

Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement 1925–1948

Yaacov Shavit



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JABOTINSKY AND THE REVISIONIST MOVEMENT
1925–1948

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JABOTINSKY AND THE REVISIONIST MOVEMENT 1925–1948

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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY PARENTS

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Acknowledgments

I started my research on the Zionist Right some 15 years ago, while studying at the School of History of Tel-Aviv University. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Professor Walter Laqueur for his encouragement and guidance during the writing of my Ph.D. thesis on this subject.

Since then I have published a number of books and articles on various aspects of the history of the Right, but to the best of my knowledge the present book is the first effort by anyone to present a general and comprehensive summation of the history of the Zionist-Israeli Right. Many of the topics dealt with in this book have been subjects of public and academic discussion and controversy, which has enabled me to clarify my own ideas and verify my sources.

I owe special thanks to the Jabotinsky Institute and its staff, in particular Mr. Pesah Gani, for their unfailing helpfulness. I would also like to thank Mr Henry Nijk, both for his excellent translation from the Hebrew and for his many constructive comments. Thanks are due also to Mr I. Ben-Sinai for assisting in this translation.

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Last but not least I would like to record that without the assistance of my friend Professor Amos Perlmutter I would not even have attempted to write this book for the English reader.

My first book on the history of the Right, which was published in 1977, was dedicated to my parents, Pnina and Yitzhak Shavit, who supported me during my years of study. This book is dedicated to their memory.

Tel-Aviv-Bonn, 1985–1987

Foreword

The intensive interest in the nature and character of the Israeli political Right began immediately after the Israeli elections of 1977, when the long-standing Labour hegemony was broken, to be replaced by the rule of a Right-wing *Likud* coalition. This of course does not mean that the Israeli Right was an unimportant, let alone negligible, phenomenon in Israeli life before its rise to power, or that no literature was written about it. Even so the transition from its long years in opposition to the ruling party made it far more important to try and understand the meaning of 'the Right' within the specific Israeli context. This in turn has given rise to a greatly increased interest in the background of the Israeli Right, and resultant efforts to try and explain its sources and origins, not in the least because of the Right's self-image, which customarily stresses its profound debt and obligation to its historical heritage.

In his speech during the early morning hours of 18 May 1977, after the initial results of the elections for the Ninth Knesset had become known, Menahem Begin, the Prime-Minister designate, said: 'Today is a turning point in the history of the Jewish people and the history of the Zionist movement, the likes of which we have not known for 46 years – since the 17th Zionist Congress of 1931, at which Vladimir [Ze'ev] Jabotinsky proposed a resolution to the effect that the aim of Zionism is the establishment of a Jewish state in our time.' With this Begin, while submitting his party's interpretation of the course of Zionist history, also presented the election results as an historic victory of the Zionist 'right wing' over the long-enduring hegemony of the 'Left', i.e. the Labour movement, whose rule had prevailed during those long years. In his view it was a resounding vindication of the Jabotinsky school of Zionism, 52 years after it had first presented itself as a political and ideological force. At the same time he presented himself as the heir and successor of Jabotinsky: the pupil had been granted the power to implement his teacher's Zionist will and vision.

From Begin's perspective the returns of the 1977 elections represented an act of historical justice: finally the in his view central

force of Zionism would hold the reins of government, after for nearly fifty years having been in the hands of a minority that had kept on ruling thanks only to its political proficiency and because the political situation had played into its hands. In election after election since 1949 Begin had failed to lead his movement towards a decisive political victory, even though several times the chances had seemed nearer than ever before. According to conventional political wisdom the *Herut* movement did not even have a sporting chance of achieving power, and the specific internal socio-political conditions within the State of Israel would forever preclude it from ruling the nation. The ideology of the *Herut* movement was considered anachronistic, while its administrative and leadership abilities were assumed to be non-existent. That is why the victory of the *Likud* in the 1977 elections was indeed a surprise to the winners as much as to the losers. Only later did the necessity arise to try and analyse both the accidental and the underlying causes which had brought the long national hegemony of the Labour movement to an end, resulting in the rise to power of the Right. For many it was a dark night in the history of Zionism, whereas for others it was 'the break of a new dawn'.

On that dramatic morning of 18 May 1977, when Begin announced the victory of the *Likud* coalition which he headed, he declared the resulting change of government in Israel to be a historical turnabout – a *ma'apah*, the name by which this turning point in Israeli politics has been known ever since. In his victory speech Begin therefore spoke of both 'change' and 'continuity'. By change he meant the profound transition which had taken place following the election results; by continuity he meant that the future *Likud* government would be founded on a solid political and ideological tradition which need not be changed, but would simply have to bring its values into practice.

The shift of political power from the Left to the Right, which occurred after fifty years of Labour hegemony of the *yishuv* and – since 1948 – the Israeli political scene, was viewed by the Left as a profound political upheaval, if not an earthquake. From the point of view of the Right it meant a revolution of historical proportions and a fulfilment of a decades-old dream: at last the Right would be able to take up the ideology of Ze'ev Jabotinsky at the point where it had been left due to the outbreak of the Second World War and the leader's death in 1940, and transfer Jabotinsky's ideological principles into the world of practical politics. After long, frustrating years in the opposition, the great moment had arrived, and now the

historical opportunity presented itself to demonstrate what was 'the "right" way in Zionism'.

* * *

The rise to power of the *Likud*, with at its centre the *Herut* movement under the leadership of Menahem Begin, aroused considerable curiosity, more than that usually provoked by the rise to power of an opposition party. The reason for this was its nationalistic and militant image, which meant that its policies would surely lead to an immediate war with the Arab nations and impose on the State of Israel a conservative, if not fascist regime. The expectations and fears were so strong because of the fact that the Right itself had proclaimed its intentions to carry through decisive changes in the domestic and foreign policy of Israel, and to effect changes in patterns of thought and behaviour, as well as in the socio-economic structure of Israeli society.

A number of questions have become the subject of political and historical debate. For instance the question whether the Israeli Right – as opposed to pre-war Revisionism – was a new phenomenon which evolved within the specific context of the Jewish society in Eretz Israel? What are the links, if any, between the pre-State Right and the party-political Right in the State of Israel? What kind of continuity can we detect in the political traditions of the Zionist-Israeli Right?

For an answer to these questions, we need first of all a more fundamental knowledge and understanding of the Zionist Right during the pre-state period. Following this, we will be able to answer the above questions, which we propose to do in the second volume of our study.

However, the general interest in the Israel Right is not only connected with current Israeli domestic or foreign (i.e. Middle Eastern) policy. The Israeli Right is a phenomenon which must be understood within the context of similar developments in the intellectual, ideological and cultural dimensions in the Middle East and the 'West' at large: the recent emergence of the neo-conservative Right in Europe and the United States, the crises of modernity and secularism in the Western and Islamic civilizations, the rise of religious (anti-secular) world views and norms.

