

**ELI AVRAHAMI**

**TABENKIN  
ON CONSTRUCTIVE  
LABOR ZIONISM**

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## FOREWORD

This is the third essay published in English about Yitzhak Tabenkin's spiritual inheritance. The other two were "Tabenkin's View of Socialism" by Yehuda Harell and "The Kibbutz — a Non-Utopian Commune," a collection of Tabenkin's own speeches and talks.

The ideology of Tabenkin is one entity; his conceptions about constructive Labor Zionism cannot be separated from his socialism and his conception on kibbutz. The systematic exposition of his theories makes it necessary to relate to these different elements in turn and we hope that the English speaking reader, for whom this is the first meeting with Tabenkin's thought, will find this method an easier approach to follow.

Different spiritual fathers of Zionism and Labor Zionism lived in the Diaspora formulating their beliefs and prognosis about our future. Not so Tabenkin, who personally took part in forging the tools for building Eretz-Israel, by living in a kibbutz.

This essay is a part of Eli Avrahami's thesis on Socialist Zionism between the Universalism in Socialism and the Particularism in Nationalism (focusing on the opinions and standpoints of Yitzhak Tabenkin). We have adapted it with his help for separate publishing and tried to make it more readable for the average researcher and student. Our thanks are due to the translator, Hanna Lash, to the copy editor David Goldberg and to everyone who made this publication possible.

*Shimon Mahler*



## **Yitzhak Tabenkin**

**(1887-1971)**

Immigrated to Palestine in 1910.

One of the founders of the Histadruth and of the Kibbutz Hameuhad, he was a member of Kibbutz Ein Harod and the founder and moving spirit of the Kibbutz Seminar Center at Efal, near Tel-Aviv. He devoted much of his life to developing the philosophy of labor and kibbutz, lecturing and publishing extensively on these subjects.

Tabenkin, who was for some time a member of the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament, exercised a powerful influence on the ideological life of the nation. He was of a passionate, indeed tempestuous, nature; single minded in the pursuit of his ideas and their realisation; consistently radical in the positions he adopted and advocated over more than half-a-century of intense public activity. He was considered the educator of the young generation of pioneers in the Diaspora and in the Land of Israel; a towering personality of the first generation of the leaders who built the modern Jewish State.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Zionism, the Jewish national liberation movement, is not merely a political movement but an ideological one. It is, perhaps the last attempt to ensure a continued existence of the unique Jewish entity, within free, modern, nonreligious Western societies at a time when the latter tended to adopt unique national identities and establish national states.

In his testimony before the 1946 Anglo-American Committee, that was appointed to examine the situation during the British Mandate, Martin Buber, the eminent German Jewish philosopher, stated: "In an era of national movements, the Jewish people have refrained from establishing an additional national movement similar to the European ones, but have created Zionism, a unique expression of the renewed aspiration to return to Zion."

This affinity to Zion — the Land of Israel, has turned the Jewish people from a religious sect into a nation. Zionism has refined the messianic conviction and freed it from the inherent miracle-oriented elements, while preserving its social, political and spiritual aims. In fact, it has remade the Jews into a political nation.

For the Jewish people in Central and Eastern Europe, Zionism was just one of several options. In the crucial years of the late 19th century, the impoverished masses could choose the Bund, a Jewish labor movement in Poland and Russia, which had adopted a revolutionary vision of salvation for all the peoples, including the Jews, almost obscuring the national myth. Jews in Central and Western Europe, on the other hand, could assimilate and almost completely disappear. While the Bund tended to support "red"

assimilation, the Jewish liberals strove to achieve middle-class assimilation. Both, however, failed dismally, disappointing their followers who were rejected because of their Jewishness and their nationality rather than because of their social visions, whether inspired by proletarian-revolutionary or liberal, middleclass motivation.

Zionism, on the other hand, seemed to provide an answer although not for immediate, existentialist problems, but at least for the near future rather than for some distant messianic days. Granted, to begin with, the Palestine solution seemed to be a disappointment as well. The first villages, established by Baron Rothschild and dependent on his generosity, had deteriorated because they depended on Arab labourers and watchmen. Moreover, as a result of the 1902 British proposal to establish a Jewish National Home in Uganda, the entire Zionist enterprise was threatened from its inception. However, the First and Second *Aliya* and their constructivism, were proof enough that Zionism was indeed viable. Socialist Zionism, which had crystallized in Eretz Israel to form a practical ideology, provided those who followed it with a creative and free outlet for their human and national aspirations. Socialist Zionism was, in fact, an ideological answer to the psychological needs of the young people who had grown into adulthood during the turbulent years of the World War I and the revolutions that followed it. This set of values is deeply rooted in man's eternal search for social justice. The power of socialist Zionism to enlist followers ensued from the integration of the social and the national ideologies, thus providing a twofold attraction for Jewish youth.

The four stormy decades in the late 19th and the early 20th century, were years of struggle between two messianic movements — the nationalist and the socialist. They also constituted the period in which Zionism crystallized, to form a national political movement. Its inception was in Russia, where a desperate struggle between tzarist oppression and underground, revolutionary movements was taking place at the time. Following the failure of the 1905 revolution, Russia was swept by numerous demands for

national autonomy. In the midst of this boiling cauldron, a trickle of Jewish youths left for Eretz Israel, forming the second wave of *Aliya* and carrying with them the vision of national and social revolution.

One of these young and enthusiastic pioneers was Yitzhak Tabenkin, who arrived in Eretz Israel on the eve of May 1, 1912. He was born in 1887, in Bobruysky, Bielorussia. When he was a small child, his family moved to Warsaw, which, at the time was a part of the Russian Empire. His mother was a Katzenelson, one of the leading families in Bobruysky, and his cousins were Yitzhak Katzenelson, the poet, and Berl Katzenelson, the future labor leader. Tabenkin's father was active in the revolutionary movement in Warsaw and his son was still very young when he was arrested and died of an illness in prison.

Tabenkin joined the circles of the "Arbeiter Zionisten," a Zionist labor organization. In May 1905, he was among the founders of Poalei Zion, Warsaw in December and of its Polish branch. His mother's home soon became the center of their activities.

As one of the leaders of Poalei Zion, he was arrested early in 1906 and was thus prevented from representing the Polish branch at the famous Poltava Convention. Later he was deeply involved in the Uganda affair and in the schism with the Territorialists and the Seymists, among whom there were most of the leaders of the Polish Poalei Zion. Between 1908 and 1912 Tabenkin was a university student in Vienna, Geneva, Bern and Cracow. At the same time he remained active in the World Organization of Poalei Zion.

On his way to Eretz Israel, he passed through Vienna, where he was given a farewell party by his comrades. Wishing him a safe journey, Borochoy, one of Poalei Zion's spiritual leaders, hoped that with Tabenkin's help, the Eretz Israeli branch would prosper. However on his arrival in the country, Tabenkin did not join the Poalei Zion, but preferred the "Unaligned", in whose ranks he found his cousin Berl Katzenelson. He rejoined the worldwide organization of Poalei Zion only in 1919, when Ahdut ha'Avoda, among whose founders he was, was established.

