

*Stanley Aronowitz*

## Setting the Record Straight: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Critics

by  
Stanley Aronowitz

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### **Introduction**

**T**he debate about the Israel/Palestine question remains, after a century of discussion, negotiation and armed conflict one of the major unresolved issues of global politics. In its current manifestation all sides, including the Israelis, have ostensibly settled on a two state solution: the Jewish state already exists but the Palestinian state awaits its birth. In the main, the issues have been framed by the claims of Zionism, or Jewish nationalism, and Arab nationalism to a rather small body of land with huge material and symbolic stakes. Now Adam Shatz, who is literary editor at *The Nation*, has edited an anthology of the writing by non-Zionist Jewish intellectuals and commentary by writers grouped under the rubric of he calls “the other Zionism,” about Zionism and Israel. Of the non-Zionist Jews Isaac Deutscher and Hannah Arendt are perhaps the representative figures who set the main context for Shatz’s argument that there has always been a secular, anti-nationalist discourse about Israel and Zionism which, in different modalities, is shared by Marxist and non-Marxist Jews.

Both writers begin from the problematic status of Jews in the diaspora; they are acutely aware of anti-Semitism in the West and well as the Middle East. Deutscher’s “The Non Jewish Jew” is a memoir of his own orthodox childhood, a lightening fast history of the relation of Marx and Marxism to the “Jewish Question” and a meditation on the reason, despite constant persecution, Jews have survived in the capitalist epoch. Deutscher’s thesis is that Jews represent the market economy because they have been consigned to it by anti-Semitism as well as by the fact that they were merchants in semi-feudal societies such as 18th and 19th century Central and Eastern Europe. They were bearers of capitalist progress and, for this reason accumulated the economic and social resources to avoid obliteration before the Holocaust and

even after it. Arendt published her “The Jew as Pariah Peace or Armistice in the Near East” in 1950, two years after the founding of Israel as a Jewish state. A refugee herself, she spent much of the 1930s and 1940s working for Jewish resettlement from Nazi Germany and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe where Jews suffered a precarious existence. Profoundly aware that Jews have suffered the stigma of “outsider” or Pariah, her article is, nevertheless a stinging indictment of the British strategy to prevent a peaceful arrangement between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and a powerful critique of the underlying nationalist premises of Zionism:

...almost from the beginning the misfortune of building a Jewish National Home has been that it was accompanied by a Central European ideology of nationalism and tribal thinking among the Jews, and by an Oxford inspired colonial romanticism among the Arabs. For ideological reasons the Jews overlooked the Arabs, who lived in what would have been an empty country, to fit their preconceived idea of national emancipation. Because of romanticism or a complete inability to understand what was actually going on, the Arabs considered the Jews old-fashioned invaders or newfangled tools of imperialism.”  
(85)

Newfangled or not, Arendt goes on to show that imperialism played an important ideological role in shaping the thinking of both Arab and Jew.

The title of Shatz’s book, *Prophets Outcast*, is borrowed from the third volume of Isaac Deutscher’s monumental biography of Trotsky, which chronicles Trotsky’s sojourn in exile from the Soviet Union he helped create, until his tragic murder in 1940 under the axe of a Stalinist agent. Both terms of the title, “prophets” and “outcast” are richly discussed and documented in the pieces. Their prophecy consists in dire warnings, issued from the dawn of Zionism and the Jewish migration to Palestine at the turn of the 20th century, that the prevailing Jewish nationalism would lead to disaster. And all of the essays collected in this volume constitute a consistent repudiation of the hallowed ideology that identifies the Jewish Homeland with the Jewish state. Here, for example, is Yitzak Epstein, a pioneer who settled in the Upper Galilee in 1886, during the first Jewish migration. Writing in 1907 Epstein explodes one of the sustaining myths of Zionism. Contrary to its

claim that settlers found a virtually undeveloped desert when they arrived, and that their efforts amounted to both a civilizing project and a restoration of fallow land, Epstein states:

there are no empty fields [in Palestine]; to the contrary every fellah tries to enlarge his plot from the land of the adjoining cistern, if it does not require excessive labor. Near cities they also till the sloping hillsides and around the settlement of Metullah, the poor fellahin, like those in Lebanon, plant between the rocks and do not let a cubit go fallow. (37)

And I. F. Stone and Noam Chomsky systematically deconstruct many of the lapses of historical memory that have been invoked by staunch supporters of Israel's settler society. In 1969 Stone reminds us that during 1947-1948 fighting Israel "seized 23% more land than was allotted to it" and demonstrates convincingly that the founding of the state of Israel was closely bound up with imperial politics (197) Chomsky's essay, published six years later, is notable for its reconstitution of the early program of the socialist Zionists, with whom he had been affiliated in his youth. The left socialists were not for an ethnic state that was Jewish, but for a bi-national state where Jews and Palestinians could live with each other and attempt to build an egalitarian, socialist society based on mutual respect.

Martin Buber and Albert Einstein, professed Zionists, issue dire warnings that a radical departure from the values of humanism and the concept of the community of nations—statements that echo Arendt's repudiation of ethnic tribalism—would condemn the new state of Israel to isolation and prevent the creation of what Einstein terms a "common" future for "two great Semitic peoples." In 1948 Einstein minces no words in his condemnation of the Jewish Right for its attacks on Arab villages, terrorist acts and bleak nationalist vision. But it is Buber who raises the stakes in the debate about the new Jewish state. In Buber's view, at its inception, Israel was losing an opportunity to forge a union with the Arabs by constituting itself as a small state—Buber calls it "normal"—which resists taking a broader and more inclusive view and instead was militant in defense of its own sovereignty.