This general curiosity, and the intensive media exposure were responsible for the close scrutiny of the political behaviour of the *Likud* government during its two terms of office (1977–1984), for

one thing to see how ideological principles were being translated into political behaviour and national policy making; what kind of changes in principles would occur once they were being put into practice; how did an opposition party act once it had come to power after many years of frustration and feelings of deprivation? Would the *Likud* give rise to new social and cultural forces, or would it stimulate and encourage the emergence of such forces? Would the *Likud* ride the wave of social and sectarian dissatisfaction, and the wave of nationalistic emotions, or would it succeed in manipulating the as yet disoriented nationalistic and discriminatory sentiments into a political bedding?

Since 1977 a wide variety of literature has been devoted to the examination of the political turnabout, which, although it was at first considered a calamity, soon enough (particularly following the second, even bigger victory at the 1981 polls) came to be understood as expressing a far more fundamental structural change in Israeli political culture. A major part of this literature ascribed the victory of the *Likud* not so much to the success of the *Likud* itself or its ideology, as to the failure of the Labour movement and its weakened impact on Israeli society. Therefore, it was argued, if only the labour parties had succeeded in adjusting themselves to the circumstances and renewed themselves, or – alternatively – stuck to their historical traditions, they would not have broken up internally, thereby paving the way for a victory of the ‘Right’. Other polemical articles connected the victory of the Right to longer-term deep-seated structural changes in the Israeli socio-cultural situation, particularly following the Six-Day War of June 1967, and the impact of the resulting territorial gains on all spheres of life. These historical discussions, mainly of an apologetic and argumentative nature, and often with little historical value, brought about a measure of renewed interest in the history of the Zionist Right, its origins and its ideological and cultural evolution.

Unfortunately Zionist historiography has been unable to provide a satisfactory historical background to serve as a solid basis for this kind of discussion, due to the neglect of the history of the Right as an academic field. Most of the interest has focused on the personality of Menahem Begin, the underground and opposition leader who at long last had become prime minister of Israel. The reason for this was the general expectation that Begin himself would almost single-handedly decide upon the activities of the new government and determine its personality. The impression was that the Right under Begin was a ‘one-man-show’, as had been the case with the Right

under the leadership of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, and in consequence the party and the movement were forgotten. As a result, the political debate was bound to be limited to perceptions, prejudices and generalizations.

The present work is not intended as a study of the Israeli political scene since 1977, even though it may serve as a broad-based and necessary background for such a discussion. My interest in the history of the Zionist Right began years before it came to power. The purpose of this study is to offer an historical interpretation of the genesis and evolution of the Zionist and Israeli Right wing, both in the intellectual-ideological field and in the political field. The Zionist 'Right' is defined in this study both as a 'type' (*topos*) of modern Jewish nationalism, and as a major stream in Zionism and in Israeli political culture; a type with unique properties, embracing a unique kind of Jewish nationalism within the framework of the contemporary Jewish national movement and the Jewish-Israeli national society. In many respects it represents an intrinsic part of Zionist ideology in general, with which it has a number of basic assumptions in common. In other respects the Right offers its own version, or emphasizes and accentuates different motives in a manner different from that of the other Zionist currents.

The Zionist Right has an image of being monolithic and monothematic, whereas in effect its history is very stimulating and contradictory, and full of sharp turns and internal changes. All the variants of the Zionist Right have a common goal: Jewish sovereignty over Palestine (*Eretz Israel*) on both banks of the Jordan River – or at least the western bank between the river and the sea. But there also exist differences in their cultural world views, their ideological arguments, their image of the political and cultural content of the Jewish national society, and the nature of the legitimate political behaviour and means. Indeed the tensions between these variants have created a fascinating and vital dynamic within the history of the Zionist-Israeli Right. The history which is told in this book forms the background for an understanding of the development of the Right in our time, beginning with its formative years, but it is also an important and interesting story in itself.

* * *

From the chronological point of view the history of the Zionist-Israeli Right divides into two main periods: the first period (1925–1948) covers the history of the Revisionist movement headed by

Ze'ev Jabotinsky, and the development of the two underground organizations in Eretz Israel – the *Irgun Zeva'i Le'umi* (the Etzel, or IZL) and *Lohamei Herut Israel* (Lehi); the second period (1948 onwards) covers the history of the Right in the State of Israel, mainly that of the *Herut* movement headed by Menahem Begin, and its development from an isolated opposition (until 1965) into a central, and subsequently (1977) ruling party. These two periods are characterized by major changes in the historical framework and the prevailing conditions, for which reason they required a separate historical study. This volume is devoted to the first period; my forthcoming second volume will cover the second period.

In certain aspects I have enlarged upon the scope of the narrative of this volume, for the following three reasons: (1) I wanted to avoid generalizations based on partial and fragmentary knowledge and prejudice; (2) I wanted to offer the reader a fuller description of a history which is for him a *terra incognita*; and (3) because the history of Zionism, as seen from the perspective of the Right, has a different character and development than as seen from the Left, and I believe that it is interesting as well as important for the reader to be aware of this different interpretation of modern Jewish national history.

This volume is divided into four parts.

The first part portrays the 'territory of the Right'. It describes the historical scene on which the Right emerged and developed, and its political history. In this part the reader will become acquainted with the organizations which attempted to translate ideology into political action. The second part deals with the national historical philosophy of the Right, and with the two main ideological streams which constitute its philosophy: their attitudes towards Jewish history, the Land of Israel, religion, culture, and so forth. Most of the arguments and views of the Right were shaped during this period, and this part forms therefore a necessary background to the intellectual and ideological developments within the Right during the next period. In the last chapter of Part II I will try and draw a summary general profile of the Right as a collective mentality. Part Three deals with the Revisionist programme and ideology in several major fields: the political concepts and political methods, the plan for a 'Colonization Scheme', the attitude towards the 'Arab question', and the socio-economic platform. The final chapter deals with the two underground organizations from a political and ideological point of view – as a continuation and metamorphosis of the 'old Right', and the problems connected with the evolution of the

Zionist Right into an Israeli Right. Part Four will discuss the two contradictory images, namely the fascist image, as seen from the perspective of the Left, and the image of the Zionist Left, as seen through the eyes of the Right. The book concludes with a general overview of the history of the Zionist Right.

In the above-described division of the book I was faced with a considerable problem of organizing the material in such a way as to give the reader a clear picture that is systematically organized by subjects and periods, while at the same time avoiding repetition. For this reason I have tried to deal with the material synchronically as well as diachronically, and although some repetition is unavoidable, I have tried my best to eliminate it wherever possible.

Any author writing about historical subjects which form a part of an existing political and ideological reality, will find it difficult to suppress completely his personal leanings, as a result of which he may find his writings becoming an element of, and an instrument in any ongoing struggles about the particular subject. Any writer about the Zionist Right discovers that he has to deal with two prevailing, but contradictory images. The Revisionists believe that their movement has been on the right political track all along, and that – despite having spent most of their political lives in the opposition – the movement has proved to be a Zionist bellweather on countless issues. In their eyes the Revisionist movement is characterized by self-sacrifice and heroism – the quintessential and purest expression of Zionism.

Its opponents, however, regard Revisionism as a sterile, unrealistic, cranky and sloganeering movement – a movement which not only failed to contribute its share to the upbuilding of the National Home, but also was the cause of serious splits and long-drawn-out and bitter conflicts in Zionism.

