmann also used the imperialist argument that “a Jewish Palestine would be a safeguard to England, in particular in respect to the Suez Canal.”⁹

The Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, was the outcome of these diplomatic efforts. This first charter for a Zionist “national home” was thus motivated by a combination of imperial ambitions and anti-Semitic prejudices on the part of the right-wing politicians who issued it. It is interesting that the strongest opposition to it within the British Government came from its only Jewish member, Sir Edwin Montagu, who clearly recognized the anti-Semitic motivations behind the policy of Balfour and Lloyd George. Montagu wrote:

I assert that there is not a Jewish nation (...) When the Jews are told that Palestine is their national home, every country will immediately desire to get rid of its Jewish citizens, and you will find a population in Palestine driving out its present inhabitants, taking all the best in the country.¹⁰

Montagu’s predictions were all too accurate. The years following the Balfour Declaration witnessed the rise of virulent anti-Semitism in Europe, culminating in Hitler’s holocaust. This in turn was followed by the dispossession of the Palestinian people. As will become apparent, the two events were closely interrelated.

⁹Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error* (New York, 1949), p. 243.

¹⁰Memorandum on the Anti-Semitism of the Present Government, August 23, 1917.

II.

THE COMMON GROUND BETWEEN ZIONISM AND NAZISM

Hitler's advent to power in Germany on January 30, 1933, meant that anti-Semitism became the German Government's official policy. This event was accompanied by an intensification of the Jew-baiting policies characteristic of Nazism.

In January 1933, the Nazi leaders, long considered by thinking persons as a band of ignorant and perverted demagogues, suddenly became the respectable heads of a great government. However, only their status had altered; their character and methods remained unchanged, and the Jews of Germany had to suffer the consequences of the demagogic campaign of hatred which had long been waged against them.¹¹

Armed with the full apparatus of government, the Nazis were able to launch an effective reign of terror. A Jewish witness described it thus:

I had to listen to the shouts of "*Jude Verrecke*" of the organized bands of demonstrators marching past my house. Daily there were attacks on people and kidnappings, the most terrible kinds of mistreatment

¹¹Oscar Janowsky, *People at Bay* (London, 1938), pp. 126-27.