Tabenkin started out as an agricultural worker in Merhaviva, Kfar Uriah and later Kinneret. He supported Shlomo Lavi's idea of a big

kibbutz and perceived the kibbutz movement as a country-wide organization. He was a member of Gdud ha'Avoda and established Ein Harod and the Hakibbutz Hameuchad. Moreover, he was among the founders of the Histadrut and Mapai and a friend as well as a rival of Berl and Ben-Gurion. He contributed greatly to the establishment of an independent defence force, and was among the ideologists of the Palmach.

In his many years of activity, he integrated public work and ideological-political struggles with his work as a teacher and educator. His views and doctrine shaped the largest kibbutz movement, the Hakibbutz Hameuchad and generations of pioneers, in Eretz Israel and abroad, were inspired by his teaching. His national and social activism influenced the Histadrut, Ahdut ha'Avoda and later Mapai, but also contributed to the conflict with Ben-Gurion which finally, in the 1940s, led to the schism within Mapai and the Hakibbutz Hameuchad and in 1954 within Mapam.

Tabenkin did not perceive the importance of politics in the narrow sense of the word. He claimed that settlement activities, the construction of a new society and the establishment of a Jewish Defence Force, were no less political actions than aspiring to political power.

Yisrael Galili, one of the leaders of Ahdut ha'Avoda reported:

...Tabenkin did not limit his activities to the political area. He perceived the value of parliamentary struggles but did not attribute too much importance to them. He regarded the ideological, educational and constructive struggles as vital and was aware of the labor movement's contribution outside the area of parliamentary and governmental activities.

These activities were closer to his heart and he succeeded in maintaining his position among the leading circles in spite of his controversial ideas. Various historians count him among the "three who started a revolution". They were Berl Katzenelson, Ben-Gurion and Tabenkin. Moreover, they regard him as the most persistent in his attempt to realize his idea, namely that socialism and Zionism

should be integrated. He claimed that this was an historical imperative which made sense especially in the Eretz Israeli reality. He was among the fathers of constructive socialist Zionism. In fact, he taught it and at the same time realized his ideals and hence his impact on pioneering youth. However, this may have impaired his influence over the general public, especially after the communal settlement movement lost its birthright.

## II. THE MEANING OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

Constructivism saved Zionism as well as socialism from barrenness, from ineffective volubility and from ideological philosophical-hair-splitting. Constructivism united the labor movement which although small, was split into numerous ideological camps, some having been imported from the Jewish *shtetl*. It served as a binding factor because of its ideological pluralism, its preferring action to doctrinaire loyalties and its adherence to the historic mission of the working class and the pioneers. Constructivism was inspired by the utopian idea of planning a perfect future society even before the capitalist economy and society had been established. This seemed feasible in the Eretz Israel reality. Moreover, Constructivism provided a means of bypassing differences between Reform and Revolutionary Socialism, by ignoring precise definitions, thus uniting all the Zionists within the labor camp under the same flag. Berl, who belonged to the "Unaligned", defined his party as being a revolutionary constructivist one, "aspiring to radical change in our national and social way of life." Quoting Brenner, he added, "A people whose life has collapsed, must start its revolution with construction."

A comprehensive crystallization of the constructionist idea, was a result of the 1920 mission of the International Poalei Zion to Eretz Israel. Nahman Syrkin was among its members and the mission's report actually served as the platform for Ahdut ha-Avoda and was the most comprehensive vision of constructive socialist Zionism. Moreover, its principles were adopted by other constructivist trends in labor Zionism.



It was an attempt to transport utopian aspirations to the Eretz Israeli reality, its ultimate aim being to create an egalitarian Jewish national society from its inception. The program called for the settlement of a million immigrants in rural and urban cooperatives.

The program's social and value-oriented elements were: nationalization of all public property; the establishment of a cooperative society in all branches of the economy; democratic structure and Chartist control over the entire economy and society; abolishment of the capitalist free market mechanism; social equality and the abolishment of all class and national distinctions.

The program aspired to establish a united, harmonious and perfect society, in which man could be freely creative; a society which would encompass the whole working class and the entire people. Hevrat ha-Ovdim, the workers' economic enterprise, which was established at the 1923 Histadrut Conference, was supposed to breathe life into the program. However, although both platforms were similar, they were never materialized. The historical conditions and the economic and political possibilities of the 1920s, may not have been conducive, or the utopian aspirations may have been too far reaching.

### III. THE FOUNDING FATHERS AND TRENDS IN LABOR ZIONISM

The three ideological-political trends within labor Zionism, were united in their constructivist approach, but divided in their philosophical-ideological points of departure. Poalei Zion/Ahdut ha-Avoda and Hashomer ha-Tzair, were both close to the radical Marxist socialist camp. Hapoel ha-Tzair, on the other hand, rejected socialism and was directly or indirectly, via A.D. Gordon, influenced by Tolstoy's moralistic idealism. When, in 1930, Mapai was established through the union of Ahdut ha-Avoda and Hapoel ha-Tzair, the former's revolutionary fervor abated significantly and the new party gradually became less Marxist. Hapoel ha-Tzair, under the leadership of Arlosorov, had no difficulty integrating within the new party. Hashomer ha-Tzair, though, abandoned community anarchism *à la* Landauer and Buber and instead adopted Marxist orthodoxy while maintaining their unique Zionist pioneering constructivism.

Three Jewish intellectuals were pioneers in confronting the problems of Jewish nationalism and socialism. They were Moses Hess, Nahum Syrkin and Ber Borochov. While unaware of the Zionist concept, Hess dealt with Jewish nationalism and its relation to socialism. There is no doubt that though he was a pioneer in that respect, his entire preoccupation with the issue was merely theoretical. The other two, Borochov and Syrkin, were already active when political Zionism took its first steps and their theoretical philosophy left an immediate impact on Zionist theory and practice. In fact, they had a significant influence on formulating the Zionist-

socialist ideology and on its realization in the labor movement.

a. **Moses Hess** (1812-1875) was one of the first thinkers of 19th century Jewish nationalism and one of the first spokesmen of the socialist movement in Europe and especially in Germany. He influenced the young Marx and Engels and recognized the former's greatness even before he became famous. Hess had no direct impact on the fathers of Zionism. However, after he was rediscovered in the late 19th century, his ideas became deeply rooted within Zionist thought. According to Hess, the synthesis between socialism and nationalism was theoretically feasible. Moreover, he perceived a firm connection between the Jewish nationalist revival and the solution to their social problems. In his book *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862), he claimed that national freedom was a precondition to social emancipation and regarded Eretz Israel as imperative to Jewish nationalism. His statement that a common homeland was of primary importance to a regular working relationship, served as the foundation of Borochoy's theory formulated 40 years later. Syrkin's constructivism also owed several of its ideas to Hess. In an article "On the Settlement of the Holy Land," published in 1867, he claimed that the Jewish concept of social justice required that every individual become productive. Moreover, solutions to economic and national issues would be found only in Eretz Israel.

His plan for a Jewish socialist community included the following elements: The settlers would form cooperative societies according to patterns of social solidarity; the establishment of these communities which were not based on private property, would call for a social transformation and mutual aid and social security would prevail in these communities.