I have tried my utmost not to be influenced by these two images, which hover like dark and powerful shadows at the back of the author's consciousness. As a consequence not all my descriptions and analyses may be accepted by my readers and critics, but I like to assure them that any mistaken or distorted representations are not a reflection of any specific predisposition, prejudice or interest on my part, but solely the result of my personal judgement and evaluation. In fact, this book deviates in many aspects from the accepted negative portrayal of Revisionism by its opponents, as well as the adulatory views current in the circles of Revisionist supporters. This study also differs – both in the views expressed and the details of the historical events and circumstances – from the opinions expressed in

other scholarly studies. Most of the English works on the subject (with the exception of J.B. Schechtman's biography of Ze'ev Jabotinsky) are based on selective, secondary and partisan sources, which as such lead to entirely unwarranted conclusions.

This book is based on extensive primary source material, as detailed in the annotated bibliography. Substantial parts of it are based on my previously published Hebrew books and articles on the subject, so that I have not deemed it necessary to report in full detail all the original sources used. In a way, therefore, my Hebrew writings formed the bricks and mortar of this comprehensive work, which enabled me to write it in its present integrated form. This is also the reason why I did not deem it necessary to include footnotes and detailed references to the numerous sources which form the basis of the various chapters. As mentioned, the bibliography is intended to serve the interested reader as an annotated guide to the primary sources and literature on the subject.

A final remark is in place, especially for the non-Israeli reader.

The often vituperative conflicts and debates which have taken place within the Zionist movement could conceivably provide ammunition for anti-Zionist discussions. Even though it is true that the rival camps within Zionism would at times hurl the gravest and most vitriolic accusations at their opponents, the exact nature of these recriminations can easily be taken out of context by critics and opponents of Zionism, to be used as a representation of substance rather than form. Such a use might not be informed by a genuine desire to understand the special nature of Zionism and the problems with which it was confronted, but rather by a desire to discredit it. The duty of the historian is to portray things exactly as they are, but at the same time this gives him the right to caution against an improper use of historical facts.

The Revisionist proclivity for militancy and muscle-flexing, which was far more evident in Revisionism than within the other Zionist parties, was to a great extent a reaction to an objective weakness: it was an effort to compensate for the bleak and desultory existence of many of its members. Zionism between the two world wars did not operate from a position of strength. The Zionists were unable either to control events, or direct them in a direction favourable to their goals. To describe the Zionist position as powerful or influential would be a violation of the historical truth. The opposite was the case: essentially Zionism was weak and powerless.

In fact Zionism did succeed in establishing a Jewish National

Home in Eretz Israel, but it was unable to save the Jews of Europe. During the 1930s Jewish and Zionist history moved on two parallel but conflicting tracks. As the plight of European Jewry became increasingly acute, and the pressure for emigration to Eretz Israel intensified, the *yishuv* – the Jewish community in Eretz Israel – felt increasingly competent and confident of its ability to absorb a Jewish mass immigration. This willingness was however counteracted by the sharp distinction in British policy between the ‘Jewish question’, the solution to which was supposed to be guided by the provisions of the Mandate, and the ‘Palestinian question’, the answers to which were dictated by imperial policy considerations. In effect the British government decided to renege on its obligations under the Mandate charter, even within its narrower interpretation. This was the situation which confronted Zionism on the eve of World War II, without it being able to break the vicious circle.

In light of the above, we must conclude that Revisionism was a tragic movement, and Jabotinsky a tragic leader. Jabotinsky was not a Mussolini, in the same way as Ben-Gurion was not a Lenin. History did not grant either of them the power to control events and direct them in the way they desired. Revisionism was a tragic movement because it did not succeed in bridging the gap between its dreams of power, and its achievement. Revisionism fought against time, but circumstances overtook it. It is against this background that Revisionism’s unsuccessful attempts to gain influence and establish the instruments for building a national society, such as an army and instruments of state, must be judged. Regardless of whether this lack of success was due to the fact that its proposed methods – given the contemporary conditions – were unrealistic and barren, or whether it should be ascribed to objective or subjective conditions which prevented Revisionism as a political movement from achieving its goals, the fact is that ultimately it came to be not only a Zionist tragedy, but a Jewish tragedy.

The question whether, and to what extent, Zionist history was special and unique greatly occupied the two rival Zionist camps, and I will revert to this discussion in the course of this study. In theory we are faced here with the Zionist variation on the ongoing discussion between the proponents of a rationalist universalist orientation, and those of the romantic-historistic historical view. I myself am of the opinion that the *Allgemeines* (general) and *Besonderes* (unique), according to the well-known categories of Leopold von Ranke, are not two separate dimensions between which there exist different patterns of contact. The unique can only be understood

within a more general conceptual framework. Comparison may not be rejected, either as a historical method, or for its own sake. Even so, comparisons do not necessarily result in similarity, let alone in an overall resemblance. The 'general' and the 'unique' are not abstract models, but concrete objects under observation. Such a concrete description of the unique against a general background is what this study aims to present.

INTRODUCTION

What is Right: The Zionist Right in General Perspective – Some Methodological Comments

The Meaning of 'Right' in the Zionist Israeli Context

In Jewish tradition the term 'Right' has a positive meaning of power and salvation ('Thy right hand is full of righteousness', Ps.48:11; 'The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted,' Ps.188,15,16; etc.).

Despite this positive connotation of the term 'Right' in the Hebrew language, not a single political stream in Zionism – excepting a passing fad during the 1970s influenced by the emergence of the 'New Right' in Western Europe and the United States – has been prepared to define itself as 'rightist'. To be labelled 'rightist' according to the classification which has been customary in political culture ever since the French Revolution, has been vigorously rejected by every stream or party to which the label 'Right' has been attached. According to this same general classification the Zionist Right defined the labour parties as 'leftist', attaching to them all the negative characteristics with which the Right customary labels the Left. When applied to itself, however, the Right has strongly rejected the validity of this generalizing classification within the Jewish Zionist context, regarding it as arbitrary and stigmatizing.

There are several reasons for this rejection:

1. The principal general argument is that the division into 'Right' and 'Left' customary in European societies and European political cultures applies neither to the special Jewish historical circumstances in the Diaspora, nor to those prevailing in Palestine [*Eretz Israel*]. According to this reasoning the national aims, the social structures and political patterns evolving among the Jewish people in the Diaspora and in Jewish society during

the British Mandate and – later – in the independent Jewish state, are in no way similar to the European structure and pattern, as a result of which a comparison between these two categories also follows different rules.

What direct connection, the Zionist Right argues, can there exist between the generally agreed characteristics of the European Right and the national aims of the Zionist movement? There simply is no connection! It was the Zionist Right which struggled for Jewish national self-expression through the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz Israel. The Right was the Zionist party which undertook the large-scale immigration [*aliyah*] of Jews, rather than a selective *aliyah* based on social or ideological considerations. The Right anticipated the Holocaust by calling for the complete evacuation of European Jewry. It was the Right which established the underground movements that fought for the termination of the Mandate and the establishment of an independent Jewish state. Could any of this be said to belong in any way to the world of the European Right? How could anyone claim that the desire to create an independent Jewish state in Palestine or, for that matter, the Jewish national aspiration to establish sovereignty over the historical borders on both sides of the Jordan river (or its western bank) are manifestations of a romantic nationalist or imperialistic ideology? These, argues the Right, are the national and historical goals of the Jewish people – the foundations and the essence of its existence! Such goals cannot possibly be defined as rightist, and thus they cannot be compared to the ideologies of any of the European rightist movements. If the rule of a Jewish majority over the Arab population of Palestine is a form of colonialism – then by all means Zionism is a colonial movement!