This book intends to resuscitate an almost forgotten tradition within the debate about the fate of Jews. Many of the contributions reveal a penchant for polemic, fearlessness about the consequences of puncturing sacred and all

but unassailable versions of history and contemporary Israeli reality, and a fierce assertion and defense of secular cosmopolitanism. Some of the essays have characteristics of classics: Deutscher's "Non Jewish Jew," the Stone and Chomsky pieces and a stimulating article by a contemporary Israeli native brought up on a Kibbutz and currently teaching in the United States, the historian Gabriel Piterberg on the question of historical and contemporary "Erasures." Although another article by the Israeli peace activist Simcha Flapan covers some of the same ground, Piterberg's essay completely obliterates many of the sustaining myths of Zionism by invoking historical evidence and theoretically informed analysis to get at the underlying truths of Israeli claims. Marc Ellis's article on the Palestinian uprising of the late 1980s is at once a good account of the first Intifada and a severe puncturing of what he calls "Holocaust theology"—the widely held refusal among Jews to recognize, let alone criticize the abrogation by the Israeli government of Palestinian rights, or to admit, for example that Israel has nuclear weapons in violation of international agreements. Shatz's introduction and his notes to every contribution help illuminate the issues and provide short biographical material on some of the lesser known writers.

The collection has two weaknesses that detract from an otherwise compelling representation of a the critical tradition: the section called "Marxism and the Jewish Question" focuses, exclusively, on the brief comments of Trotsky and the Trotskyist, Abram Leon whose book on the topic, *Zionism: A Marxist Interpretation* was published in 1940. The Leon work is a major contribution to Marxism and to the literature on Zionism. However the excerpt is both too brief and does not give enough the theoretical flavor of the work. But there are other, perhaps equally important Marxist writings on Jews and Zionism that did not find their way into the book. One, Ber Borochov's *The National Question and the Class Struggle*, written in the early 20th century, from a left-Zionist perspective was profoundly influential on Hashomer Hatzair and other Labor Zionist tendencies until the late 1960s. Communists like M. J. Olgin and V. J. Jerome wrote critical analyses of Zionism in the 1930s and 1940s. Here, Shatz displays an unexpected narrowness which contrasts to the rest of the volume which goes out of its way to include diverse non-Zionist and Zionist perspectives.

Judith Butler's confrontation with one of the more egregious aspects of Zionist invective, its label of anti-Semitism attached to any criticism of Zionism or the state of Israel, and the charge that its Jewish critics must be "self-hating" addresses an important issue in the current debate. And Tony

Judt's article from the *New York Review of Books* calling for a return of bi-nationalism is, perhaps, one of the boldest, if utopian, pieces in the collection. But just as earlier writings such as those by Arendt and Chomsky link the questions of the middle east to the world politics of their own time, one would have hoped for the inclusion of a similar set of articles for our own time, especially the relation of US policy to the Palestinian and Israeli conflict. These criticisms are not meant to detract from the urgency and brilliance of Shatz's effort. In what follows, I want to offer my own reading of some of issues, including those of history and memory on Israel and Zionism, that bear on the politics of our time.

## I

A YEAR AND A HALF AFTER THE US INVASION OF IRAQ IT IS INCREASINGLY EVIDENT that this was not a war for democracy, to fight terrorism or, of course, to eliminate Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. This is a war to establish US dominance over the Middle East. In the administration's calculus, ending the Ba'athist regime that governed Iraq for more than thirty years was a means, not a final objective. Displaying overwhelming US military power and toppling Saddam Hussein was merely a prelude to a much larger aim: to warn the Europeans as well as neighboring Arab states that in its quest for unchallenged economic and political regional hegemony, the United States was prepared to go it alone—at least in relation to its traditional Cold War era European allies. The stakes were not only the rich Iraqi oil reserves, as the Left was wont to point out or the region's centrality to world energy resources, although these should not be overlooked or minimized. Contrary to his 2000 election pledge to stay clear of foreign entanglements, George Bush and his administration have used the events of 9/11 to undertake an extensive program of military intervention without, however, offering a clear plan for post-war nation-building or reconstruction.

Short of unmitigated disasters, an eventuality that is still not impossible given the full throated insurgency now in process which has caused a high level of casualties following its military conquest of the Iraqi state, we can expect that occupation forces will remain in place for the foreseeable future. The American military will stay en masse in Iraq not only because of the neo-colonialist intentions of this administration, which require setting in place a stable Iraqi-led puppet regime, and privatizing state-owned enterprises, not the least the oil industry, but also because it continues to label the multiple

insurgencies instances of “terrorism.” That terrorism has become the indiscriminate name for all dissent is consistent with the Bush doctrine that, since 9/11, terrorism is the rubric under which a new evil other has been constructed and has rapidly become the key element of US foreign policy.

Iraq’s conquest is only one component of the intricate, but interlinked US middle east intervention. Numerous missteps notwithstanding, the Bush administration—and its Democratic rivals—are committed to three crucial elements of a Middle East policy installing friendly, if not always puppet regimes in Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and neutralizing Libya and Iran; dismantling and otherwise thwarting the development of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons among Arab countries and Iran; even as, under the excuse that, in Bush’s words, “Israel has the right to defend itself,” the US bestows unconditional support to Israel’s own program to develop, maintain and possibly deploy weapons of mass destruction, not the least of which are nuclear weapons about which the Israelis and the American government are strictly silent; and supporting the unconditional right of Israel not only to exist, but also, in the name of self-defense, its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the prospective sites of the still unfulfilled promise of the autonomous Palestinian state. That the Democrats may differ on the issue of unilateralism and may be critical of the performance of US intelligence agencies, which grossly misstated the Ba’athist threat to United States security, should not divert our gaze from the essential bi-partisanship that continues to govern US Middle East policy. It is true that, as demonstrated in the 2004 primary season, there is dissent on some of these questions. But, at least for the present, it has been effectively stifled within the party’s ranks, and this subordination is particularly evident in the silence among leading liberals on Israel and the Palestinians, a silence that has provided ample space for Israel to pursue, with increasing approbation by the Bush administration, a new colonialism in the region.

An important part of the administration’s strategy is to support, by indirection indicated by the US government’s silence on the bloody results of the occupation and the relentless forward march of Jewish settlements, Ariel Sharon’s program for a “greater” Israel that will reduce the promised Palestinian state, when and if it comes into being, to a dependent, noncontiguous, poor semi-colonial possession. Since fall 2001, in concert with the Sharon strategy, the Palestinian resistance, just like its predecessor, the Intifada of the 1980s, has been conflated with terrorism (indeed insurgency against all but US-supported regimes suffers the same label). In

contrast to forty years during which successive US national administrations—Republican as well as Democratic—rhetorically opposed Israel’s annexation of the West Bank and Gaza—even as all refused to impose sanctions on the Israelis and regularly supplied the government with large sums of economic aid and military funds— recent statements by the Bush administration have reversed this administration’s early censure of Israel’s systematic disenfranchisement of the Palestinians. Instead, consistent with its doctrine of building an alliance of the imperial willing, it now clearly sides with the Israeli government’s policy of dispossession by settlement and armed occupation of these territories. In this respect we note that the New York Times 8/21/04 reported that the Bush administration might support some new West Bank settlements.