Nonetheless, in his Zionist dream Hess visualized Jewish immigration to Eretz Israel, only from those countries where they were persecuted. He discovered the Hasidic movement and regarded its social framework as a possible foundation for socialism in Eretz Israel. (Later, Buber would develop a similar attitude to Hashomer ha-Tza'ir and the Hassidic movement.) Although Hess' concept of Zionism did not enjoy recognition in his lifetime, he must be acknowledged as the first Jewish nationalist and socialist.

b. **Nahman Syrkin** (1868-1927) was born in Russia and studied in Germany. After emigrating to the USA he became one of the leaders of Poalei Zion and one of the first Zionist-socialist thinkers. About 25 years after Hess had published his *Rome and Jerusalem*, Syrkin, then only 20 years old, aspired to "integrate the two ideals, namely Jewish nationalism and socialism into a single national humanistic one."

Unlike Hess, who belonged to Marx' generation and had adopted his ideas, or Borochoy, who introduced Marxism into Zionist thought, Syrkin's socialism was of an idealistic nature. His socialist thought was neither based on Marxism nor on utopia, but on the prophets and he even pointed out the socialist elements in Bible. While visiting the country with the worldwide Poalei Zion mission, he spoke at a workers' meeting in Jaffa and presented the plan for constructing a socialist society as a continuation of Jewish morals and prophecies.

In 1898 Syrkin published an essay, *On The Jewish Problem and a Socialist Jewish State*, outlining his doctrine which had three cardinal elements: (1) Zionism and socialism should be integrated in order to complement one another, thus becoming the ideal of the entire Jewish people; (2) the Jewish State should be a socialist one; a socialist Jewish Republic is the rational solution to the Jewish problem; and (3) free nationalism supports internationalism by creating an international union of free peoples.

At the 1919 Conference of Poalei Zion in Stockholm, Syrkin gave a lecture on "Constructive Socialism," in which he presented his program of establishing communitarian settlements in Eretz Israel and building a socialist economy and society from its inception. The conference decided to send a mission to Palestine and Syrkin's program, together with the facts they observed in the country, served as the foundation for its report.

c. **Ber Borochoy** (1881-1917) was a Zionist-socialist theorist and one of the founders of Poalei Zion. Earlier he had been active in the Social Democratic party in Russia.

While Syrkin had introduced constructivism into socialist Zionism, Borochoy also added Marxism. However, he did not

adopt the entire Marxist doctrine but examined it, criticizing faults especially in relation to its attitude to nationalism and Judaism. He adopted Marx's historic and economic doctrine and introduced the class struggle into Zionist theories.

What attracted the young Borochoy to Marxism? In his book on *Marxist Philosophy*, C. Tailor finds evidence of the relation between Marxism and the messianic movements that proclaimed the coming millennium in Europe. Perhaps this religious element which Tailor discovered in Marx, the converted Jew, had also attracted Borochoy. Even though he was not a religious person, he had grown up within the Jewish *shtetl* and absorbed its religious atmosphere and messianic dreams. Possibly, though, both Marx' and Borochoy's messianic aspirations were based on Hegel's intellectual Protestant approach with which both were familiar.

Borochoy presented his innovative ideas on Marxist attitudes to nationalism, in his essay, "The Class Struggle and the National Problem" (1905). It was one of the first attempts to examine the issue from a Marxist point of view. Borochoy's second essay, "Our Platform" (1906), laid the foundations of Marxist Zionism. Both were published before Otto Bauer's 1907 essay on nationalism and Social Democracy.

Borochoy's cardinal assumption was that capitalism ruled the developed countries and their national economies and that this would be the case in Palestine as well. He examined this prognosis in two essays, and both were to become cornerstones of the radical socialist Zionist doctrine. His concept consisted of three main parts: (1) a Marxist approach to the national issue and a common denominator in the struggle for national and social independence; (2) an analysis of the Jewish proletarian's hardships and of the process which would make Jewish immigration to Eretz Israel an imperative; and (3) the part to be played by the class struggle in realizing Zionism. The class struggle would lead to territorial independence in Palestine and thus be a stage in the coming revolution. The revolution itself would lead to a dictatorship of the proletariat and provide a comprehensive solution to the Jewish problem.

Predestination ensuing from the Diaspora reality, would lead to an ingathering of the Jewish people in Palestine. In fact, Zionism was an historical imperative. Borochoy's prognosis was aimed against the idealistic, utopian and romantic attitudes prevalent among Zionists and their opponents. As a Marxist, Borochoy assumed that, in regard to Zionism as well, "people's actions were on par with their targets only in case those were adapted to a certain predestined social process." Although admitting to predestination and historical imperatives, Borochoy rejected passivity as well as fatalism and attributed a leading role to the organized proletariat.

In "Our Platform" he divided the Zionist tasks among the various classes. "The middle classes take charge of production and the raising of capital, while the working classes undertake the social struggle for democratization." In fact, Borochoy allotted the task of constructing the national economy to the middle classes, while the working classes would introduce socialism only after a capitalist economy had, already, been established. This concept was to lead to a relentless controversy between Borochoy and his followers and the central trend of Zionist socialism, which included Tabenkin, whose approach was a constructivist one.

#### IV. THE FATHERS OF SOCIALIST ZIONISM AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON TABENKIN

It would be difficult to determine which of the two thinkers, Syrkin or Borochoy, had influenced Tabenkin more. He claimed that Borochoy established the socialist foundations of Zionism and that Syrkin was the first Zionist socialist.

From Borochoy he borrowed a few cornerstones which he integrated into his doctrine: a sociological analysis of the Jews in the Diaspora and the conviction that they had to acquire basic jobs and professions in order to establish to a normal economic and national structure. He also adopted Borochoy's opinion that each class had a different attitude to nationalism and that the working class must realize Zionism via its own class struggle. Moreover, he adopted Borochoy's analysis of the historical imperative of Zionism and especially of socialist Zionism.

Syrkin as well as Borochoy perceived the anomaly of the Jewish people in the Diaspora and predicted the cataclysm that would follow the destruction of capitalism. Syrkin predicted the catastrophe before anyone else and had actually foreseen the "final solution." Tabenkin adopted Syrkin's feeling of an impending catastrophe which was reinforced by the Holocaust. While Borochoy had provided a Marxist analysis of the crisis, Syrkin had perceived the Jewish condition as a spiritual phenomenon rather than an economic one.

Tabenkin meticulously noted the differences between the two and emphasised Syrkin's claim that Eretz Israel should be settled via the

constructive effort of immigrants who would arrive in order to work at the basic professions and thus establish a normal economic structure in contrast to the traditional occupations of the Jews in the Diaspora. He also referred to their different attitudes towards the class struggle. While Borochoy perceived the working class as the leading social force, Syrkin wanted the entire Jewish people to be involved in the struggle. In fact, he regarded them all as "potential immigrants." During the Uganda Affair, a schism opened up between Tabenkin and Syrkin who supported the British proposal for a Jewish homeland in Uganda. However when the latter returned to the Zionist fold and came to Palestine as a member of the Poalei Zion commission, the schism was patched up and Tabenkin participated as one of the local representatives of the party.

Tabenkin also disagreed with Borochoy's prognostic approach to Palestine. He rejected the latter's analysis according to which the Jewish people were used to moving from one place to another whenever they were faced with external pressures, but he predicted that eventually they would settle for Palestine as their most convenient option. Tabenkin, on the other hand, claimed that the cause was not an external one but that the Jewish people were motivated by permanent internal incentives which had been a part of their heritage for generations. Accordingly, the Palestine solution was a matter of principle. Tabenkin also differed with Borochoy on his rejection of constructivism; yet it would seem that had the latter lived longer, they might eventually have seen eye to eye. In fact, Tabenkin pointed out that in the last years of his life, Borochoy changed his attitude to the constructivist pioneering effort in Eretz Israel which had started without waiting for the revolution. According to Tabenkin, "He was as brave as Marx and dared to admit that he was not a 'Borochovist'."