2. According to a more fundamental (and historiosophic) argument Jewish history occupies a unique and separate place within general history, to which Western political categories cannot be applied; as a result of this it can only be discussed in specifically 'Jewish' terms. This holds true as regards Jewish history in general, as well as with regard to various political and social phenomena forming a part of its modern history. Any attempt to apply Western categories to the Jewish historical experience is artificial, misleading and wrong.
3. From the nineteenth century onwards the European Right has been considered anti-Semitic and reactionary in character, in the same way as anti-Semitism forms a dominant (although

suppressed) part of its cultural symbol system moulding its policy towards the Jews. Not a single Zionist party could therefore possibly identify with the Right, whether this be the conservative Right or the radical 'new' Right.

4. The Zionist Right considers the division into 'right' and 'left' to have an anti-national character, liable to cause sectarian strife and a rending of the national fabric through class struggles. While the classical Zionist Right looked upon itself in social matters as a 'neutral' national movement representing the 'nation as a whole', which stood above class struggles, and in which the interests of the nation, the state and the fatherland reigned supreme, it viewed the Left as a class-bound movement representing its own partisan interests only.

We need not emphasize that in this respect the Zionist Israeli Right shared the attitude shown by the European Right towards the Left.¹ The 'Left' was considered an anti-national one-class party; the 'Right', on the other hand, represented the entire Jewish nation. In the eyes of the 'Right', the 'Left' constituted an integral part of the 'international Left', in the same way as the latter regarded the 'Right' as an integral part of the 'international Right'. Both movements saw themselves as unique political phenomena, which could only be understood within the unique contexts of Jewish history and the Jewish existence in the Diaspora and the nation that was being built in Eretz Israel. At the same time, each regarded the opponent as part of a universalistic phenomenon, to be judged by universalistic criteria.

As mentioned earlier, we are faced here with an interesting historical paradox. In the eyes of the hostile critic outside the Zionist movement (and, at times, those of the radical dissident currents from within as well) Jewish nationalism as a whole is a rightist movement, due to its inherent romantic nationalist dimension. This interpretation matches the definition of, for example, Hugh Seton-Watson, who says that 'a reactionary is one who wishes to resurrect the past, and reactionary ideologies are based on visions of the past, usually more mythical than real, which are intended to inspire political action in the present.'² According to this definition, Zionism in general can be understood as a reactionary, 'rightist' movement, since its underlying 'romantic' idea is the actual revival of an ancient national historic past in a land from which the nation as a whole had been absent for many centuries.

Another critical approach is that there exists no real difference between 'left' and 'right', either in the Zionist movement or in Israeli society, and that any differences are those of emphasis only. Even if, theoretically, such differences could be found, they would mainly be a matter of self-image, which in practice would fade into insignificance, or even disappear. The political behaviour of the Right and the Left would in the final analysis yield the same results. According to this view one might say that what looks like the dualism of a deeply-rooted opposition – both within Zionism and within Israeli society – is a seeming contradiction only, even if it manifests itself as a political struggle. In any case, we have here two political oligarchies trying to mobilize the masses in an effort to achieve a certain political power. In their view, the saying of the Roman historian Sallust about the struggles between the patrician factions in Rome, '*Bonum publicum pro simulantes, sua quisque potentia certabant*,'³ applies equally to the political struggles within Israeli society. Right and Left are two faces of one and the same phenomenon!

There are also those who reject the accuracy of the 'classical' division into 'right' and 'left' from an empirical rather than an ideological point of view, reasoning that in Zionism the 'Right' is not so 'right', and the Left not so 'left', since the socio-demographic foundations of both the Zionist Right and Left cannot at all be compared with those of European society. The Israeli Left, which ruled the country until 1977, possesses extensive economic assets, and its voters belong by and large to the middle classes. The Right, on the other hand, is penniless, and its supporters and voters are recruited from the lower middle classes and the urban proletariat. According to this interpretation the Left offers a socialist platform in theory, but what it has established in Israel is a pluralistic society with a unique mixture of Socialism and Capitalism: a form of socialist State Capitalism. The real, and decisive, division between Left and Right, according to this view, is not a socio-economic, but an ideological one: a division between those adhering to nationalist and activist Zionist convictions, and those embracing a minimalist Zionist viewpoint. Zionist activism and Zionist minimalism (or rationalism), according to this interpretation, represent a political attitude towards the central national political issues, and these in turn are a matter of 'Zionist faith', or 'collective psychology'.⁴ According to the rightist definition a 'minimalist' is someone who is lacking in faith, and who puts party-political interests above the national interest. He is someone whose Jewish and national identity

is not strong enough, due to an excessive preoccupation with internationalism or universalism. Put differently, the real division is one between 'nationalism' and 'leftism', or between 'nationalism' and 'defeatism'. As seen from the opposing side, the two contending ideologies are 'ultra-nationalist' or 'fascist', in contrast to a 'humanitarian' and 'sane' Zionism. As of 1977 the two opposing sides have crystallized into the 'dovish' Left and the 'hawkish' Right.

The problems with a definition of the Zionist Israeli Right follow therefore from the definition of topical issues, as well as from the lack of parallelism between ideological self-awareness, on the one hand, and socio-economic structure and class stratification, on the other. The political ideological struggle has tended to accentuate the gap between the two opposing parties, leading to further polarization and a schismatic gap. In the reality of daily political life, however, these differences may on certain subjects be subdued, whereas on other occasions they will appear sharp and deep.

The student of Israeli political culture (and Israeli culture in general) will find that despite this blurring of areas and the problems connected with an objective definition, those involved will nevertheless insist on distinguishing a clear and unequivocal division into 'right' and 'left', which in most cases brings about hasty and *a priori* conclusions on most issues. For large sections of the Israeli public Right and Left represent sub-cultures which produce built-in responses to the various phenomena. Right and Left represent not only contradictory ideologies, but two contradictory mentalities and two contradictory personalities. No one can deny that the chasm between the Zionist Right and Left is one of the dominant facts of life in Zionism and Israeli society, and that it is charged with ideological differences, as well as with emotions and feelings of superiority and deprivation, not to speak of the opposing interpretations of Jewish and Zionist history. The political debates within Zionism have traditionally been informed by a deep consciousness of a fateful historical struggle being enacted, under the influence of dramatic historical events, catastrophic and revolutionary historical changes, and the establishment of a Jewish national society for the first time in modern Jewish history.

The above-discussed contradictory interpretations, namely those that attempt to blur the differences between 'right' and 'left' in the Zionist Israeli context, and those that stress their real and profound differences, do in themselves give rise to some important questions. For instance, are these interpretations based on different

historical, or on different ideological and political approaches? What are the contradictions between the Right and the Left: are they fundamental, or do they concern only marginal areas that fail to influence concrete political behaviour? Are we dealing with true or with imaginary self-images – merely different models of what is regarded as the reality, and which, as it were, lead a life of their own? Comparative research should be able to provide a more accurate and reasoned answer to these questions once the available historical material on the Right has been studied.

