

Zionism in Crisis

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rationale, and results, even though this is meant to be a book about the Israeli army.

Most offensive, however, are such statements as: "[In Arab society] there evolved a convention of settling issues by . . . naked violence. Palestinian society was especially noted for this trait . . . As far back as the 1930s, thousands of people had been murdered in the course of the ideological debate between the two main Palestinian camps" (p. 173). Or, "For decades thereafter the Palestinians continued to bring enormous damage upon themselves by resorting to terror" (p. 173); whatever Palestinians the IDF did kill, it was their own fault. This moral ambivalence is reflected again in the last chapter, "The War in Lebanon." Schiff states, without comment, that the task of entering Sabra and Shatila "was left to the Phalangists. . . . [The US was told] that Israel felt obliged to enter West Beirut to maintain order and protect the population against outbursts of revenge over Gemayel's murder. It had long been common knowledge that hundreds of Palestinians stopped at Phalangist roadblocks had subsequently vanished. . . . The Phalangists had a long list of scores with the Palestinians and were perennially out to settle them" (p. 257). He then accepts that "Israel was [only] indirectly responsible for what happened" (p. 257). No comment.

Ideally, producing a new book or a reissue is justified by the attempt to offer something better than before. It may be unfair to fault Schiff for not writing Luttwak and Horowitz's book, or Rothenberg's, but it is fair to blame him for not rewriting his own.

Zionism in Crisis _____

The Tragedy of Zionism: Revolution and Democracy in the Land of Israel, by Bernard Avishai. New York: Farrar,

Straus, Giroux, 1985. 376 pages. Index to p. 389. \$19.95 cloth.

Reviewed by **Avi Shlaim**⁹

To most readers, Bernard Avishai will be known from his perspicacious and elegant contributions on Israeli culture and politics to the *New York Review of Books*. He is a Canadian Jew who lived in Israel for several years in the early 1970s, taught at the Hebrew University, and is currently professor of writing at MIT. In this book, the product of mature reflection tinged with a measure of personal disenchantment with Zionism, he displays his skills as a writer and commentator at their very best.

In calling his book *The Tragedy of Zionism*, Avishai does not mean to suggest that Zionism is some historical misfortune but rather that Labor Zionism is a good revolution that long ago ran its course, that it stopped short of its liberal democratic goals, and that recent efforts to reinvigorate Zionism in Israel have only brought Israelis more misfortune. As with all other revolutionary movements, the leaders of Labor Zionism did not fully anticipate the political force of their theories and practices. Avishai's book is about the making of a revolution and about the unforeseen consequences of the Zionist revolution's success. In essence, what Avishai has written is neither a history of Zionism nor a history of the state of Israel but an historical essay on the way in which early Zionist ideas have impinged on the evolution of Labor Zionist institutions. Avishai sets out to show how Labor Zionism became preoccupied with the struggle for a Jewish state despite the fact that statehood was not a critical element of Labor Zionist ideology. He also tries to explain how

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Labor Zionist institutions successfully, and humanely, confronted the challenge of an Arab majority in Palestine—and how those very institutions alienated the Sephardi immigrants whom the state of Israel hoped to assimilate after it came into existence. The great irony is that peace is now farther away because most of the new immigrants to Israel since the 1950s have revolted against Labor Zionism's economic power and social theories and have accordingly voted for Labor's most reactionary rivals. Avishai does not blame the Labor Zionists for having tried to impose their vision on all the people who became Israelis, but he does maintain that the failure to do so only underscores how misguided is the impulse to meet the challenge of post-Zionist Israel with obsolete strategies for pioneering settlement and idle talk about "ingathering" Western Jewry from their "flesh pots." Outdated Zionist ways of thinking, he fears, would obscure historic Zionism's greatest achievement, namely, a democratic Jewish state.

One of the great merits of Avishai's study is that it is not confined, like so many other accounts, to political Zionism but ranges widely over the social, economic, and cultural strands of thought that went into the making of the Zionist revolution. One of the limitations of the study is that such thinkers as Theodor Herzl, Achad Ha'am, A.D. Gordon, Chaim Weizmann, Vladimir Jabotinsky, and David Ben-Gurion appear here mainly as the personification of their ideologies.