In an effort to settle the controversy between Syrkin's constructive socialism and Borochoy's revolutionary Marxist approach, Tabenkin, through his doctrine and actions, integrated the philosophy of the two founders of Socialist Zionism. In the same manner he attempted to settle the differences between Zionism and socialism.

## V. CARDINAL POINTS IN TABENKIN'S SOCIALIST-ZIONIST VIEWS

Tabenkin never attempted to write a comprehensive outline of his doctrine, or to formulate a platform. However, he summed up his ideas in several comprehensive lectures. He was not a political leader, used to the decision making process, but he was an influential spiritual teacher, who left a strong impact on several generations of youth in Eastern Europe and in Israel.

His concept of Zionist-socialist constructivism followed a tortuous yet consistent line, leading from the founding conference of Abduh ha-Avoda (1919), to the establishment of the Histadrut and Hevrat ha-Ovdim (1920; 1923) and up to his final years, when he criticized the labor movement's focus on political struggle at the expense of constructive activities. He also advocated constructive settlement activities rather than taking political steps in order to realize his concept of the "larger Israel."

He was always adamant that deeds came first, that ideas should be realized in practice according to concrete historical conditions, rather than on meticulously adhering to his ideology. In 1940 he complained that, "ideas without realization, without practice, were a disease of Zionism and of socialism as well."

The Zionist socialist constructivist ideology was technically conceived via an ongoing dialogue between two levels: the philosophical-ideological one and the practical-realistic one. This compulsion to adapt to the Eretz Israeli situation in practice, made the ideology unique and powerful and prevented its theoretical stagnation. Zionism socialist as perceived and expressed by Tabenkin, is a comprehensive new entity and cannot be divided into

separate elements. Zionism and socialism have merged each being unable to exist without the other. Their integration has not merely been accomplished on a theoretical level, but on the practical one, as dictated by the historical imperative.

#### A. CONSTRUCTIVISM AND SETTLEMENT POLICY

One of the cardinal elements of Tabenkin's constructivism concerned individual and public realization. He consistently followed the ideology of Ahdut ha-Avoda, fighting for the realization of its political program during the many tasks he took upon himself over the years. However, he adamantly adhered to his kibbutz way of life, first as a member of Gdud ha-Avoda, later in Ein Harod and finally in the Kibbutz Hameuchad which was the legitimate continuation of both.

Even before Ahdut ha-Avoda had formulated its platform, or the Poalei Zion its program for the establishment of a socialist Jewish state, Tabenkin had already outlined a plan for the Eretz Israel labor movement. In the summer of 1918 he was elected to the "Labor Fund" committee in the Galilee. In a letter to the committee, he drew up a plan which far exceeded the targets of mutual aid and improved working conditions prevalent at the time. His letter seems to have included the first hint of constructive socialism in the Eretz Israeli labor movement.

The Labor movement is mainly a constructive movement; in future it should include the whole Yishuv and the entire society in the country. Any obstacles must be overcome through individual realization and self-education because they are mainly internal. Our target is to create a society of Jewish workers. This labor society must be freely based on Jewish work without any form of exploitation and will thus express the class struggle. Our cardinal problem is how to settle the working

people who have no private means and this is where the "Labor Fund" comes in. The workers have to realize the aims of the entire people, but in order to do it in their own way, they must ensure their independence and the freedom of their movement. The general public realizes the importance of work and therefore we can achieve a situation in which the profits are left in the workers' hands and will not be taken from them as in a capitalist society. Moreover, even though the profits belong to the workers, they should serve the entire movement so that it may provide for future workers. This will be done with the help of the "Labor Fund."

These ideas would later be integrated in the Ahdut ha-Avoda platform. Speaking at the founding conference of the party, Tabenkin presented his profoundly socialist aims: the abolishment of private property, national ownership of the land, a change of the social structure. However, unlike the orthodox socialist doctrine, he does not propose to achieve this via revolutionary acts of destruction, but through constructivist means.

In an address at the worldwide Poalei Zion Mission, he emphasized the national aims, claiming that a socialist approach was imperative to the realization of Zionism.

Our primary and basic assumption concerns the abolishment of private property. If Eretz Israel is built with private capital only, it will not be Jewish... There are two cardinal proposals on the agenda, *national land and national capital*. Our socialist struggle within the Zionist movement means a different approach to Zionism and not its rejection because Zionism is our life.

Tabenkin's constructivism combined national Renaissance and socialist revolution; settling the country with the creation of a new society according to socialist visions. However, constructivism does not merely mean the creation of a society, an economy or a country,

all of which are macro considerations; it also applies to the individual, to the pioneers who have to realize the revolution on a personal level. The *halutz* has to conquer work and at the same time conquer himself; it transpires that the transition to a life of work is a moral and cultural process. Tabenkin conceives the *halutz* as a person who determines his own fate, while realizing the importance of his mission, who integrates voluntarism with the historical imperative. He was neither a determinist nor a fatalist and always believed in the historical process which would eventually lead to the Zionist and human revolution.

Two value-oriented elements of constructivism were emphasised by Tabenkin: the principle of working without exploiting others and building the country by settling the land. He used to ask, "What is a holy life? a life of work." In one of his lectures, he even amended the classical Marxist definition of the proletariat as a class without any means of production and claimed that its most important aspect was its living by work. He may have intended to emphasise the importance of work and at the same time prevent settlers, such as the kibbutzim who owned means of production, to be excluded from the Proletariat. Zionism perceived work as a value *per se*, instead of a barter item and Tabenkin was quick to point this out.

The concept of settlement was of cardinal importance to Tabenkin's doctrine. He perceived it as the melting pot in which Zionist socialism would be forged into an indivisible chemical element; in which the Jewish social and national maximalism would merge with defence, settlement and pioneering activism.

I am certain that our kibbutz settlements are of international and not merely Jewish value and that they should be examined from that perspective. Our settlements have turned out to be the heart of the labor movement, even though this did not occur consciously; after all, our primary aim was to establish a labor movement rather than a settlement movement.

The concept of settlement served as a kind of antithesis to the

concept of Diaspora, the same as the territorial concept to the ex-territorial, the concept of colonization to emigration. In that respect, the Eretz Israeli labor movement was unique among all the other labor movements in the world.

There were five elements in Tabenkin's approach to the settlement concept: a direct involvement in the environment; the establishment of new settlements; maximum development and growth; the fostering of a defence force; and the creation of a new Jew.

The first element was the most complex and comprehensive one. Settlement activities were conceived as any kind of direct and indirect involvement in the environment, not merely through agriculture, but via all the actions which might create new sources of income. In short, nature and its treasures were conceived as providers of new economic values. The importance of the settlement concept was emphasised as being contradictory to colonialism and its exploitative economy; it was presented as an antithesis to the traditional Diaspora professions. Settlements were to create a new working class in all the economic branches. However, it was not enough to create new sources of income; settlements were to be established all over the country in order to disperse the population and open up new areas for the people. In Tabenkin's words, "Opening up Zionist territories through settlements." Each and every settlement would aim to expand by absorbing as many new immigrants as possible. This also dictated their economic structure, namely numerous intensive branches and the integration of agriculture and industry, crafts and service jobs in order to develop all the natural sources in the area.