The present study is a profile of the Zionist Right; it is not intended as a comparison of the political ideology and behaviour of either the Right or the Left. Such a discussion would necessitate a detailed analysis of the historical vicissitudes of both, before we could even begin to draw analogies and parallels between the two. My concern here is with the Right in and by itself, rather than with drawing comparisons with other factors or phenomena. Neither is it my intention to judge the Right; what I want to do is describe it, in order to facilitate an understanding of its nature and characteristics.

Ideology, Weltanschauung and Political Methods and Behaviour

‘Right’ is not only an operative ideology, aimed at declared goals, or a political system, but a political tradition and *Weltanschauung*, which together create a solid framework of political and cultural traditions. Certain elements of this tradition of the Right can also be found in other Zionist political traditions. The territorial romantic dimension, for instance, was as strong within a central part of the Left as within the Right; the claims with regard to Jewish national sovereignty over Palestine and its historical religious legitimization were espoused among the Zionist Left no less strongly than by the Right. However, despite these and other similarities in elements, the Right is a separate political framework, due to the fact that its various elements have coalesced into one recognizable, coherent and active unit that behaves in a specific way.

It will be useful if at this stage we explain first the concepts that are being used in this study as a means of organization and interpretation. The three concepts in question are ‘*Weltanschauung*’, ‘ideology’ and ‘political methods’.⁵

A *Weltanschauung* is a comprehensive view of man, society and history as a totality; it is a system of symbols and values; a code of behaviour in every sphere of life. It is also a depiction of the historical past, a vision of the future. This comprehensive view

organizes reality and the image of reality in the collective consciousness and determines 'mechanistic, *a priori* responses, attitudes and orientations towards various events and phenomena'. Certain symbols and slogans within this system – words such as 'state', 'tradition', 'fatherland', and so forth – have a suggestive power.

This system of symbols and references does not only apply to political issues, and it is not represented only in the shape of formal ideology, but also manifests itself in other forms of communication in a culture. A collective *Weltanschauung* therefore represents a comprehensive world view of a certain public – its collective mentality as a part of the *Zeitgeist*. Since we are talking of the mentality of a broad, heterogeneous and anonymous public, we have to trace all its cultural expressions, and not only its political culture. However it must be remembered that the connections between an attitude toward 'culture' at large and an attitude toward 'political culture' are not unequivocal.

The writings of intellectuals and men of letters who belong to a certain tradition have two functions. In the first place they provide a more sophisticated and methodical manifestation of the collective (i.e. common) wisdom of the public, and as such they attempt – mainly within societies in transition – to provide the collective *Weltanschauung* with a philosophical basis. In the second place these writings in many instances provide sources of influence for the public world view, providing it with new and solid arguments and answers.

Ideology represents the effort to formalize a *Weltanschauung*, or parts of it, into a practical system in the political sphere, and to translate arguments into active conclusions. Differences in world view may be unimportant at the political level, and remain in the area of personal feeling or the intellectual and political debate. Only when translated into an active ideology and code of behaviour does a world view have social and political meaning. Ideology is therefore a specific political and social opinion; a well-defined, formulated, systematic set of goals and aims (the value dimension) and the means and methods of attaining them (the practical dimension). Ideology and programme are not only that systematic set of goals which seeks to formulate practical policy; they are also the intermediate link between the world view and practical policy, between the perception of the world and reality.

Political behaviour and methods are the ways and means whereby a group which possesses an ideology behaves within the political system, and the manner in which it tries to achieve its goals, while

setting a normative relationship between the 'desirable' and the 'attainable', between the 'possible' and the 'impossible', between 'expectations' and 'achievements'.

The ideology and programme can be found in the formal platform of the party, in the discussions in party conferences, and so on. The *Weltanschauung*, the emotions behind politics and the repertoire of images and symbols, is to be found in newspapers, journals, books and other forms of verbal and/or written expression. An established *Weltanschauung* and ideology within an organized political framework with a firm sense of identity, belonging and continuity, will create a strong, confident and effective *political tradition*.

Such an ideological political tradition has existed within the Zionist Right for the past 60 years. This political tradition was strong enough to weather two generations of historical upheavals which changed the Jewish world and the position of the Jewish national movement inside it. The newcomers to the rightist camp during this period therefore joined a solid political tradition, and adopted its values and systems. In the course of our discussion we will deal with the question of whether the socio-cultural profile of the newcomers, or the joining of a new elite, caused a radical change in this tradition, or merely added new elements.

* * *

The guiding thesis of this study revolves around the three above-mentioned concepts, in an effort to expose the continual tension between *Weltanschauung*, operative ideology and political and organizational behaviour. Revisionism was a national movement, and its *Weltanschauung* was therefore built upon an active national awareness – a striving towards the achievement of full Jewish independence in historical Eretz Israel – and upon various nationalist symbols. This national awareness determined the attitude of the Right towards the different historical occurrences; the ideology and the political platform were efforts to translate this national awareness into practical policy, and the political methods were intended as the instruments for influence and shaping the political reality in the light of the ideal.

It is my view that the formal ideology of Revisionism was unable to provide a sufficient response to the active national awareness and nationalist *Weltanschauung*. This inner tension at times even existed in the world views and behaviour of individuals, first and foremost Ze'ev Jabotinsky himself: the practical solutions which he

presented did not allow themselves to be translated into effective answers to the existing expectations and aspirations. As a result of this the nationalist *Weltanschauung* cast about for different solutions, and during the 1930s it developed a new operative ideology, as well as new instruments for the implementation of the solution and new types of behaviour. It often looked as if there existed a semantic resemblance between the *Weltanschauung* and the ideology, but here and there concepts and slogans such as 'political action', 'revolution', 'rebellion', and so forth, were invested with a different interpretation. Within the context of the historical process this tension between a nationalist *Weltanschauung* and ideology and programme gave rise to a great deal of internal tension, setting into motion political processes in which the *Weltanschauung* became institutionalized in activities that were neither approved, nor guided by the organs of the movement. Eventually this resulted in the establishment of new and completely independent organizations. In addition, the tensions within the movement resulted in the evolution of two different nationalist ideologies within the Right, accompanied by splits and schisms. I maintain that the creation of the new nationalist ideology and the development of the military organizations was the result of a clash between a *Weltanschauung*, which was first expressed in journalistic articles and poetry, as well as in a public attitude, and a formal and well-defined ideology that was not merely a response to historical events, but also presented itself as a real alternative and a new political avenue.

A discussion on world views and ideology rests on the assumption that the system of symbols and the deeply-rooted responses mould behavioural patterns, and that groups with different ideologies will have different aims, different expectations, and different behavioural norms. At the same time we may not forget that political behaviour, just as policy itself, is shaped by a wide variety of forces. The status of the Right within Zionism and Israeli society, its oppositional character, as well as its inner compulsions and collective personality, have greatly influenced the nature of its behaviour within the political system, quite apart from the fact that this behaviour has undergone changes in line with the evolution of the Right's status and tasks within this system [particularly its transition from political party to underground movement (1940–1948), and from opposition to ruling party (1977–1984)]. For this reason a political history cannot limit itself to a discussion of a symbol system and a formal ideology and programme, but should subject this

ideology (as well as the other components) to the test of actual practice.