In this regard Sharon’s spring 2004 unilateral announcement of Israel’s eventual withdrawal from the Gaza must be taken with grain of salt; especially since, almost simultaneously, he has tried to placate his right by promising new settlements in the West Bank. Israel’s occupational forces have moved in and out of the non-Israel territories such as Lebanon as well as Palestinian lands since the 1967 War. In this respect one may speculate that Sharon’s gesture was intended to give him cover against accusations that he has violated the Camp David and the Geneva Accord that called for the creation of a Palestinian State in the current occupied territories, accords which would have mandated the immediate dismantlement of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank as well as Gaza. After driving the Palestinians to their knees, the Sharon government hopes that its victims will accept a deal. As Tony Judt argued more than two years ago, the Palestinians are asked to accept a more economically prosperous subordinate status in return for surrendering their passion for genuine autonomy. In 2002 Judt’s conclusion was that this is the most serious of Sharon’s many flawed assumptions. Passion, according to Judt, will always win out. It remains to be seen whether this optimistic analysis can withstand the severe tests placed before it by Sharon’s shenanigans.

There is no doubt that Bush has, in part, adopted these policies in order to pander to the powerful American pro-Israel lobby that, tragically, enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority of organized US Jewry. Moreover, neither of the two post-Vietnam war Democratic administrations since the 1967 war that initiated the occupations of Palestinian territory, nor the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, dare risk the ire of the pro-Israel lobby whose unconditional support of the program of Greater Israel

has contributed to the paralysis in American politics to confront the serious consequences of Israeli aggression. Since this lobby (AIPAC) is directly and indirectly responsible for raising major campaigns funds for both parties' electoral efforts, it is highly unlikely that either will bite the hand that feeds it. But while the politics of influence and campaign financing is a necessary part of the explanation for US policy, it is insufficient. The bare fact is that Israel is a vital component of the main objective of US Middle East policy: to establish the dominance of United States and US-based energy corporations and to thwart movements for genuine Arab independence in the region. Since 1948 when, by armed struggle and the powerful alliance with the Soviet Union and Great Britain, Jews achieved their national home, the United States remains responsible for building Israel's military dominance in the region; Congress has appropriated more than \$3 billions a year for this purpose, and Israel is the world's largest recipient of US aid for non-military purposes. Today Israel is perhaps the 4th strongest military power in the world. Despite its democratic protestations, the Bush administration has not extended similar backing to the Iranian liberalization movement any more than it is prepared to put its weight behind Palestinian autonomy by insisting that negotiations for the establishment of a Palestinian state proceed in a timely fashion.

Moreover, the US public has never been effectively disabused of one of the most enduring myths about Israel: that contrary to all of its Arab neighbors and Iran, it is the one democratic state in the Middle East. Carefully disguised from this account is the rank economic and social discrimination suffered by the nearly one million Israeli Palestinians. For while they are citizens and enjoy suffrage, they have been systematically denied significant land ownership and their civil liberties and social rights are severely restricted by police and other surveillance forces. Together with what Ella Shohat has called "Arab Jews," the Sephardim who migrated from countries such as Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, among others, they constitute a significant fraction of the Israeli working class, many of whom are poor, suffer authoritarian scorn from the Ashkenazim, who constitute the overwhelming majority of professional/managerial and bourgeois classes and who own the lion's share of Israel's productive property.

Citing the rash of suicide bombings that have occurred in the past several years the Israeli government's program of systematic disempowerment of the Palestinians by acts of violence such as blowing up Palestinian homes, killing civilians who demonstrate, peacefully or not, lengthy internment of all



manner of dissenters without preferring charges and its latest maneuver, the construction of a wall around Israel that effectively creates a new apartheid in the area and deprives tens of thousands of Palestinians of their livelihood. The ominous silence of the US government in the face of these hostile, aggressive acts has resulted in an unprecedented repudiation and isolation of both Israel and the United States government in world opinion. Israel's relentless military repression of Palestinians that has resulted in hundreds of deaths every year since the occupation that began in 1967, for its trampling of human rights Israel stands condemned by Amnesty International, the United Nations and other human rights organizations but, so far with little effect.

Even as the Bush administration has refused to condemn Israel's virtual house arrest of Yassar Arafat in Ramallah, he remains the President of the Palestinian Authority which enjoys official US and UN and recognition, Still, the Bush administration is somewhat constrained by world opinion. It is still official US policy to favor an autonomous Palestinian state. To be sure, Arafat's career as the leader of Al Fatah and as chief of the Authority has been riddled with corruption: cronyism, nepotism, authoritarian rule, and opportunism and provides enough convenient grist for the Israeli government's propaganda mill. Arafat faces serious opposition from within, not only from his traditional religious nationalist opponents who reject any settlement that will recognize Israel's right to exist and suspect Arafat of being all too willing to make compromises. Recently thousands of young Palestinians who are not connected to Hamas or other Islamist groups took to the streets to protest Arafat's leadership. The potential emergence of an anti-Arafat, secular movement is, undoubtedly, giving Sharon and his allies on the Right as well as in the Center Labor Party which, at this writing, is poised to enter the Sharon government, some sleepless nights. For if this movement gains momentum it may deprive the Israeli elite of one of its central excuses for refusing to engage in serious negotiations with the Palestinians: Arafat is unreliable. Sharon's proposed "national unity government" reveals the degree to which Labor has, itself, drifted right and indicates the growing strength of the intransigent ultra-right coalition led by Benjamin Netanyahu. For if a new secular democratic force emerges victorious within the Palestinian resistance, they will deprive the Israeli government of its main excuse for not negotiating a serious settlement: that Arafat is not a worthy partner.