The next element, the fourth, ensued from the imperative of settling everywhere, including remote places and along the borders. This created a need for self defence and the fostering of a Jewish defence force, eventually leading to the creation of the Palmach and its bases in kibbutzim.

Finally, the creation of a new Jew, who would identify with the settlement enterprise. After all, the harsh conditions in a land that had been neglected for generations and which did not have any natural resources, called for an enormous human effort. Only a

collective effort and complete identification would create a person who was close to his environment, thus causing him, as Tabenkin noted, to put down roots in the earth.

A person grows attached to his creation, to nature, to its historical and archeological geography. All these together, will combine to create a new Jew, a person whose nurturing sources had been clogged up throughout the ages, but which having opened up, will give a new taste to his life and enhance it with new national and social values and with a new feeling for human creativity.

According to Tabenkin, settlement was not merely a means, but also the target and a value *per se*. Eventually, the debate on the value of settlement and the superiority of the constructive effort in Eretz Israel, would lead to the first schism in Gdud ha-Avoda. The majority, which regarded itself as a country-wide commune of labourers, rejected the importance of the settlement concept as perceived by Tabenkin and the minority. The former preferred a consumer commune with a common purse, while the latter planned to use all available funds for the development of Ein Harod. The Gdud leadership, however, demanded its right to decide what was to be done with the funds, which they thought should be handed over to the common purse. This led to a confrontation between two approaches to the settlement issue, which Tabenkin described years later.

The majority in the Gdud perceived communism as their cardinal value from a social, organizational and pioneering aspect... They regarded settlements as merely another chance to get work... They did not perceive the importance of building an economy compared to the Gdud's other tasks. According to the majority, the settlement was unimportant compared to the commune and its consumer needs.

In other words, it was a controversy about the imperative of constructive settlement activities as opposed to the importance of achieving collective consumerism.

## B. VOLUNTARY PIONEERING

According to Tabenkin, everyone who voluntarily accepted the hardships of pioneering was personally realizing Zionism. He did not perceive it as a predetermined historical imperative claiming "that an idea elevated the individual to higher spheres and moulded him into a pioneer, an avantgarde." Pioneering was a person's conscious choice, rather than an objective, historically predetermined factor (as perceived by Marx). The individual's decision to volunteer emerged within the Zionist movement and was an organic part of it. In fact, by introducing an element of personal commitment, the Zionist movement was saved from stagnation.

Voluntary pioneering means making a conscious choice within a certain historical situation; accordingly, the individual consciously adopts these historical factors and identifies with them. Although Tabenkin believed in the existence of historical imperatives, his approach was not deterministic. He believed that the historical imperative was dictated by reality, nevertheless, man's free will played an important part. The individual's voluntary commitment to an historical process was a condition to its success. Society and each individual should decide which of several options was viable. "History moves on, but we have to be the incentive..."

Voluntarism is an antithesis to fatalism and, to some extent, also a corrective to determinism. Tabenkin clearly distinguished between an historical imperative and fatalism and warned against a situation where the individual's affinity, his values and free will were actually non-existent. Fatalism as well as determinism tended to release the person from responsibility to his activities. Hence, the importance of individual commitment and voluntary pioneering. Tabenkin rejected the concept of Zionist predetermination relying on conscious and voluntary commitment and on enterprising individuality.



### C. A UNITY OF EQUAL VALUES RATHER THAN INSTRUMENTAL RELATIONS

Tabenkin perceived the unity of Socialist Zionism and repeatedly stated that for the Jewish worker there existed no "non-socialist Zionism nor non-Zionist socialism." This left no room for an instrumentalist attitude to either, in which one would serve the other according to a certain hierarchical order.

Unlike some of his comrades in Gdud ha-Avoda of the 1920s, or several Mapam leaders in the early 1950s, Tabenkin never gave up his Zionist conviction, nor his socialist ones, as did some of the Histadrut and Mapai leaders in later years. The first event had occurred when a group of about eighty Gdud members and their leader, Menachem Elkind, left Eretz Israel for the USSR where they hoped to establish a commune. Two factors led to their decision, they had despaired of their vision to turn the entire country into a comprehensive commune and on the other hand, ceased to believe in the Zionist solution to the Jewish problem. Moreover, they were captivated by the Russian revolution and naively believed that the Jewish national problem might be solved there together with those of other nations.

Two and a half decades later, during the early 1950s, a similarly naive approach, (or perhaps a mistaken assessment that the USSR might also take over the Middle East) would prompt a leftist Zionist group under Moshe Sneh, to leave Mapam. They joined the Israeli Communist Party which had rejected Zionism altogether. Another leftist group within Mapam crystallized around Marxist-Leninist ideologies and slogans and developed a strong affinity to the USSR without actually having rejected Zionism. This schism within Mapam badly affected several kibbutzim, just as had been the case during the schism in Gdud ha-Avoda. Sneh and his followers were lucky not to have left the country for the USSR and could, at a later stage, admit their mistake and return to the Zionist fold. Elkind and most of his followers, however, vanished during the Stalinist rule of terror.

In a process which started at the Fifth Conference of Poalei Zion

(1908), when the paragraph calling for class struggle was deleted from the party's platform, most of Tabenkin's comrades in the Ahdut ha-Avoda leadership and later in Mapai, abandoned their radical-socialist positions. By the mid 1920s, the majority of Ahdut ha-Avoda had rejected the constructivist Zionist-socialist platform which had crystallized between 1919-1922, during the establishment of Ahdut ha-Avoda, the visit of the Poalei Zion Mission and at the First and Second Conferences of the Histadrut. Many of the Labour leaders continued to adhere to constructivist Zionism, but the practical realization of socialism was to be postponed. At the same time, they also gave up their Zionist constructivist radicalism, namely, the concept that settlement was of the utmost importance to the national and social enterprise. For Tabenkin, on the other hand, settlement was a cardinal consideration and he regarded it as the future alternative way of life.

In those years Ben-Gurion began to emphasize political actions and Berl Katzenelson spoke of establishing a strong political party demanding a synthesis between Zionism and socialism rather than the national element. An evergrowing pragmatism followed the crisis of the *Fourth Aliya*, when many left the country because of unemployment. This was expressed at the Fifth Conference of Ahdut ha-Avoda (1926). A new approach to the social revolution perceived the urban middle classes as replacing the communes; hence the focus should be on the organizational and professional struggle of urban workers. Accordingly, the prevalent situation required a re-examination of principles as well as of policies. In fact, a new ideological reorientation was needed, one which rejected the former Constructivist socialist radicalism and instead adopted a Zionist pioneering radicalism.

In the early 1930s, Ben-Gurion published his book *From A Class to A People*, which expressed his transition from a class-oriented approach, to a popular-Zionist one and in which he proposed a national leadership instead of the present labor leadership. The ensuing process strengthened Mapai and reached its climax with the establishment of the State of Israel, when the pioneering approach was replaced by the *etatist* approach. As a result, Tabenkin and

other kibbutz leaders were relegated to the political sidelines.