It is also important to remember that a political party in the context of Zionist history, the history of the Jewish community in mandatory Palestine (to a certain extent also in modern Israeli society) was forced to maintain different patterns of involvement and activity within the historical reality from those of the Right in other countries. For this reason we will find the Right (as well as the Left) deeply involved in education, in immigration activities, in the organization of military undergrounds, in economic ventures, and so on. The question remains whether these patterns of involvement and fields of activity of the Right were different from those of the Left, and to what extent these variations stemmed from their differences in character, ability, ideology and interests.

PART ONE

THE TERRITORY AND
ORGANIZATION OF THE RIGHT –
POLITICAL HISTORY

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Introductory Remarks

The term 'movement', by which connotation certain organizational streams in Zionism are identified, has come to express the difference between the overall character of a group and a mere political organization. A 'movement' is not just a political party; it is, in the Zionist context, a socio-political organization which also deals with education and settlement, as well as with social and defence activities. A 'movement' aims at the organization of its members for the fulfilment and implementation of a variety of tasks which exceed the party-political sphere. A 'movement' comprises not only a political party and its parliamentary faction, but also youth movements, trade unions and other enterprises in fields such as, for instance, settlement, culture and education. Revisionism was unable to separate itself from this built-in pattern of the leading Zionist movements. Although Revisionism set out as a faction of a political party, it soon turned into a movement with a similar structure to that of the Labour movement. As was the case in the Labour movement, the political system of the Right also had two constituent parts: the political party and the youth movement. At the same time the overall Zionist framework dictated binding patterns of organization and activities with regard, for instance, to electoral campaigning and the struggle for representation within the Jewish representative organs. Our main interest in the political and organizational history of the Right is to see how under the prevailing conditions it became organized, which of the various organizations claimed to express its ideology, and how the tensions between *Weltanschauung*, operative ideology and the patterns of political behaviour influenced the organizational history of the Right.

I decided to start with a review of the organizational history, since our subject is not a history of ideas as such, but of ideas existing in a certain socio-political context, or – to put it differently – with the way in which existing ideas succeeded in finding a social body willing to adopt them and carry them towards their realization.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Territory of the Zionist Right: Origins and Historical Background

The Scope of Geography and Time

This book covers a specific period, namely the 25 years which elapsed between 1923/25 and 1948. This quarter century should not only be seen as the road leading towards a Jewish state, or the formative period of the Israeli Right after 1948. It should also be regarded as a specific historical period in its own right. The emergence of a Right wing within the Jewish national movement was one of the major and most crucial reactions to the situation and status of the Jews between the two world wars, both in Europe and in Eretz Israel under the mandatory regime. The Right was one of the responses to the overall situation of the Jews in the modern society, evolving in an era between war and revolution; between war and the Holocaust; and between Communism and nationalism.

Geographically, these developments span a wide area. The intellectual cradle of the Zionist Right stood in pre-revolutionary Russia; its broad demographic base was located in Poland and the Baltic states, after these states regained their independence. Here, too, we find its cultural roots as a mass movement that mobilized the middle class to its ranks. The focus of its aspirations and actions was Eretz Israel, which at the time was ruled by the British mandatory regime, whereas its political and diplomatic centres were located in London, Paris, Geneva, Warsaw and various other European capitals. Its branches were scattered all the way from the shores of the Baltic to South Africa, and even Harbin in China. The emphasis of this book will by necessity be on those centres which played pivotal roles in the history of the Right, rather than on the broader periphery.

The period under discussion witnessed a number of sweeping historical events, which did much to influence the development and shaping of the Right. Throughout the book these events will be mentioned insofar as they formed a turning point, or were instrumental in determining the course of events. The Russian October Revolution, which severed the large and vibrant Russian Zionist movement from world Zionism, was regarded by the Zionist Right as the biggest threat the Jewish people and Jewish nationalism had ever faced. In contrast to many other Zionist currents, the Right never had much faith in the New World which the Revolution was supposed to herald. The Right regarded both the Revolution and Soviet Russia itself as exponents of totalitarian barbarism and active and powerful anti-Semitism. The establishment of the new national states in Eastern and Central Europe was at first also seen as a negative development, since the nationalism prevailing in these states was tainted with anti-Semitic elements. There was every reason to fear that nationalism and national étatism would look upon the Jewish minority as an alien growth that would have to be suppressed.¹

However, following the signing of the Minority Treaties, and the consolidation of the newly-independent European states, the Revisionists came to believe that the Jewish populations and the Jewish national movement might have the best of both worlds. Not only would they enjoy equal political and national rights, as provided under the law, but they would also be able to continue cultivating the Zionist nationalist *Gegenwartarbeit*. Jabotinsky, for instance, described Latvia as an oasis of moderate nationalism, with a markedly positive attitude towards minorities. Post-1926 independent Poland under the leadership of Pilsudski was described in a similar positive vein.² Unfortunately the historical developments between the two world wars failed to justify this optimism, and the Zionist Right thrived despite its difficulty to reconcile its deep appreciation of the nature of Eastern and Central European nationalism – particularly because of its opposition to Communism – on the one hand, and a deep fear of its profound and aggressive anti-Semitism, on the other. For this reason the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany at the beginning of 1933, and the death of Marshal Józef Pilsudski, the Polish leader, in the summer of 1935, may be seen as turning points in the attitude of the Revisionist movement as regards its evaluation of the situation and the fate of European Jewry. ‘Breaking points’ might be a better description, actually, in the sense that they spelled an end to the hopes of an autonomous

national existence within the framework of the new national states in Europe.

The changes in British policy in the Middle East, both in Eretz Israel and in the Arab world as a whole, were formative events as well, and they proved the main catalysts for the formulation of fundamentally different points of view, and the evolution and internalization of certain fundamentals of the *Weltanschauung* of the Right, in particular its radical nationalism and extreme attitude towards the Arabs. In the course of this book we will time and again be confronted with the formative influences of the Arab riots of 1929, the Arab revolt during the years 1936–1939, the provisions of the White Paper of May 1939 and, of course, Great Britain's policies during World War II and the Holocaust. These were dramatic and even traumatic events, which were interpreted, often with justification, as apocalyptic and catastrophic, in which capacity they helped to shape and determine the response of the Right as a whole.

The Background: the Stage is Set

In the next chapter we shall deal at length with the organizational and political history of Revisionism. It is important therefore to consider the specific political and social conditions prevailing in the arenas in which the Zionist Right operated. Of course these were not confined to the Right, since in fact the entire Zionist movement, including all its constituent parties, was subject to the very same conditions. Even so it is important to mention this crucial aspect, since ideologies do not function in a vacuum, but within the framework of the available means and possibilities.