## II

SINCE WORLD WAR TWO WORLD JEWRY HAS BEEN PREOCCUPIED WITH THE HOLOCAUST. There can be little dispute that the Holocaust was one of the defining events of the 20th century. Those who refuse to draw its implications for the future of what has euphemistically been described as “civilization,” let alone those who regard the legacy of the bourgeois enlightenment as unproblematic, even after Aushwitz, are no less culpable for the current state of global affairs than Americans who fail to take account of the US atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the subsequent global buildup of stockpiles of even more powerful nuclear weapons.. The genocide perpetrated by the Nazis against European Jews, and the first historic use of nuclear weapons by the US government have coarsened both those who directly participated in these events and those who sanctioned them either by silence or by granting enthusiastic support. It is no exaggeration to claim that the ravages of World War Two during which 40 million perished, including 20 million Russians and six million Jews, the Vietnam war, which killed millions of Vietnamese civilians, “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia, bring new meaning to Gandhi’s ironic remark. When asked what he thought of western civilization he is said to have replied: “it would be a good idea.”

The Holocaust was not only unique in its display of systematic extermination of an entire people, but revealed two profound flaws in the Enlightenment legacy. The first is the “banality of evil” that Hannah Arendt describes in her controversial study *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. The social content of this phrase is the critique of the pervasive bureaucratic rationality of Western capitalism. In Max Weber’s terms the machinery of extermination was derived from the same algorithms upon which the success of large scale industry and government relies. The second is perhaps even more serious. One of the myths of the Enlightenment is the what we mean by progress is intimately bound to the presumed disinterestedness and political neutrality of Science. Science is said to be liberatory to the extent that is hermetically sealed from the chaos of political struggles and the conflicts of everyday social relations. Hitler’s scientists were to be unencumbered by the uses to which their discoveries and inventions were put.

For example Werner Heisenberg may have failed to develop a nuclear weapon for the Third Reich but, patriotism aside, his motives were equally to

engage in the techno-games that impelled his counterparts in the West. Perhaps few of those who engaged in research directed toward extermination, were anti-Semites. They were good worshippers of the religion of Science. If poetry was one of the highest forms of humanist expression, Adorno asked whether there could be poetry after Auschwitz. Those who work on weapons of mass destruction during World War Two and perform similar tasks in laboratories all over the world today will almost invariably protest that their science has nothing to do with mass suffering, including genocide. They are only doing their jobs and even more, taking advantage of the proclivity of states to fund scientific discovery through military programs. As citizens they may disapprove of these programs; as scientists they have no choice but to avail themselves of their largesse.

Zionism is an ideology whose key premise is that, absent their constitution as a nation-state with territorial integrity Jews have no secure home. For some Zionists the Holocaust was only the final proof that Jews required a “national home” to survive the brutality of anti-Semitism which, presumably, pervades even the most enlightened modern states. The Zionist argument relies as well on a quasi-religious recuperation of the twenty five hundred year history of persecution by a succession of rulers, beginning with the destruction of the first Temple. For it was the expulsion of Jews from 15th century Spain, the frequent Pogroms of Czarist Russia, and the widespread discrimination visited upon Jews in most countries of Europe and the United States that, a half century before World War Two, led Theodore Herzl, Chaim Weizmann, and others to conclude that hopes of Jewish assimilation even in the most democratic societies were misdirected.

As practical politicians as much as visionaries, Herzl and Weizmann were neither socialists nor anti-imperialists. Herzl foresaw a capitalist Jewish state and was prepared to enter into an alliance with the British, or any other major European power that could deliver the requisite pledge that Jews would have their own nation-state. In fact, he negotiated with Turkey, then part of the Ottoman Empire, and might have agreed to settlement in Uganda, but this arrangement did not work out. Finally, as World War One broke out, world Zionism settled on Palestine as its objective, and dealt with some leading political figures in the United Kingdom, whose empire, at least until World War One, was unrivaled in power and scope. The focus on Britain was aided by both the strength of the British Zionist movement and its capacity to influence the government, and by Chaim Weizmann’s important scientific contributions to the war effort which impressed British

government officials. Indeed Herzl argued that advocates of a Jewish state in Palestine would, of necessity, require the approbation of the British. Moreover he sought to persuade the British that a Jewish state in the Middle East could serve British interests by providing the Empire with a vital military, economic and cultural outpost. After years of hesitation and diplomatic maneuver, not the least of which was a promise to the Arabs that they would retain sovereignty in Palestine as well as other Arab lands, in 1917 His Majesty's Government, under the leadership of Lloyd George, issued the so-called Balfour Declaration of support for the concept of a Jewish National Home in the area known as Palestine.

But the Balfour Declaration included a phrase, insisted upon by Jewish opponents of the concept of a Jewish state, that some Zionists might have interpreted as double talk. While the opening of the declaration unambiguously reads "His Majesty's Government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object," it goes on to state it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political state enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

According to Ami Isseroff, "this wording was at least in part a reflection of [the secretary for India] Edwin Montague's conviction, shared by other influential British Jews, that the very existence of a Jewish state would call into question the loyalties of Jews living in other countries and be a source of anti-Semitic persecution. The clause concerning the rights of existing non-Jewish communities was used in the 1922 [Winston] Churchill White Paper and more particularly in the Passfield White Paper to justify limitations on Jewish immigration, which, it was claimed, was threatening the economic rights of the Arabs by causing unemployment and dispossession." Plainly, in addition to the anxiety of some British Jews in high places, powerful elements of the British ruling circles also harbored deep reservations about the identification of a Jewish national home with the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. For by the turn of the 20th century Jews were already purchasing large tracts of land from resident Arabs, a program which might be described as dispossession by commerce. This conversion of Arab peasants into proletarians continued throughout the length of the 20th century and intensified after the war.

By 2000, by law and by commercial transaction, Jews owned ninety percent of Palestine land. Contrary to the myths of Zionism, Jews were not purchasing desert or other fallow lands, but displacing thousands of Palestinians who, for generations, sustained themselves on subsistence and commercial agriculture. Before 1948 when the Jewish State was won by armed struggle and diplomatic and political triumph, the Palestinians did not typically leave the region but, in most instances, were transformed into wage laborers on the lands they once owned, or migrated to cities like Jerusalem where some became small merchants, but most entered wage labor for the growing number of Jewish owned manufacturing, transportation and commercial enterprises.