In many ways the most interesting debate is between the last two, between the militant proponent of Revisionist Zionism and the towering figure of mainstream Labor Zionism. It has been argued that, in the shadow of the Holocaust, Jabotinsky's ideology of power, race, and capitalism superseded the revolutionary ideals of Labor Zionism in the minds of Mapai leaders. Critics of Zionism, such as Hannah Arendt

and Noam Chomsky, for example, have charged that Ben-Gurion and his colleagues took a turn towards Revisionism at Biltmore by rejecting the binational solution, or even the partitioning of the country. The implication is that the way by which the state of Israel arose was unnecessary, and that it was Ben-Gurion's submission to Jabotinsky's ideology that doomed any further efforts to seek a peaceful compromise after 1948. Avishai defends Ben-Gurion against the charge of spurious Revisionism. But the arguments marshaled for the defense, it must be said, are not always convincing. The fact that Ben-Gurion swung away from Jabotinsky's ideological heirs and even helped the British hunt down the Irgun, for example, may have been due to political rivalry rather than to intellectual incompatibility. Moreover, Avishai himself concedes that despite the Declaration of Independence, it was virtually inevitable that Ben-Gurion would put aside the strictly democratic ideals of his revolution whenever these were at odds with the expediencies he deemed necessary to consolidate state power.

Looking back on Ben-Gurion's record in the early years of statehood, Avishai wishes, as did the Israeli Left at the time, for more diplomatic initiatives toward the Palestinians, for a greater emphasis on diplomacy where there was retaliation. But he never ceases to be impressed by the fundamental pragmatism of Ben-Gurion's approach. He gives Ben-Gurion credit for being more supple-minded than his colleagues on the Left, for realizing that the Israeli nation would have to be tirelessly sustained in the face of enemies, and that this was a cultural matter in addition to one requiring a defense strategy. Ben-Gurion saw, adds Avishai, that the new generation of Israelis would have an easier affinity for a new nationalism than for the old Zionism. So where is the basic incom-

patibility between Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky's ideological heirs? It is certainly no coincidence that reservations about Ben-Gurion's growing militarism were expressed not by Menachem Begin or his Herut colleagues but inside Mapai by such moderates as Moshe Sharett and Levi Eshkol. A second victory could not but enhance the appeal of the statism that had been forged in the crucible of the 1948 war. In this sense the Sinai war, in Noah Lucas' words, proved an "epitaph for socialist-Zionism."

Since Labor Zionism had achieved its essential aims, the Revisionist ideal of the state was the only coherent Zionism left standing. Moshe Dayan, the hero of the Sinai war, personified both the new and more muscular nationalism and the growing convergence between the statism of Ben-Gurion and his young followers and the Revisionism of his old political opponents. Once the state was placed above all other moral values, it was only logical to follow Jabotinsky's other ideas, such as his attack on the power of the Histadrut and his call for compulsory arbitration in wage disputes, his aversion to proletarian influence, and his militarist models of social organization. Nor did the forces for this kind of Zionism lack a national majority; 1967 served as a powerful catalyst for the forces of new Zionism—it was an invitation to the Second Israel as a whole to participate more fully in national life. After the war, the mantle of Zionism passed to statist of Dayan's ilk and thence to Revisionists and religious messianists.

Avishai reserves his severest strictures for the last of the Mapai old guard, Golda Meir. Mrs. Meir, he says, proved wanting in vision, incapable of speaking about any national problem except in terms of anachronistic Labor Zionist rhetoric which sounded hypocritical even to diehard Labor supporters, and all but guaranteed the accession to power of her old Revisionist

rivals. She did nothing to integrate Israeli Arabs into the national life. On the question of the occupied territories, her impulses proved particularly disastrous. As to the larger issue of Israel's defense strategy, her record was equally questionable. In economic affairs, for all the talk about her commitment as a socialist to closing the social gap, the market approach over which she presided created an oligarchy of privileged people and generated uneven growth to the obvious enrichment of Israel's bourgeoisie.

