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The critics of Zionism, 1943.

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THE CRITICS OF ZIONISM

The second of two lectures on "Zionism: What It Is -- What It Is Not"

WRHS
By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver



At
The Temple

On
Sunday Morning, November 7, 1943

Every great idea, my friends, encounters resistance. But when it is inherently sound and just, that great idea is inevitable. This week the Senate of the United States, in principle, approved the world organization of a League of Nations for the preservation of Peace. At Moscow it was recently subscribed to by the great powers of the United Nations, by England, the United States and by the Soviet Union. Only a few months ago the whole idea of a League of Nations seemed to be thoroughly and completely dead. Great powers had destroyed its prestige even before this war, and our own Senate, you will recall, rejected the whole idea of a League of Nations at the outset, in 1920.

But today it is the most living thing in the world again. It is now again looked upon as the wished for instrument for World Peace in the world order. Great and true ideas cannot perish regardless of how violent the opposition is and how seemingly insurmountable the obstacles in the way.

So it is with the idea of a national restoration of Israel. It is beset with difficulties. But it will triumph in the end because the idea is sound and just.

It is interesting to note that in our entire long history there were Jews who resisted the ideas of the national establishment of Israel and of our national survival. Back in the days of Egypt, there were Jews who did not want to leave slavery. A Rabbi who understood the psychology of our people so thoroughly declared: "There were rebels and transgressors among the Jews who enjoyed Egyptian patronage and had acquired wealth and prestige and did not want to leave Egypt". I suppose that these people developed a platform of their own like the American Council for Judaism. They were one hundred percent ~~however~~ Egyptian patriots. They did not want a Jewish state in Palestine. They were few in number.

The Jewish people wanted to leave the slavery of Egypt, emancipate itself, set up a free national life in its own land. There were Jews among those ^{who} left

Egypt who during forty years of hardship tired of the long Road to the Promised Land and preferred to return to the fleshpots of Egypt rather than endure the dangers and hunger and thirst for the sake of building Israel into a free nation in its own land. Fortunately for them, most of the people refused to turn back to the fleshpots of Egypt. Fortunately for Israel and mankind people carried on, especially the youth of those who came out of Egypt. Permission was granted by Cyrus to return to Babylon. If the whole of Israel had returned to Babylon in the 6th century before the Common Era, Israel would have perished. The whole history of our people would not have taken place, the whole history of the world would have been different, especially spiritually. If Judaism had not survived, never Christianity would have been born.

And so, in the 19th century, the movement toward national rebirth for Israel assumed vital, political forms among our people, especially after the organization of the Zionist Movement at the close of the last century. Strong opposition made itself manifest among Jews of wealth and prestige in Western Europe. Those who acquired wealth and prestige felt completely at home in the countries where they lived.

They opposed Zionism and scoffed at the idea of trying to settle Jews in that barren country. Some laughed at the very notion that Jews would think of leaving their comfortable homes in Vienna, Berlin, Budapest, Paris and go to an oriental, out of the way hinterland of sand, waste and ruin. And the thought that Jews would or could become pioneers, with a pick and harrer and shovel build and their own country with their own hands -- that incited these these all knowing, worldly-wise bankers and merchants and lawyers and journalists to outbursts of hilarity!

Yes, fifty years ago they began issuing manifestoes against Zionism. Some Rabbis in their best style spoke against it. Some laymen gave their money to fight Zionism just as some of them are doing today. This was especially true in Germany where the emancipated Jew was riding the high tide of 19th century liberalism

but failed to note the dangers both of 19th century nationalism and anti-Semitism which were destined before long to destroy whole Jewish communities root and branch from many countries in Western and Eastern Europe.

In Germany, as far back as the Forties of the last century, certain Rabbis had decided that Jews were no longer a nation, that the Jewish people did not need a national home, that Germany was their Fatherland, and Berlin their Zion. Unfortunately this was a one-sided announcement. As one looks back over the persistent and violent anti-Semitism which pervaded German society almost every section of it, during the last century, one is amazed at the appalling wishful thinking and political naivete of the cultured and intelligent Jews of Germany. But this fatal blind-spot did not restrict the Jews of Germany only. Other Jews elsewhere were day-dreaming like they were.