Although legitimate real estate purchases constituted the bulk of the ownership transfers until 1948, thereafter Israel's expropriation of the Arabs by means of military force meant that many Palestinians were forced to migrate from the new state of Israel, often to refugee camps within the middle east. What David Harvey has called "accumulation by dispossession" became the main source of Israeli capital formation and this was one of the principal outcomes of the 1967 Six Day War when, as spoils of victory, Israel annexed the West Bank, the Golan Heights and Gaza. At the same time successive Israeli governments—Labor as well as those of the Right—denied the "right of return" to the dispossessed Palestinians even as they affirmed the right of any Jew to "return" to their historic homeland even if they had never before lived there.

### **III**

THE UNITY OF ZIONISM IS THE CONVICTION OF THE NECESSITY FOR the creation of a Jewish national home. Regardless of other ideological considerations such as the nature of the society which should be established in the new state, all factions of the Zionist movement share skepticism, even disdain, for the concept of Jews living permanently in any diaspora. For Zionism diasporic Jews may be used for political and financial purposes, but their Jewishness remains always suspect. There agreement ends. Since the early 20th century, one may discern three broad tendencies corresponding to different interpretations of what means a Jewish National Home and what kind of economic, political and social order should be created. The dominant tendency, represented by Herzl and Weitzmann, and most of the earliest settler groups, including the Israeli Labor Party led by

David Ben Gurion, favored the creation of a Jewish state that would exercise economic, political and ideological hegemony over its resident Palestinians who, at best could expect bare toleration,. Labor (Mapai) was prepared to grant those who could not be displaced formal citizenship but vigorously pursued a policy of dispossession, wherever the vital interests of Jews was at stake. This policy accelerated after 1948 when Israel, as a Jewish state, adopted an official program of limiting Palestinians within its borders and boldly coveted non-Israel territories of Palestine.

Of course Mapai disagreed with “bourgeois” Zionists regarding the economic character of the Jewish State. Even before the founding of the state of Israel Mapai and the Histadrut, its trade union federation, set up union-owned businesses, some of which are operated as cooperatives which, through the 1960s, dominated Israel’s economy. A concomitant of these institutions under Labor’s auspices, Israel developed one of the more comprehensive social welfare states in the world, much of it underwritten by US aid. Since the emergence of the Right in the late 1960s, Israel has undergone significant privatization and some elements of the leading Right-wing party, Likud, have sought to dismantle or otherwise weaken welfare state programs, either by privatization or by shrinking them. But like the American social security system and similar European practices and institutions, these programs enjoy broad support among Israeli citizens. For this reason, at least for the present, the Right has made little headway and in Israel has suffered some political defeats when it has attempted to implement its dismantlement program.

The rightist faction, whose most articulate ideologue was Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky, were eloquent in its contention that the establishment of a Jewish State entailed the ruthless pursuit of a policy of ethnic cleansing, both by law and by terror. Jabotinsky boldly declared:

The Arabs loved their country as much as the Jews did. Instinctively, they understood Zionist aspirations very well, and their decision to resist was very natural...There was no misunderstanding between Jew and Arab but anatural conflict...No agreement was possible with the Palestinian Arab; they would accept Zionism only when they found themselves up against an “iron wall,” when they had no alternative but to accept Jewish settlement.

That “iron wall” became the hallmark of the Right’s policy regarding

Palestinian Arabs. Jabotinsky advocated colonization, and believed that the Palestinian Arabs were part of a much larger Arab world of 35 million people who could be made to accept colonialization only by “bayonets.” He argued that only when the extremists had been crushed would “moderates” take over. Sharon is a true believer in the Jabotinsky legacy. He has converted a metaphoric statement into a physical reality and it is no accident. For Sharon himself is the political son of a series of patrons including prime ministers Begin, Shamir and other militants who participated in the independence movement under the banner of the Irgun and were themselves terrorists. But in concert with the mainstream, Jabotinsky believed in a policy of cultural Western homogeneity stating that:

we Jews have nothing in common with what is called the “Orient”...thank God. We are going in Palestine, first for our national convenience [second] to sweep out all traces of the “Oriental Soul.” As for the Arabs in Palestine, what they do is their own business but if we can do them a favor, it is to help them liberate themselves from the Orient.

But as this statement shows, the rightist sage first pointed to the Sephardim, “who must be weaned from their “ancient spiritual traditions and laws” Israel’s education policy has always been relentlessly Western. Far from being multi-cultural its school system is firmly controlled by the Ashkenazis.

Jabotinsky died in 1940, but his teachings have become the new mainstream of Israeli society. During the struggle for Palestine between the Great wars the Right’s militia, Irgun and its terrorist wing, the Stern Gang, became something of an embarrassment to the mainstream of the Mapai because of their advocacy of terrorism against Palestinians as an instrument of liberation. After 1948 they formed an electoral party Herut, which became the contemporary Likud Party. The Mapai distanced itself from the right on domestic grounds but also because it recoiled at the inconvenient language that the followers of Jabotinsky used. Labor had a longer term strategy to achieve some of the same goals. David Ben Gurion himself, Moshe Sharrett and other leaders of the party were no less contemptuous of the Palestinians and had no plan to grant them full citizenship. But during the 1948 war and in the early days of Israel, they were somewhat constrained by the need to win political and economic aid from key European states such as the Soviet Union, France, Britain and the United States whose support, in the

immediate post-war period, had been shaky at best. Despite the best efforts of American Jews, Roosevelt had never been a friend of the Jewish Agency, which administered a program of relief and immigration, especially of Holocaust victims.