The final downfall of Labor Zionism was brought on by the Yom Kippur war, for which Mrs. Meir was largely responsible. After a brief and sterile interregnum by Yitzhak Rabin—"a Sphinx without secrets"—the day of reckoning had arrived. When times were better, Labor highhandedness was overlooked, but times were not good in Israel in the spring of 1977. "Clearly, the Labor Party had created a crippled, incompetent, highly inflationary capitalism which was hard on the workers and middle-class wage earners who had once been Labor's natural constituency outside the workers' agricultural settlements. It was hardest on the Second Israel. Yet it also offended the sensibilities of the same intellectuals and businessmen who most benefited from it" (p. 269). The Second Israel probably derived more satisfaction from overthrowing the hated Labor oligarchy than it did from the elevation of the Likud.

In his concluding chapters, Avishai examines the impact of the occupation of the West Bank on Israeli democracy. Most Israelis, he observes, have become accustomed to living in what Meron Benvenisti, the former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, has called *herrenvolk* democracy, with first-class citizenship for Jews and second-class citizenship for Palestinians. Even if the West Bank is relinquished, the fundamental question would remain: How can a

democratic state not treat one-sixth of its citizens as equals and remain democratic? For Israel's Arabs the answer is that it cannot, and that they must have far greater social and economic opportunities in Israel if their children are to feel loyal to the state and their teachers are not to feel like quislings. For them loyalty to Israel derives from what democracy it has achieved, and more perfect democracy, in the broad sense of the term, is the only incentive for them to keep faith with the national life.

For Avishai the real question is not whether good Zionism or bad Zionism will prevail in Israel but whether the democratic tendencies inherent in historic Labor Zionism will prevail against the anachronistic institutions which Labor Zionists once made—whether they will prevail against the new Zionist ideology of a greater Israel. An Israeli, he remarks, need not be a Zionist of any kind to want democracy for the country. For Israeli democrats, Arabs included, Zionist ideas are at best a distraction, at worst an invitation to authoritarian forces to set the terms of national debate.

Israeli political life may have much to recommend it when compared with the regimes of its Arab neighbors, but such comparisons are cold comfort to those Israelis who are concerned that their liberties not only may not be extended but that they may be extinguished. How many Israeli youngsters will learn to appreciate democratic standards, asks Avishai, so long as they perceive themselves to be engaged in a revolutionary Zionist struggle against a major part of their country's citizens? His somewhat circular answer is that democratic ways of thinking would come easier with peace, though a commitment to democratic values may also be a precondition for peace. In any case, "The prospects for peace cannot be advanced by any new Zionist achievements. If the West Bank (including Arab Jerusalem)

and Gaza remain part of Israel there will be more wars. At best, Israeli Jews will be faced eventually with the choice of expelling many more Palestinian Arabs, or living with them in an unequal society. Neither result is inevitable but neither is precluded by more military victories" (pp. 10–11).

Any progress on the peacemaking front, argues Avishai, will need leaders who are prepared to believe in a world where Jews are not merely victims or pariahs. But after six Arab-Israeli wars, the European Holocaust, and the mass exodus of Jews from Arab lands, he sees precious little evidence to suggest that such leaders are emerging from Israel's younger generation. What he does say is that Ben-Gurion's old plan to partition the land is no less vital to Israeli democracy today than before and that, during the elections of 1984, the Israelis of the coming generation seemed less open both to partition and to democracy than their own parents were. That may prove the real tragedy of Israel. And that is the gloomy forecast given by Bernard Avishai at the end of his sensitive, eloquent, and thought-provoking essay on the interaction between Zionist ideas and the modern history of Israel.

Winning American Jews to Zionism

The Political World of American Zionism, by Samuel Halperin. Silver Spring, Md.: Information Dynamics, Inc., 1985. xv + 316 pages. Appendix to p. 334. Notes to p. 398. Bibliography to p. 419. Index to p. 431. \$19.95 cloth.

All My Causes, by I. L. Kenen. Washington, D.C.: Near East Research, Inc., 1985. ix + 129 pages. Index to p. 134. \$8.50.

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