Tabenkin scorned the instrumental approach to both Zionism and socialism and did not believe that one was meant to serve the other in any form. Accordingly, national and socialist aims were identical and hence his comprehensive approach to socialist Zionism. Moreover, this led to his rejecting the part of Borochoy's doctrine which relegated the task of building the country to the middle classes; only after this was accomplished, the labor class would start a socialist revolution. Tabenkin, therefore, also rejected Ha-shomer ha-Tzair's "doctrine of stages," which in later years, both they and Borochoy abandoned.

Alas, Tabenkin was not very consistent in his approach to instrumentalism. He believed that the affinity to international socialism was justified as long as it served the construction of a socialist Eretz Israel. On the other hand, during discussions on the Jewish National Fund and on land purchasing, Tabenkin claimed that the former should be instrumental in realizing the socialist principle of a common ownership of national resources. It transpires that his attitude to instrumentalism might change according to the circumstances: sometimes socialism served Zionist aims and vice versa.

#### D. APPROACH TO ZIONISM

Tabenkin perceived two approaches to Zionism: the socialist Zionist, settlement-oriented approach and the capitalist, immigration-oriented one, which was based on predestination. The painful debate between the settlement approach protagonists, the socialist Zionists, and other Zionist trends and doctrines, had started in the first decade of the century within Poalei Zion, following the Uganda affair. Tabenkin represented the concept of "Principle Palestinism" as opposed to Borochoy's concept of "Practical," and later, "Prognostic Palestinism", which he had outlined in his articles "On the Territorial Aspects of Zion" and "Our Platform." According to Tabenkin, the Uganda controversy

also led to "territorial deviances" with Syrkin, one of his three mentors; (the other two were Borochoy and Kaplanski). It transpires that even as a young man he already disagreed with his mentors on the Palestine issue; in later years he would explain why:

We say that the Jewish people opted for Eretz Israel because they perceive it to be their historical homeland. This is not just a perception, but a historical fact. Everything is related to Eretz Israel, the Jewish psyche, their culture, their creativity, hence the land is inseparable from the Jewish national movement.

Tabenkin's "Principle Palestinism" was connected with Syrkin's constructivism, which perceived the Zionist worker as a constructive force and not merely a liberating one. Tabenkin's refusal to regard Palestine as just an objective imperative which, according to Borochoy's "Prognostic Palestinism," the Jewish people had reached by predestination, was the result of his conviction that free will should be integrated within the historical imperative. Hence his adherence to the constructivist socialist Zionism which would reach its apex by establishing communal settlements, the kibbutzim. He perceived settlement as a way to elevate the human being to higher levels, as "a way to conquer nature for the benefit of man... because every human development tends to lead to an independence from external factors, by conquering nature."

He also perceived two contradictory trends within socialist Zionism, which were constantly fighting with one another. They had the same target and the same point of departure, however their daily perspectives differed. According to Tabenkin, the first represented the day to day political negotiations and their practical aspects, which tended to undermine the image and the power of the labor movement because its political force was merely temporary and transient. The other was a historical trend, "which relied on a historical analysis of power, and on the social analysis of rising constructive forces, which never yield, even in face of failure, because they depend on historical forces and factors." The first was

the central trend led by Ben-Gurion and the second was Tabenkin's and his followers.

Tabenkin's Zionist activism was a part of his concept of human progress which required constant activity. He was radical in his approach to Zionism as well as to socialism and throughout his life he preached an active constructivist socialist Zionism.

#### E. NATIONALITY, DIASPORA AND ZIONISM

Tabenkin did not give much thought to the theoretical differences between a people and a nation. He perceived both as merely terms which had been coined for the same phenomenon during different historical periods. Following Borochoy, he assumed that national consciousness developed in the same way as class consciousness and that, therefore, the terms *people* and *nation* expressed different stages of conscious development.

He regarded the nation as a natural, objective form of existence and claimed that nobody could exist outside its framework. "The nation is a unique phenomenon of human culture. The content of this culture is always universal, but its external aspects are always national." Moreover, he rejected the approach which perceived nationality as a typically capitalist phenomena and said, "as early as 1903, we, the Zionist workers, realized that man's affinity to his nation was on a par with his affinity to the human race."

One of the decisive factors in the creation of a nation is its existence on a common territory: "Nomadic tribes become a nation only as a result of settling down... They turn into a nation only as a result of their common territory and not because of their race, their religion or their political regime; settlement is the mother of nationhood."

Tabenkin envisioned the following process: "Life in a single country will lead to the creation of a nation, at a certain stage in its development this nation will establish a state, however, at an even higher level it may destroy this state in order to create a communist society."

According to Tabenkin, this communist society (which would abolish private property and government) would replace the state. He often envisioned a treaty of communist nations within an International. However, he violently rejected all cosmopolitan notions and went so far as to claim that socialism was of no value to humanity if it led to the abolishment of nationality. He also rejected all approaches which associated nationality with race and, moreover, disagreed with Marx's and Lenin's definitions of nationality. Naturally, these attitudes explain his utter rejection of chauvinism which led to his supporting the concept of an international of equal nations. In fact, as soon as fascism appeared, he averred his abhorrence of this extreme form of chauvinism.

According to Tabenkin, fascism was the darkest form of reaction. "It is the worst and most desperate attempt of the ruling classes to suppress human progress." In 1934, during the Viennese workers' uprising against Dollfuss, he pointed out the specific danger of fascism to the Jewish People. "The fascist reaction carries with it seeds of destruction for us Jews: contempt, isolation, boycott and finally, murder and genocide."

While addressing educators in a famous lecture during World War II, he spoke up against narrow-minded chauvinism and asked them to focus their educational efforts on Jewish and human values, according to the international socialist ideal "an integral part of which is Zionism," and on brotherhood between nations as well as on an active anti militarism.

At a seminar in Na'an, on the eve of the 1948 War of Independence, he devoted a significant part of his lecture to the uniqueness of Jewish nationality, which he termed "National individuality." It seemed as though he was trying to provide his listeners with ammunition in preparation for the difficult days ahead which would, eventually, lead to the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz Israel.

Eretz Israel is a must for the Jewish people and their relations to the country are not irrational.

They are the result of two inter-related factors, the first, that it is our homeland in which we acquired

our national individuality during a settlement process that lasted for about 1500 years. The second, that we took this individuality with us into the Diaspora and as long as it endured, our relations to the country, to Hebrew and to our religion endured as well. It is our conviction that Eretz Israel is our homeland and that no other country can replace it.

Tabenkin perceived the Diaspora as an antithesis to Eretz Israel. Although Zionism was nurtured by the Diaspora, it was not a continuation, but should be battled with. He absolutely rejected its existence on principle and claimed that its deterioration would reinforce the adherence to Eretz Israel.

"What is the Diaspora?" he asked rhetorically at a Zionist Congress in Jerusalem (1957):

And replied, "The Diaspora is a minority's dependence on the majority, it is an absolute and concrete dependence on somebody else and therefore Zionism is the ultimate rejection of the Diaspora. Exile and Diaspora are not geographical terms, but rather economic and cultural states of experience; Zionism is a pessimistic approach to the Jewish existence abroad, but optimistic because of its belief in establishing a Jewish existence in Israel.