In fact, Secretary of State Cordell Hull had consistently spurned various representations that called attention to the plight of European Jews and allowed only a sliver of those with professional and scientific credentials to enter the country. Truman was perhaps even more hostile to mass Jewish immigration into the United States. After the founding of the UN the Soviet Union became one of Israel's most important allies in the early debates about the desirability of the Jewish state concept. That the Soviet Union was a major supporter of the Jewish state was interpreted by many foreign policy experts as part of its strategy to become a leading player in the region, helped produce a sharp turn in US foreign policy. Recall that early in 1947 a State Department functionary, George Kennan, had written a memo advising that US foreign policy be devoted to a strategy of containment of Soviet expansionism after the agreements at Potsdam and Yalta had ratified permanent Soviet occupation of much of Eastern Europe. It may be argued that the reversal of US policy towards Jews and especially its belated agreement to back the proposal to found a Jewish state in Palestine was one of the felicitous entailments of the Cold War and followed Truman's adoption of the Kennan thesis and its concomitant, Winston Churchill's fateful Fulton MO speech declaring the Soviet Union the new enemy of Western democracies. Despite the Soviet Union's crucial gesture, after the United States government's support of the Jewish state, and the UN declaration of a two-state solution to the Palestinian question, Israel chose the West, a decision that was foreshadowed by the liberal and social-democratic orientation of the leading Zionist forces.

The third tendency, the left Zionists, was inspired by the writing of Ber Borochov who in the first decade and a half of the 20th century, provided a Marxist analysis of the imperative of a Jewish homeland. His major work, *The National Question and the Class Struggle* (1905), and many articles in subsequent years, offered a theoretical argument that tried to explain why Jews could never truly assimilate into European and United States liberal democratic states. The gist of his argument is based on the marxist insight that the production of human life is grounded in our collective relation to nature. According to Borochov, through anti-Semitism and the social division of labor Jews have been consigned in nearly all European states and



the US to sectors that are removed from basic industries such as agriculture, mining and primary metals production. Where Jews have found economic niches in productive wage labor they are mostly in the garment and textile trades, or are craftspersons in secondary and tertiary industries such as retail and wholesale trades, or are independent petty bourgeois shopkeepers. Under these “conditions of production” their separation from nature and thus the fundamental processes of capitalist production, combined with their historic outsidersness renders next to impossible their permanent assimilation into these societies.

Using a Marxist argument—that capitalism always functions, in the first place, within a national market—Borochov enters a vigorous defense of nation as the dominant context within which classes are formed and class struggle is conducted. After acknowledging that the Grand and petty bourgeoisie adopt nationalism as part of their ideological and political rationale, he takes pains, against the traditional socialist assertion that the working class has no country and that only an internationalist movement can effectively replace capitalist relations of production, to insist that working class consciousness is forged in the context of the nation-state:

All propaganda and every moment, which is rooted in the character of the conditions of production of a given society, it is either nation or nationalistic. Whenever attempts to blunt the class and civil consciousness of the members of that society, and whenever it ignores the class structure and the antagonism between the interests of the classes, it is nationalistic. If, however, it does not obscure the class structure of the society, it is national.

If the Jews have no secure national identity, if their position renders them relatively powerless, they cannot control their own destiny. According to Borochov even in the most liberal of “gentile” states the position of Jews would always be precarious because of the fragility of their economic position. Anti-Semitism, for the most part latent in liberal-capitalist societies, would inevitably become manifest in times of inevitable capitalist crises.

Borochov’s theoretical work became the basis for the famed Kibbutz movement in Palestine which beckoned thousands of Europe and American Jews to migrate to Palestine between the wars to reclaim the land. Borochov was the ideological reference for the Hashomer Hazair, the Marxist Zionist

party that, until the 1967 war, was an important political force. It identified itself with the international perspectives of the Soviet Union which, notwithstanding anti-Semitism and other serious flaws, it believed remained the most powerful force in the world for socialism and had played a crucial role in the defeat of fascism. As Israel moved ever more firmly into the US orbit, Hashomer, or the Mapam, its party name, found itself in an increasingly defensive position. Before 1948 it was the only Zionist faction that advocated a bi-national state in which Palestinian Arabs would have full citizenship, enter into a collaborative relationship with working Jews on the basis of their common class interests and fight together for socialism. While it accepted the Jewish state in the early years of Israeli independence, it maintained its position for bi-nationalism. Its disintegration reflected the heightened Israeli nationalism that accompanied the post-war occupation and annexation. More to the point, the party and its program were based in the Kibbutz movement, a rather narrow fraction of the population, and, in the burgeoning cities, managed to win support mainly among the intellectuals. Further, as the social composition of the Israeli population shifted from European to middle eastern Jews, left Zionism's appeal was substantially diminished. It survived as the initial basis of the Israeli peace movement which, however, was neither socialist nor Marxist.

But there is an important fourth political tendency among Jews, the secular, internationalist cosmopolitans, most of whom are on the left. Although they readily acknowledge the serious questions posed by Zionists about anti-Semitism share with most Jews a strong cultural and political identification with the legacy of the Holocaust, they are not neither nationalists nor Zionists. I was raised in this milieu.

#### **IV**

IN THE LATE 1940S I ATTENDED NEW YORK CITY'S MUSIC AND Art High School, having passed the entrance test in music. Organized by Mayor LaGuardia to give "talented" students a chance to follow their artistic interests while receiving a high quality academic education it attracted kids from all over the city and became, along with Stuyvestant, Brooklyn Tech and Bronx Science the city's "select" high schools. Many of us came from liberal or left-wing families, a good number from the Jewish working class. Of course there were an equal number of students from the professional and

managerial class and a small, but not insignificant coterie of black and Latino students.

“M and A” made an indelible impression on all of us for its focus on the arts, but also, at the time of the American Celebration, whose central proposition was that the US was the best of all possible worlds, many of us had fairly strong political interests, were critical of US foreign policy and of the Truman administration’s rearmament program that sacrificed social programs and were militantly anti-racist. The overwhelming majority of the politically active Jewish students were from families that were firmly rooted in the diaspora. Ideologically our parents were “progressives,” a common term describing those sympathetic to the New Deal and its legacy, socialists and communists. Our parents were divided over the Cold War, but a surprisingly large number were among those who dissented from the mounting pressure for conformity in American society and culture.