During the mandatory period the Zionist Right did not operate within the framework of a sovereign Jewish society. Also in the Eastern European Diaspora the Right was only one of the Jewish Zionist parties competing for the attention of the Jewish public. Politically, its struggle was not aimed at taking the reins of government, but at achieving influence and representation with the existing sovereign government and its agencies, as well as achieving a position of power within the representative bodies of the Zionist movement. The instruments of this struggle were by necessity limited to propaganda, educational activity and political organization. In other words, the activities of the Zionist Right in Europe evolved within independent, non-Jewish states, and were, by their very nature, incapable of influencing either the structure, or the economic life-style of the Jewish Diaspora society in any way. The

imitation of the political and organizational patterns, as well as the nationalist motives of the European national parties, insofar as it was tried, influenced the internal character of the Right and its ideology, but without the same results.³

The arena in mandatory Palestine was equally beset with numerous restrictions.⁴ Here too the Right did not operate within an independent Jewish national society; the struggle for government inside the *yishuv* – the Jewish community – was of a fundamentally different character from the struggle for political rule within an independent state, and the tools which could be employed in this struggle were therefore severely limited. The British mandatory authorities permitted street demonstrations, public gatherings, strike action, and so forth, but any attempts to take over the government by force, or to organize a *putsch* or a public uprising, were out of the question.

Theoretically, for instance, it would have been possible to advocate a dictatorship or one-party system, but actually carrying out a *putsch* or a civil uprising was an impossibility. Similarly any efforts to force through changes in the political structure of the representative organs of the Zionist movement or of the *yishuv* had to be ruled out.

Another factor severely limiting the ability of the Right as a political party to effect far-reaching changes in the economic and social structure of the Jewish community in Palestine was the mandatory government's control of most sectors of the economy: it was the legislative and executive authority, and its policies were determined in London, rather than by the Zionist movement.

Nevertheless, both in Palestine and in Poland, the political struggles between the Right and the Left within the respective Jewish communities showed several striking similarities. The Polish government granted substantial freedom of action to the Zionist political parties operating within the independent Polish state. The mandatory government maintained a low profile as regards its involvement in the internal life of the *yishuv*.⁵ This enabled the Zionist movements in both countries – despite their totally different characters – to keep up an intensive level of political activity, and to create two autonomous Jewish societies: the Jewish Zionist public in Poland, and the Jewish community in mandatory Palestine.

It should be remembered that the European Right acted within established national societies and within the framework of sovereign states, whereas the Zionist Right functioned within an autonomous voluntary communal framework. Its principal objec-

tive, which the Right shared with Zionism as a whole, was the establishment of a national Jewish society in Eretz Israel. However, the historical goal, the circumstances, and the instruments which a movement has at its disposal are no less, and possibly more, important factors than its declared ideological contents, which merely serves to create a world view and self-image, and to shape and evaluate a certain reality. The nature of the historical framework and the available instruments determine the possibilities and the restraints confronting a political movement in the fulfilment of its goals and desires.

The Intellectual Arena

The ideas of the leading personalities in the Zionist Right, some of whom have achieved greater renown than others, were not merely shaped by the *Zeitgeist*, but also by the impact of specific contemporary ideological doctrines about which they learned either from personal experience, or through others. Quite a number of the prominent figures of the Zionist Right were alumni or students of various European universities. (Professor Joseph Klausner was a graduate of Heidelberg; Ze'ev Jabotinsky had studied at Bern and Rome, and various other universities; Abba Achimeir and Israel Scheib (Eldad) were graduates from Vienna, and so forth.) Studying their writings enables us to identify their respective direct and indirect sources of inspiration and intellectual knowledge. It is far more difficult to trace the development of the *Weltanschauung* and ideology of the movement as a whole. There is no doubt that various literary minds had a seminal influence on the movement – in the first place Jabotinsky himself, who is regarded as its spiritual father, or at least as the originator of most of its ideas. Even so there is an easily discernible ideological continuity from the nationalism of the 1880s, in other words the ideas that were born during the period of the *Hibbat Zion* (Lovers of Zion) movement and the *Ha-Tehiah* ('Revival') era in modern Hebrew literature, as well as from the Zionism of Herzl and of his period, which were developed or given a new emphasis by the Revisionist movement.

The intellectual territory of the Zionist Right is highly eclectic. In it were represented influences of Western European Positivism (through Jabotinsky and Achimeir), of the Russian Slavophilic School, Polish messianic nationalism, German neo-Romanticism, and influences of Nietzsche and Spengler, as well as of other currents and sub-currents, all of which were placed in a Zionist

context. The Right also reveals clear traces of the philosophies of Achad Ha'am, Berdichevski, Herzl and Nordau, in addition to which Revisionism was of course profoundly influenced by its particular interpretation of the Jewish cultural tradition. We are therefore faced with a multi-varied and contradictory world which, despite itself, succeeded in creating a specific intellectual and ideological tradition. The question which has to be examined here is therefore how this tradition came into being, and how its various elements were joined, and welded into a unified intellectual structure, which in turn was translated into a political ideology.

Is there a Revisionist Ideology?

At this point we may ask ourselves whether Revisionism possessed an ideology. This may sound a rather strange question about a movement known for its ideological dogmatism, so that we should try and provide an answer.

When the founders of *Ha-Zohar* formulated their platform during the years 1923–1925, they were thinking of an operative Zionist programme rather than creating a new type of national ideology. All the main points in their programme were of a pragmatic, operative nature. Some of them were taken from the existing repertoire of Zionist plans, which for some reason or other had never before been included in a comprehensive programme of any other political party. The term 'ideology' was regarded as belonging to the intellectual world of the 'Left'. On the other hand, when in 1923 Jabotinsky met with the nationalist youngsters who had founded *Betar*, he did not merely offer them an operative political programme consisting of a few simple points, but tried to imbue them with an activist national consciousness, a national awareness, and a national cultural ethos. He believed that the *Betar* members were not so much in need of an ideology, as of a strong historical consciousness – a *Weltanschauung*. After all, *Betar* was intended to be a *Lebenswelt*, a spiritual home for its members in the Diaspora, as well as an organized cadre for training those who were to take part in the future national and political struggle. *Betar* as a movement was regarded as more expressive of a state of mind, a collective psychology, than of an ideology. Jabotinsky portrayed the nationalist Jewish youngsters who joined the ranks of *Betar* in the idealistic and rhetorical terms customary in romantic national movements. His descriptions are reminiscent of, for instance, the lines of Mickiewicz famous 'Ode to Youth' ('Together, young friends'), a poem written



Ze'ev Jabotinsky



M. Begin



A. Stern



Joseph Klausner



A. Achimeir



V.Z. Greenberg



M. Grossman



A. Zvi Propes

in Kovno, in which he calls upon Polish youth to wake up and unite in order to build a new world. In this light it is not surprising that the meeting in Riga inspired Jabotinsky to write 'A Timely Poem', apparently intended as an anthem, an important attribute for a youth movement that needed appropriate songs for all kinds of important occasions. The colours about which he talked in this *Farben Lied* were blue, gold and white, and its symbolic national heroes were the Maccabees. It described youth as the flywheel of history, and boyhood as the motor propelling the ship towards vistas of ideals and vibrant vitality.⁶

When Jabotinsky met in Riga with the members of the Jewish student association *Ha-Hasmonai* – a meeting with far-reaching consequences, about which we will have more to say in the next chapter – he saw before him a new type of national Jew. These students did not necessarily accept the political principles which Jabotinsky expounded because they believed in their immediate realization, but mainly because they satisfied them, and matched their nationalist mood. Jabotinsky, on his part, was particularly surprised by the active and uninhibited national awareness of the Riga group. He described it as fundamentally identical to any other national[ist] student group in its immediate (Polish, Latvian or German) environment. He envisioned a new kind of nationalist 'Hebrew' Jew, a kind of Jewish gentile possessed of an overall national culture. According to Jabotinsky, these nationalistic and idealistic Jewish students were in every respect the same as the gentile nationalist students, but they did not shy away from 'the hypnotic influence of external forms and traditions', and from joining the student fraternities and orders (*Bundeswerde*). They even drank beer and fought duels! This was a conscious effort on his part to reconstruct a Jewish national existence on the model of a neighbouring nationalism. The ideal of an active, committed nationalism, untainted by any universalist and socialist ideas (the latter in view of the fear of the enemy Soviet Communist neighbour) became the focus of the efforts to mould a nationalist Jewish youth trying to create for himself a full and satisfying national world, even if – at least not in the foreseeable future – he possessed neither a homeland, nor an independent country he could call his own.