Even before the Holocaust, Tabenkin claimed that Jewish life in the Diaspora was on the decline as a result of the collapse of capitalism. After World War II he even went further:

"The collapse of capitalism and the disappearance of the Diaspora, are both signs of our time... They are interrelated because during the war the universal human culture collapsed, and even if European stability is reestablished, this will not save the Diaspora... A Jewish person has no place in the Diaspora - every Individual is dependent on the fate of the entire Jewish people. The Jewish people have no existence in the Diaspora, hence the individual

has none... this will continue for as long as the situation does not change, as long as the people are dependent of others."

Analyzing the decline of the Diaspora before the Holocaust, he did not merely rely on catastrophic predictions, but followed Borochov, and analyzed the sociological and economic positions of the Jews in the emerging capitalist economy of Europe. He claimed that the functional task of the Jews in their countries of residence, was on the decline, as "the rate of events is unpredictable... but it is not a matter of hundreds of years..."

According to Tabenkin, the Jewish people were unique because they were a universal nation, hence their problem was of concern to the entire world. It was an international problem and concerned even the communist countries which had, so far, ignored the very existence of a Jewish nation, a fact that Tabenkin regarded as their Achilles heel.

There was only one solution, namely, Zionism and the ingathering of the people in Palestine. Zionism was "a revolt against the Jewish people's minority complex" and also "a doctrine of the Jewish catastrophe as well as a doctrine of the Jewish revolution."

However, in relation to the content of Zionism, opinions differed not just among the General Zionists, but also in the Labor camp.

Addressing the Fourth Conference of Ahdut ha-Avoda (May, 1924) Ben-Gurion said, "If there is any realistic content in Zionism, it is the idea of statehood. Zionism means the aspiration to a Jewish state, to a country, to a government." Tabenkin, on the other hand, asked, "How does the Zionist idea get started everytime and everywhere? In a demand for land and free immigration, in a request for freedom and for assistance in settlement."

According to Tabenkin, the cardinal task of Zionism was its contribution to the Jewish people's social revolution. The debate within the Eretz Israeli labor movement rotated around the issue of society versus statehood and around the issue of constructing a people versus the construction of a government. This was the focus of the controversy between Ben-Gurion and Tabenkin and the key

to understanding why their ways split even though both set out from the same point of departure.

Tabenkin and his followers were unique in their approach to the Zionist revolution whose cardinal achievement, according to their doctrine, was to build a new society rather than establish an independent political rule. This revolution was not merely a matter of immigrating to Eretz Israel; although this in itself was of great importance, it was not enough. In order to complete the revolution a transition leading to a life of work and of settlement was imperative. In 1931 he declared, "Our *raison d'être* is Zionism, namely, the settlement of a multitude of workers, and I mean settlement in the broadest sense of the word." He also regarded Zionism as a progressive factor in Palestine, a country that was still feudal. He warned against the danger of immigrating to Palestine without undergoing a socio-revolutionary process. According to Tabenkin, not just a geographical change was needed, but a social one as well.

The revolutionary aspect of Zionism was not just an objective need, required by the Jewish people, by the country and by those who lived there: It was part of a universal movement which swept the entire world at the beginning of the century. In fact it was part of an historical process.

The perception of Zionism as a social, revolutionary movement, besides its aspiration to national independence, together with Syrkin's approach to constructive socialism, led Tabenkin into an uncompromising struggle over the principle of publicly financing the Zionist enterprise and of public ownership of the land. In 1922, during the Third Conference of Ahdut ha-Avoda, he disagreed with Ben-Gurion, who had changed his attitude to the national task of private capital. Tabenkin adhered to his concept that public financing was of vital importance and claimed that it was essential to the establishment of the country's economic foundations.

A few years later, the Fourth *Aliya* crisis was to prove him right when it transpired that mainly the private sector had been affected by the recession. Eventually, this would reinforce the capitalist system in Eretz Israel, a process which Tabenkin had predicted. Addressing the Poalei Zion Mission in 1920, in which he represented

the local branch of Ahdut ha-Avoda, he stated his opinion that if Eretz Israel was built with private capital, it would not be a Jewish country at all, mainly because the profit incentive would lead to the employment of Arab instead of Jewish labor. Forty years later, he repeated his warning that a capitalist economy was adverse to Zionist interests.

When World War II broke out, he declared that in face of the events awaiting the Jewish people, "The viability and destiny of Zionism as the one and only option of salvation, was indisputable." However, "even at this awful moment, the fact has not yet filtered into people's consciousness... There is no alternative, we have to rely on ourselves."

These words were to become the slogan of both Tabenkin and Berl and the former adhered to them till the end of his life.

## VI. IN FACE OF AN EMERGING ARAB NATIONALISM

Ever since his arrival in Palestine, Tabenkin was aware of the fact that there were no ideal solutions to the Arab problem. Several proposals, such as Syrkin's that the Arab *Fellah* assimilate within the Jewish working class, or that of Hashomer ha-Tzair to establish a bi-national state, or Prof. Magnes' who founded Brith Shalom, were rejected by him. In fact, he clearly predicted the violent confrontation that would ensue and was rather pessimistic in his outlook. Although he was somewhat shortsighted in refusing to acknowledge the development of an Arab-Palestinian nationalism, he was, nevertheless, realistic enough to predict the almost unavoidable conflict ahead. Adhering to the Marxist analysis, Tabenkin expected a class oriented conflict within the feudal Arab society, eventually leading to the crystallization of an Arab working class, one which would regard the Jewish working class as allies. Alas, his prognosis was proved to be wrong and the conflict between the two peoples was stronger than their internal social class struggle.

There is no written evidence of Tabenkin's outlook on the Arab issue during his early years in the country. He first appeared in *Kuntress*, a periodical published in June, 1919 and in the notes of the Poalei Zion Mission, as well as in a debate on the defence of Tel Hai, a northern settlement which was under attack. On those occasions as well as in an address delivered at the founding Conference of the Histadrut in 1920, and during the big debate on Arab nationalism at the Abdut ha-Avoda conference in Ein Harod in 1924, he expressed

the basic opinions to which he would adhere throughout his life. These may be summed up as follows: the labor movement has a unique approach to the Arab problem; as soon as the Yishuv is strong enough, a solution will be found; there is no contradiction between the demands of Zionism and the Arab population's needs; the Jewish people's right to settle freely throughout Palestine, conforms to socialist principles; expected developments within the Arab society will eventually lead to a class differentiation and hence to solidarity between the workers of both peoples. However, until that day arrives, the Zionist enterprise is threatened and it is, therefore, imperative that an independent defence force be established. In his address to the Poalei Zion Commission, he spelled out the situation very clearly:

One of the fundamental problems in this country, are our relations with the Arabs. It would be impossible to say that Jewish circles share a single point of view on the issue, but evidently the working class must take a stand. So far, we have played a very minor role because we are still a feeble minority. As soon as we become stronger the problem will reach a solution.

Our everyday reality is very complicated — we are surrounded by a hostile environment — political considerations have forced our Zionist leaders to foster illusions that we will be able to settle the country peacefully. Yet our enterprise has merely increased their sense of jealousy and hate. Land acquisition has not contributed to a feeling of trust, even though it was bought mainly from rich *effendies* (Arab landowners). However, land speculation has been a part of the deal as the latter are evidently after more wealth and completely disregard the plight of the poor *fellahin* and of their vassals — this policy harms mainly the *fellahin* who after their own land was sold are not much better

off. Although we have come in peace, the local population does not welcome us, in fact, they live by the sword and our defence capability is a must. Many among us fear that we are depriving the Arabs. But they have many countries and large ones besides Eretz Israel and this country is of little significance to their future. If the Arabs have imperial aspirations, you, as socialists, should not encourage them. Weitzman believes that via political negotiations one can reach an agreement with them, if we recognize their rule in Syria and they will recognize our rule in Palestine. I think this is an illusion. Others believe that there is no alternative but war. Yet we are not strong enough; only our settling the country and the fortification of our settlements will lead to a solution between us and the Arabs.