Among our classmates was a small group of Hashomer members. They were sympathetic to the Communist wing of the American Left but generally refrained from getting involved in American politics because they saw themselves as making *alliyah*—moving to Israel—after graduation from high school or college. In a school of students who were generally better educated than most of their generation, some of the Hashomer adherents were among the most talented and well informed about political issues. As I became more vocal in school affairs, they made fairly vigorous efforts to recruit me. I met with their New York leader, attended their camp in New Jersey over several weekends and read some of their literature, including the *National Question* by Borochoy. After these experiences I knew in my bones that I was not a Zionist. For even as I resonated with some of Borochoy’s arguments which were conveyed to me verbally as well as in text and agreed that European Jews needed a homeland and viewed the founding of Israel with pride—largely due to the importance of the two labor parties that were central to the military victory—my perspectives, as unformed as they were, were directed to the American situation.

Like most young Jewish radicals of my own generation I fervently believed collective action could change America, that the working class in this most advanced of capitalist countries would eventually adopt Left politics and oppose the dominant program of capital. I saw myself as a Jew, but only culturally, because my parents were secular and cosmopolitan, if not rootless. My father’s family came to the US from Lithuania in 1908 and were

practicing religious Jews. But he, too, was an American. Through his encouragement I was exposed to classic American literature—by the age of sixteen I had read Whitman, Poe, Hawthorne and the major 20th century novelists such as Dreiser, Dos Passos, Thomas Wolfe and James T. Farrell. Moreover, I was steeped in American History, having read the Beards' *Rise of American Civilization* and a fair amount of labor and black history.

Pursued by Russian authorities some members of my mother's family had been staunch activists in the Jewish Bund, a revolutionary socialist, militantly anti-Zionist movement. They had arrived in the United States as political refugees. Some of her uncles were founders of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union. The most prominent was my uncle Zelig, who had been a garment worker and later a reporter and labor editor for the Jewish Daily Forward, died in the late 1960s. I remember attending the funeral home where over 200 people crowded into the chapel to say their farewells. As I entered the home my aunt was engaged in a loud dispute with the funeral director. It seems he had asked whether she required a rabbi to officiate at the event. Angrily she told him that "we don't need a rabbi or any other religious person to attend" and the director vanished. This was the first time I was made aware of her and my uncle's atheism. The "service" consisted of a long list of often spirited testimonials, in Yiddish, delivered from the podium by my uncle's friends.

Later, in the 1980s, when I was invited to give a speech at a dinner sponsored by the American section of the Bund, I was able to confirm, first hand, how truly secular and anti- or non-Zionist this movement had been. Men and women in their sixties and seventies and older still called themselves secular Jewish socialists and, although they felt ties to Israel and would defend her, their lives had been living repudiation of the fundamental Zionist creed. Zelig was far more vocal than most in his disapproval of Zionism and of Israel's adoption of Hebrew as the official Israeli language. Even though he had abandoned the socialist movement—having left the party in 1936 among many others to support Roosevelt and affiliated with the American Labor Party, a united front organization of principally trade union socialists and Communists—he retained traditional diasporic socialist values. These included: contempt for organized religion which, he and others of his generation believed, had thwarted the forward march of the Jewish masses, in the first place the working class; the belief that one could never affiliate with a capitalist party; and the imperative that Jews remain staunch defenders of the Enlightenment, especially secular education, science and the arts. And,

despite their strong feeling for Yiddish culture, my mother's side of the family considered themselves dissenting Americans.

In sum, first and second generation immigrant Jews had fallen for assimilation into American society and culture more rapidly than their European counterparts. But, at least until the late 1960s secular Jews remained staunch adherents of all of the major left and left-liberal currents in American society. Jews were heavily represented in the leadership as well as the rank and file of the parties and organizations of the Left and were among the leading trade unionists, not only in the older needle trades and in the retail and other service sectors but especially in the newly organized public employees organizations. Jews are at the top of some of America's largest unions. The names of Jerry Wurf, late president of the State, County and Munciple Employees, Service Employees leader Andy Stern, the Teachers Al Shanker and Sandi Feldman and the Communications Workers' Morton Barr, attest to the role of Jews in the labor movement.

But Zionism had effectively neutralized secular Jewry's voice in the determination of US Middle East policy because many were afflicted with profound guilt about the Holocaust and, perhaps, about their own assimilated identity. After the 1967 war many on the Left either openly renounced their own anti-Zionism, or fell silent about the Middle East. Some Jewish labor leaders who had grown up in the non-Zionist socialist movement became fervent and uncritical patrons of Israel, even as they remained stalwarts of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, supporters of liberal feminism, civil rights and even the anti-Vietnam war movement. This was particularly true of democratic socialists of both socialist and Trotskyist backgrounds, but, already rattled by the celebrated Khrushchev revelations about Stalin's infamies, many close to the Communists muted their criticisms of Israel as well. A not insignificant fraction of erstwhile left Jews of all persuasions, especially intellectuals either drifted or galloped to the Right, because, after the Left refused to defend it against a threatened Arab invasion they viewed radicals, particularly of the New Left variety, as implacable opponents of the state of Israel. After 1967, the fragment of left Jews who remained critical of the actual policies of the Israel government, especially the occupation and the hardening of the Israeli class and race systems, were labeled "self hating." The implication of this phrase is that anyone, especially in the diaspora who opposes Israel's position *viz* the Palestinians has become, intentionally or not, an enemy of Israel.

After 1967 the grip of Zionism over the organizations of US Jews—religious, fraternal and sororial, secularists defenders of the constitution’s separation of church and state, community centers, charities such as the Jewish Federation, business organizations and others—was virtually complete. The transformation of Israeli politics from mild social-democratic to right-wing nationalism has the detained the great majority of organized American Jews not at all. Begin, Shamir Sharon enjoyed as much support in these circles as did David Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, Yitzak Rabin and Shimon Peres. It may be argued that the reason for this trans-ideological solidarity is that the Zionist propaganda machine has been all-powerful in the face of a vacuum in counter-information about what is going on. But what remains to be explained is why secular, cosmopolitan and radical Jews have been almost completely marginalized in American politics and especially in the debate about the Middle East.