The above explains the emphasis on character building (*Bildung*) in *Betar*. This utopian moulding of both the internal and the external personalities of the Jewish nationalist youth was based on the ethos of *hadar* ('splendour', or 'glory'), an idealized code of behaviour, reflected mainly in conduct and aesthetics, which showed clear signs

of having been copied bodily from the norms of the environment, and which was grafted as a 'closed system' onto the Jewish national culture and society. Jabotinsky's utopian ideas of the 'new Jew' corresponded on many points with those of Herzl. Both saw the Jew as trying to shed his ghetto garb, and simultaneously struggling against assimilation (a form of inner ghetto), in an effort to rehabilitate his image and restore his dignity, both as an individual, and as a contemporary person with a nation behind him – all this with the incorporation of archaic as well as modern and even utopian elements. Herzl himself was the perfect model of the 'new Jew'.⁷

On the face of it, the new movement that was born here expressed a mood, whereas its programme was limited in contents. However, Revisionism was not an idealistic and romantic youth movement, or a mere political faction, and for this reason it devoted endless discussions to the question of whether the movement should have a binding ideology on all kinds of issues, particularly in the social and religious cultural field. Some claimed that the movement did possess such a comprehensive and binding ideology, whereas others made a case for pluralism on any subjects that were not of a 'purely nationalist nature'. 'Revisionism', wrote J.B. Schechtman, 'is a political movement, pure and simple, which takes a purely neutral stance in religious and social matters'.⁸ Jabotinsky himself, when referring to the subject of ideology, at times talked about a detailed and systematic platform outlining a distinct action programme concerning the areas of Zionist fulfilment, and at times about a 'world view', in the sense of a definition of the intrinsic roots of Jewishness in the widest sense. In the 'Idea of Betar' of 1934, in which he tried to define the general outlook of *Betar*, he commented that a collective world view could not be the outcome of theoretical deliberations and formulations of ideals; it could only emerge spontaneously from the collective experience of the nation – in other words as a response to historical challenges taking the shape of a 'national character' and a binding normative system. In this sense the aim of Jewish nationalism was to achieve for the Jewish people a national territory, a homeland of their own, in which they would be free to organize themselves as they desired, and to lead their lives without being subjected to any outside pressures or influences. Despite this, Jabotinsky did not content himself with formulating draft platforms or incidental ideas in scattered newspaper articles. Instead he made a serious effort (for instance in his articles on 'Economic Theory') to formulate a broad and comprehensive world

view, to try and meet the demand for what he called a scientific theory of Zionism.

Most Revisionists never doubted, however, that Revisionism possessed a detailed and comprehensive ideology covering any and all subjects, and that its world view formed a closed system providing satisfactory answers to all questions, and as such was capable of creating a self-evident national Jewish world. More than this, most of them had no doubt as to where the questions and the answers on virtually all these subjects were to be found: in the writings of Jabotinsky. Jabotinsky's articles, in particular those written during the 1920s and 1930s, were familiar to any contemporary reader. Party meetings, political discussions and newspaper articles were all devoted to the creation of an overall ideology.

Two Faces of the Right

Two ideological and political axioms distinguished the Revisionist movement from other political movements and parties within Zionism: the principle of the absolute and unconditional territorial integrity of Eretz Israel, and the principle of an openly-proclaimed desire to establish a sovereign state on that territory by political or military means. This is not to say that other Zionist circles did not at one time or another hold similar principles, or did not act to achieve them, but merely means that Revisionism and the Zionist Right were the only Zionist school whose position was firmly rooted in these axioms, and who never deviated from them for any political reason whatsoever.

It should be stressed once more, however, that a common definition of objectives (a Jewish state in Eretz Israel), or even a common definition of the ways and means by which these are to be realized, do not necessarily require a common intellectual and cultural basis, or, for that matter, identical visions and goals. The communality of ideas which existed within the Right was achieved by means of a consensus on certain major issues, but simultaneously there existed within the Right a wide gap between two widely different world views. During the 1930s Revisionism was divided into an 'old' Revisionism and a 'new' Revisionism, which was radical and messianic.

The division I have attempted is by necessity schematic, and disregards many subtle shadings of opinion and permutations, in addition to which I have accentuated contrasts for the sake of a

clearer analysis. To some extent the division runs between the 'Westernism' and 'Slavophilism' in the Russian intellectual world of the second half of the nineteenth century. Both camps were characterized by deep controversies on numerous fundamental questions, and reflected two different utopias.⁹

The division into 'Westernized' Jews and 'autarkic', or 'authentic' Jews is not only arbitrary, but erroneous. Jabotinsky indeed openly and consciously borrowed ideas from European thinkers and philosophical schools, and his thinking betrayed historical-positivist and rationalist tendencies, but at times he dressed these up for pragmatic reasons in what he called 'Jewish philosophy'. The nationalist messianic current declared itself wholly anchored in an independent and authentic set of Jewish terms of reference, free of any influences alien to the Jewish spirit. However, a division of subjects with a common European-Jewish spiritual cultural background into absolute categories of 'European ideas' versus 'Jewish ideas' is not always a real historical distinction. Even so it can easily be shown that there are not only parallelisms and similarities, but also mutual influences and borrowings between 'Jewish-autarky', and the German idealist philosophical school, Russian Idealism and Polish messianic nationalism, to mention only the most important. All of the latter also claimed autarkic values for their particular world-views. Even so this deliberate rejection of certain 'European categories' does not mean that those concerned did not avail themselves of other European categories. On the contrary, those who opposed the rationalist and liberal foundations in Jabotinsky's thinking, speaking in the name of 'Jewish culture' instead, in the final analysis applied the same categories of criticism and 'utopian' characterization as used by the romanticists and mysticists of the European conservative tradition. In my opinion the messianic Right availed itself of European categories to define and interpret the elements of the 'new Jewish history and culture'. In the second part of this book I will devote considerable space to a discussion of these two aspects of the Right from the intellectual point of view.

The East European Background

We have already mentioned how *Betar* and *Ha-Zohar* were able to gain momentum and flourish in the climate of the new national states of Eastern Europe. These states formed the intimate environment in which their national and political culture had been shaped.