Now, what were some of the reasons, and what are some of the reasons behind persistent opposition to Zionism? There are reasons and there are rationalizations. Rationalizations are intellectual camouflages for real reasons which are not readily acknowledged and sometimes not readily sensed. Thus, for example, the argument that Jews are a religious sect, and not a people, and therefore should not aspire to a national territory/center, is pure rationalization. The real statement, the forthright statement of such a belief would read something like this: I don't want the Jews to be regarded any more as a nation or a people. That might suggest that I am an alien among the people where I live. I better tell them that I am like them in every way except religion, and in as much as people today are accustomed to a variety of religious groupings in their midst, my own position will be no different from that of Catholics or Baptists or Methodists. Now all the ideological opposition to Jewish nationalism is pure rationalization. There is no warrant for it either in fact or in history. The Jewish religion is steeped in nationalistic sentiment and nationalist loyalty although it is universal in its ethical concepts and ideals. The ancient prophets of Israel were champions of

Jewish national survival, and after the first exile, of the idea of national restoration in Palestine. The mission of Israel is to proclaim the idea of one God, and His moral Law in the world has nothing whatever to do with anti-nationalism, and was, in fact, given its most eloquent expression at the hands of Deutero-Isaiah, the most nationalistic of all the prophets. And all the artificial distinctions drawn between Judaism as a religion, and nationalism as secularism is pure vamping and moon-shine.

And all of it has been evolved as a political device to justify the Jews' right to equality of citizenship in the modern state. But the right to equality of citizenship in the modern state needs no such justification. The Jew and any other man regardless of race, creed, color, is entitled to equality of citizenship in the land of his birth or in his adopted land if the land is truly a free land, and just so long as he obeys the laws and gives it his undivided loyalty. And if that land is not free and its laws to discriminate between creed and class, then no amount of self-effacement on the part of Jews and no cunning definition of himself will protect him against discrimination and persecution. The anti-Semite is never reconciled or approved by any pleasant formula about Jewish life which we invent.

Our enemies can rationalize their hates quite as readily as we can rationalize our hopes; and they have never been known to relent because of any sweet and appetizing definition of Jewish life that we can give them.

There is no single definition of Jewish life available unless it be that of an historic people, recognized as such by the world and by ourselves. What elements went into the fashioning of that historic people is really academic thinking. Many factors ~~xxxx~~ it, went into the common historical experiences, race, religion, many other factors. There it is, and there we are -- a recognized historic group.

In Eastern Europe a year before the war, some four million Jews lived as Jews, recognized by law of the land as a nationality among other nationalities and were granted along with other nationalities certain minority rights as well.

In the Soviet Union, where some three million more Jews lived, and where the principle of nationality is encouraged and cultivated by the Government, Jews, wherever they lived in large numbers are given the recognition of a nationality, are encouraged to have their own communal institutions or school systems, their own Yiddish language, their own press, their own literature, and their own Jewish community life. You will recall that some ten years ago, the Soviet Union actually made the attempt to establish the autonomous Jewish republic in BiroBijan. To speak of the Jewish of Russia today as a Jewish religious community is ridiculous.

In England, in the United States, and other lands where nationalism and nationality are not emphasized although they do exist, the Jews naturally will not press for national status. They will carry on as an historic community whose chief attribute is its distinctive religious culture. In Palestine however, in Palestine alone the Jewish people has sought and seeks today to establish a complete national life to make that ancient land of Israel, that ancient home of our people not a racial state, but a state that is as Jewish as England is English and as France is French. In Palestine the Jews are a nation in their national home. That is the meaning of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate if they have any meaning at all. The nationhood of the Jewish people in Palestine has been acknowledged in international law. It is not yet sovereign or autonomous, but the existence of the Jewish people as a people and their right to re-establish their national home in Palestine has been approved after the last war by fifty nations, including the Congress of the United States.

the Jews are

Those who tell the Jews, therefore, that/only a religious denomination are distorting history or are wilfully shutting their eyes to everyday experiences. We are a people living under different political conditions in many parts of the world, like any other people, except in one regard. All other peoples, regardless of which people it is, has a national locale, a national center. We lost ours! We lost ours, and the absence of it has been the cause and source of nearly all the

tragedies, miseries and sufferings of our people these last two thousand years. It is this absence of our national center which makes us so different, and which makes our people so insecure in the world. I find it necessary time and again to point out the simple fact that while we Jews have been branded as international Jews, there are people today that are far more international than we are. There isn't a corner of the world today where you can't find Englishmen, Germans, French, Italians -- in South America, in the United States, in Africa. They are far more international than the Jews. Yet no one speaks of the international Englishman, Frenchman, Italian or German. Only the Jews. Why? Because somewhere on the face of the earth, regardless of where it is, there is an England, a Germany, an Italy, a France, a national center. When an Englishman or a Frenchman or an Italian leaves England, France or Italy, he leaves one home and will find another, but when a Jew leaves a country, he leaves one homelessness to find another homelessness.