Make no mistake. In the last thirty years, in addition to the radicals who have been consistent, if uncritical, in their support of the Palestinian Arab position, secular Jews who have been generally sympathetic to Israel, have advanced their agenda for peace in the Middle East. Conservatives like Seymour Martin Lipset, Tony Judt, Daniel Bell, liberals like Amitai Etzioni and other intellectuals have joined democratic leftists like Michael Walzer, Irving Howe and others grouped around journals such as Dissent and The Nation in a fairly broad effort to urge both sides to make peace and work toward a Palestinian state. They have taken out ads, lobbied the Congress and written op-eds daily newspapers that implicitly or openly criticized Israel’s approach. The problem with these interventions is that they reflect a wide agreement among Jewish intellectuals that peace is both necessary and desirable, but have little base in the court of Jewish public opinion. For today, in contrast to the first two decades of the post-World War Two period when secular liberals played an important role in organized Jewry, there is no left or critical intellectual coterie that commands a degree of moral authority in organized Jewish circles. The neo-conservative journal Commentary is, for most intents and purposes, the leading intellectual forum of American Jewish opinion and it is rapidly pro-Israel. The few specifically left Jewish publications have a limited audience and the most widely circulated among them, *Tikkun*, is edited by a former radical, now rabbi Michael Lerner. But taking into account *Tikkun’s* largely secular, non-Zionist readership, its circulation is fairly confined to people on the left who are more strongly

identified as Jews. *Tikkun* simply does not talk to the Jewish-identified small business, technical and professional middle class.

## V

ZIONISM WAS ONCE AS DIVERSE AS MARXISM. WHILE THE concept of a Jewish homeland inevitably entailed the creation of settlements that might encroach on the lands of indigenous peoples, strong Jewish currents within and without Zionism advanced the notion of bi-nationalism as an alternative to the dominant ideology of the Jewish state. Through the post-1948 period the voices of bi-nationalism were virtually stilled as Israel consolidated its narrow, tribalistic concept of sovereignty, hardened its mythological narrative of origin, created a hierarchical ethnic and class ridden society that all but reversed its once powerful legacy of laborism and collectivism. Today many young Israelis, disillusioned with the drift of their homeland, seek spiritual and economic refuge in the United States and countries of the almost defunct British Commonwealth, especially Canada and Australia. I have met more than a few of these younger people, some of whom are and were my students; and I have had discussions with the previous generation of Israelis who served in the 1947-48, 1967 and 1973 wars who have drawn the conclusion that militarism has become the dominant strain in Zionism. There is not always a political critique of the fate of Israel, but they are generally agreed that the society feels stifling, dangerous, sometimes authoritarian, and closed. For even in the midst of its unmistakable military power, and as the Right and Center Zionists cling to their near-monopoly over the discourse about the Holocaust, its institutionalized memories, and its narratives, they are having a hard time sustaining the view of Israel as a victim state, or as a humanist refuge for the homeless and abandoned.

True, large migrations of Russians, following an earlier arrival of Arab Jews, keeps alive the older idea. But today's Israel has pursued some of the worst features of Western capitalism. It has adopted a policy of "guest workers" to replace the now excluded West Bank and Gaza Palestinians who are barred by the Iron Wall from earning their living. These workers—Turks, Yemenis and others cannot qualify for citizenship since they are not Jews. At the same time they compete with the other fractions of the Israeli working class: Sephardim, Israeli Palestinians and Russians to the benefit of the bourgeois and the Professional and managerial elite. Buber's lament about the

normalization of Israel has come to pass. But, despite the umbilical cord that has been constructed, along with the Iron Wall, between Israel and its patrons, the US government and the American organized Jewry, there can be long-term security. Israel stands alone in the region; even its once heralded alliance with Egypt is all but sundered by its refusal to address the Palestinian problem. And its willingness to lend its technical and military capacities to further the ends of US domination in the region, remains a thin thread upon which to base any comfort.

Once viewed as a lapsed doctrine, after the Palestinian state is erected, bi-nationalism may make an unexpected comeback. For it is unlikely that the Palestinians will accept a version of the Bantustan—dependent, economically unviable, militarily weak and territorially split by the strategic placement of Jewish settlements as military outposts for Israel. This is a possible scenario, particularly in the face of the profound corruption of the extant Arab states, whose historical betrayal of the Palestinians shows no signs of abatement, let alone reversal. A bi-national state in the region could be the beacon of democracy and egalitarianism Israel once claimed and still claims to be.

But it will take years of writing such as Shatz has offered, political discussion and agitation within both left and liberal circles, especially within the United States, a much less timid Israeli peace movement, and a Left within Israel and among US pro-peace Jewish activists, that courageously embraces the possibility of bi-nationalism and, of course, a Palestinian resistance that works to overcome the nationalism within its own ranks and forges a democratic alternative to the Arafat fraud. These are tall orders that are likely to be fulfilled, if at all, unevenly and with many setbacks. What we can do now is to take up the issues raised by Prophets Outcast, not only on the non-Zionist left (is there a Zionist left anymore worthy of the name?) but into larger sections of American Jewish life.

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Zionism, Jewish nationalist movement that originated in eastern and central Europe in the latter part of the 19th century that has had as its goal the creation and support of a Jewish national state in Palestine, the ancient homeland of the Jews. Learn more about the history of Zionism in this article. Encyclopaedia Britannica's editors oversee subject areas in which they have extensive knowledge, whether from years of experience gained by working on that content or via study for an advanced degree. See Article History. Zionism , Jewish nationalist movement that has had as its goal the creation and support of a Jewish national state in Palestine , the ancient homeland of the Jews (Hebrew: Eretz Yisra'el, "the Land of Israel"). What its proponents themselves called "cruel Zionism"-namely the idea that Zionists had to use violent means to dislodge Jews from Exile-had achieved its ends. beneficent enterprise portrayed by official discourse. From the early days of Zionism Sephardim were perceived as a source of cheap labor that had to be maneuvered into emigrating to Palestine. Setting the Record Straight: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Critics. by Stanley Aronowitz. Introduction. Martin Buber and Albert Einstein, professed Zionists, issue dire warnings that a radical departure from the values of humanism and the concept of the community of nations statements that echo Arendt's repudiation of ethnic tribalism would condemn the new state of Israel to isolation and prevent the creation of what Einstein terms a "common future for two great Semitic peoples." In 1948 Einstein minces no words in his condemnation of the Jewish Right for its attacks on Arab villages, terrorist acts and bleak nationalist vision. But it is Buber who raises the stakes in the debate about the ne