That has been the unfortunate status of the Jew in the world. We have no national status anywhere as a people. As a people we have no voice in any international conference, not even as Jews in exile, a government in exile. If there is to be an international League after the war, every people -- every people -- will have a voice in an international assembly of peoples. Sixteen million Jews will have no voice. We shall remain again anonymous and when again the great masses of our people will be persecuted as they have been in the past, we shall have no national people somewhere on the face of the earth to speak up for us, but we shall have to intercede with some government to intercede for us.

The purpose of Zionism is imply to normalize the status of the Jewish people and make it equal with all other peoples so that the Jews can be free as individuals in every country and when they chose, to live as a free people in Palestine like every other people who has a national center somewhere in the world.

There are Jews who fear -- and this is the real reason which motivates their thinking -- there are Jews who fear that if a Jewish national home is

to become a real thing our enemies, wherever they are will say to the Jews living in those countries: Go back to Palestine. Go back to your own country. They will have a good excuse for expelling the Jews. But, my dear friends, anti-Semitic governments have never waited for such an excuse to expel the Jews. Through all the long and tragic centuries up to the days of Adolf Hitler, Jews have been driven from one country to another in spite of the fact that they had no national home to go to. Our enemies never waited for the establishment of a national home of the Jews before beginning to drive the Jews out. The contrary is probably true. Had there been a Jewish National Home through the ages, these expulsions would probably not have taken place -- certainly not in modern time. Had there been in existence a Jewish state wherein the nationals of other states lived and with which other states carried on commerce and trade, the attitude of those other states to the Jews living in their midst would have been dictated by considerations of national policy, trade interests, and reciprocity. We are at war with Germany and with Italy today and I have not heard it said anywhere all through this war or the last: You Germans can go back to Germany and you Italians go back to Italy, principally because there is a Germany and there is an Italy.

In all events, if incidents of persecution are to occur in the future and no practical statesman can shut his eyes to that possibility, in view of all that has happened in our own life time, then surely the establishment of a Jewish National Home to which our persecuted brethren might come as to a place of welcome refuge, without repeating the horrors of many of our refugees in the last decade who knocked on a hundred doors and were not admitted or were put in concentration camps -- surely the establishment of a Jewish National Home to which such refugees may go is a wise natural precaution and insurance. As it is, the foresight of the last twenty odd years made it possible for the Jewish National Home in spite of severe restrictions not of their making, to give refuge to more half of the total Jewish refugees of Europe up to the war.

Some Jews feel that ^{with} the establishment of a Jewish state they in the United States, or the Jews of England or of other countries will be accused or might be accused of double allegiance. Here again I should like to point out that the enemies of the Jews did not wait upon the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine before he began to denounce the Jew for his disloyalty and lack of patriotism. In fact they seized on their homelessness and used that as their most powerful weapon in their anti-Semitic campaigns. The Jew has no roots anywhere. The Jew is an internationalist. The Jew has organized a secret international organization -- "The Elders of Zion" to which he owes allegiance, which organization conspired to overthrow all other countries in order to put the Jews in control. The anti-Semite invents his lies. There is nothing we can do that will satisfy the anti-Semite.

And strangely enough in all the anti-Semitic literature both here and abroad wherein Jews are denounced on almost every score in the catalogue, Zionism is never one of them.

The right thinking American knows that the desire and help of the Irish of the United States to establish a Free Ireland, or that of the Czechs, or Poles to establish a Free Czechoslovakia and Poland are not reflections of double allegiance on their part. No one ever accused them of double allegiance. In fact we applauded this movement, in the same way as they are applauding and assisting us in our effort to rebuild a free Jewish national home in Palestine.

Every President of the United States, from Woodrow Wilson down, has approved of Zionism. Woodrow Wilson saw the Balfour Declaration before it was issued. He said that he looked forward to the establishment of a Jewish National Home. Congress unanimously approved it. Ministers, authors, writers, have always evidenced sympathetic interest in the movement and not a single one of them ever raised the question which seems to be bothering some Jews -- that interest in the Zionist Movement would in some way involve the Jews in double allegiance.

The Jews in the United States have no other allegiance than ^{to}the United States of America. The relation of the American Jew to the Jewish homeland in Palestine will not differ in any respect from the relation of any other American towards the land of his ancestral origin. If there is any Jew who will wish to give his political allegiance to a Jewish state in Palestine, he will have that privilege of immigrating there and becoming a citizen of that state. And that is the privilege of every man.

Finally there is the argument against Zionism based on the fact that the establishment of the Commonwealth in Palestine is unfair to the Arabs. The Jews would take away a country which belongs to the Arabs. Jews would deprive them of their rights. And the Jews shouldn't do such things. I want to read this paragraph from the pen of a non-Jew on the subject of Arabs in Palestine:

"The Arab population in Palestine did not begin to grow until the 1880's. In fact, a careful analysis of the present Palestinian population would show that about 75 percent of the Arabs are either immigrants themselves or descendants of persons who immigrated into Palestine during the last 100 years, for the most part in the last 61 years since 1882.

"That latter date of 1882 is significant because it is the date on which Jewish immigration into Palestine began. Prior to Jewish immigration, Palestine was an area of desolate countryside and dilapidated towns, and during the whole period of Arab life in Palestine the country showed scarcely a single Arab achievement. In the war to liberate Palestine in 1917-18 the Palestinian Arabs did little to overthrow their Turkish rulers. They neither tilled the soil nor fought for its redemption. Arab interest in Palestine began with its restoration by the Jews, and Arabs have benefited greatly by the establishment of the Jewish national home."

When you think of the Arabs, you must think of the Arabs in the entire Near East, and that is a vast territory. The Arabs occupy in the Near East more than one million square miles. The whole of Palestine is ten thousand square miles.

And that vast territory of Syria, Iraq, Transjordan, Saudi-Arabia, not to speak of North Africa are terribly underpopulated and terribly undeveloped in spite of rich land and the capacity for rich and great development. Scientists have estimated that in the Near East alone there is room for 750 million people, because that territory is as large as 2/3 of Europe.

Out of the last war the Arabs gained freedom and independence from the Turks. As a result of the efforts of the Allies three independent Arab states were established — Iraq, Transjordan and Saudi-Arabia. Realizing this fact that the Arabs would have their national aspirations satisfied after the war by the establishment of a group of Arab States and that they have vast territorial possessions which would take them centuries to develop, and realizing also that the Jews stood in desperate need for a place of refuge for their people, the Allies reserved this notch, as Balfour called it, of 10,000 ^{square} miles for the Jews. When the Balfour Declaration was put into effect, there was absolutely no mention of the establishing in Palestine an Arab National Home — only a Jewish National Home. Provision of course was made in the Balfour Declaration that the civil rights of citizens should be fully safeguarded, as they have been to this day. And there is no more prosperous Arab on the face of the earth than the Arab in Palestine. Their standards there are higher than anywhere on the face of the earth because that was the one place to which they were permitted to come.

Arthur Balfour, at the close of the last war had this to say about the Arabs: "So far as the Arabs are concerned — I hope they will remember that among all the Great Powers, most especially Great Britain has freed them from the tyranny of their brutal conqueror,...I hope that, remembering all that, they will not grudge that small notch, for it is not more geographically, whatever it may be historically, that small notch in what are now Arab territories being given to the people who for all these hundreds of years have been separated from it."

The establishment of the Jewish National Home in Palestine can be the greatest boon in the Far East. Palestine has initiative, skill, Jewish scientific knowledge. Vast concentration of knowledge is placed in Palestine because of the refugees who have been gathered there from all parts of Europe. Jewish Palestine which has come to be such a remarkable center of industry, etc. can become the hub of a revived Near East...

It is the Jews of Palestine who are truly pro-Arab. No one wishes more than the Jews to work in friendship and cooperation with the Arabs — but not at the sacrifice of their national rights.

There are other things that I should like to speak of at this time and in this connection, but there is no more time. So I would suggest, dear friends, that now that this movement has entered its historic hour of concern, it is incumbent on thoughtful Jews to be thoroughly familiar with facts, not to permit themselves to be swept away by catchwords, rumors, prejudices. Therefore, read, study, study, read. There is a vast literature on the subject on all phases of it — political, economic, spiritual. Read! Be informed!

Zionism is a great, just, sound ideal. It is such in my humble judgment and as such it is inevitable.