Several months later, at the founding conference of the Histadrut, Tabenkin elaborated on the Arab's rights. He stressed the importance of solidarity with non-Jewish workers, in the spirit of internationalism and being loyal to the socialist concept of solidarity and mutual aid entailed in the common destiny of workers everywhere.

During the debate on the defence of Tel Hai, he again stressed the fact of Arab hostilities.

It is a fact that the Arabs are hostile. The villagers regard us as conquerers and we have no option but to defend ourselves. The Arabs who live by the sword, must learn that we can defend ourselves and that we can't be robbed and driven away... that nothing will be taken from us.

At the fourth conference of Ahdut ha-Avoda at Ein Harod (1924), the demand for free immigration and settlement was reinforced. The conference decided to reject the Mandatory government's proposal to hand over authority to the population, as long as the Jews were a

minority. Furthermore, it was noted that no contradiction existed between Zionist demands and the interests of the local population, because Zionism developed the entire country for the benefit of everyone and the labor movement assisted in organizing Arab workers. Tabenkin reinforced this approach:

Zionism means a demand for land, for free immigration as well as for lending assistance to Jewish settlement in the country. It is a rejection of the local population's right to impair the development of the entire country and to determine the country's destiny, because they cultivate only a small part of the land. Recognizing their rights is not the same as demanding the freedom of the enslaved peoples in the East, on the contrary, it might even reinforce the feudal rule of the effendies. Our demands are, in no way, contradictory to the Arab population's needs, even though they may not be in the spirit of the Arab gangs that want to take over the country and stop its free development.

Tabenkin often expressed his conviction that there was no conflict of interests between Zionism and the Palestinian Arabs. However, he added that potentially there was room for conflict as long as the Arab nation had not experienced the same kind of revolution as the Jews and were free of their feudal social system. According to him, the source of the conflict were the contradictions between a constructive Jewish force and Arab feudalism.

Tabenkin did not acknowledge the existence of an Arab national chauvinistic movement, believing the conflict between Zionism and the Arabs to be a temporary one. He claimed that the historical trend was pointing in the direction of an alliance between the two peoples. Even during the War of Independence (1948/49), he recalled his vision of an alliance between Israel, the Palestinian Arabs and the surrounding Arab countries. "This is our target, even if its achievement still seems to be remote."

He was consistent in his reaction to Arab violence ever since the

1919 defence of Tel Hai, claiming that only strength would insure peace. Throughout, he stressed that economic power was not enough and that a strong defence force should be created. His conviction that it was the population's right and duty to defend itself and not rely on the British government, led to his initiative, during World War II, to create a force within the Hagana, the Jewish defence force, which would be at the disposal of the Yishuv. At the time when thousands of Palestinian Jews enlisted in the British army, he was also involved in establishing the Palmach, the commando unit of the Hagana. However, he perceived these forces as defensive rather than offensive ones and rejected any idea of displacing or transferring Arab populations from their land. Such ideas had been voiced during the 1936/39 riots by the British Peel Committee, that proposed to transfer the entire Arab population from that part of Palestine which was to constitute the Jewish homeland. His objection to the proposed transfer was both a moral matter of principle, as well as from a pragmatic and political motive. He claimed that the Arab was an integral part of the country and that his removal would not further Jewish settlement.

Even after the Six Day War (June 1967) when he called for the establishment of settlements in the entire country, he remained consistent to his principle not to displace any Arab population. He insisted that settlements be established only in unpopulated areas and that all development plans should include Arabs as well. However, throughout he adhered to the early attitudes of Ahdut ha-Avoda and refused to recognize the existence of an Arab national movement. His ambivalent feelings were evident in the suspicious approach to the Arabs which he expressed in 1919 at the Poalei Zion Mission and which increased over the years until (1940) when he regarded them as great a danger as the Nazis. On the other hand, he maintained an international vision of brotherhood in the Middle East, to which he adhered even during the 1948 War of Independence.



## VIII. EVALUATION AND CRITICISM

An analysis of Tabenkin's speeches and attitudes points to three fundamental assumptions:

1. That man is a social creature; that society precedes the individual who is entirely the creation of this society; that there is an identity and an interdependence between individual and social progress.
2. Human progress is a matter of development and evolution. It is an historical process, leading from statehood to a communist society. Eventually, classes will be abolished together with all private property and human relations will be based on equality and cooperation. This process will lead from individualism to collectivism and from private property to a cooperative society.
3. Humanity does not exist outside the national framework. In the future, the only phenomena known will be internationalism, a free alliance of equal nations.

These assumptions led to his Zionist-socialist attitudes and pointed out the direction. According to him, his doctrine and activities were the result of an historical imperative, but their realization depended on the subjective consciousness of each and every individual and on his willingness to participate in this progressive process.

According to Tabenkin's doctrine there was a complete identity between Zionism and socialism, which were both interdependent. The realization of Zionism and socialism in Israel dictated that they should be integrated in order to form a new and complete entity, namely, a constructivist socialist Zionism.

The realization of his ideology required the whole individual, a person who would act out of conviction and while making changes in his environment, was himself changed, in fact, a person who did not yield to destiny. Tabenkin demanded individual action as well as the movement's activism. He asked for a limitless, ideologically motivated devotion to the cause. The fact was that most people were unable to face the pressure. Even though thousands adopted his views and doctrine, many dropped out at one stage or another. However, the desertion of individuals or even of groups was no proof that the idea was wrong.

The most cherished element in Tabenkin's doctrine concerned the settlement process, which he perceived as both a means as well as the target. Hence his persistent, if not always successful, struggle over the conviction that settlements were instrumental to Zionism and that the commune was the nucleus of future society. In this matter his approach differed from Ben-Gurion's, who rejected the priority of settlements and especially of the communal ones.

The aspiration to achieve a Jewish majority in Eretz Israel and to develop the country so that it might absorb every Jew who wanted to come, dictated all his actions and political attitudes. In this respect, he saw eye to eye with Ben-Gurion and Berl Katzenelson, with whom he had formulated the platform of *Ahdut ha-Avoda*.

This may explain his somewhat conservative adherence to fundamental ideas. In spite of his realism, he seemed to have been a captive of his own ideology. His approach to Zionism and socialism and his conviction that they should merge to form a single, solid and complete entity, often bordered on an almost mystical, irrational belief.

Universal trends following World War II, as well as developments in Israel, must raise some doubts in regard to his evaluation of the conservative powers in the Jewish people and of the endurance of capitalism. In spite of expectations to the contrary, the latter showed a remarkable viability after the war and hence his predictions about the decline of the Diaspora were proven wrong. Tabenkin's catastrophic prediction of events in the Diaspora materialized only in Europe and the Middle East. In the New World, however, neo-

capitalism prospered and so did the Jewish communities there. They prospered materially as well as spiritually. This caused a new economic structure, but also some spiritual and cultural changes — on the one hand to assimilation, on the other to a certain religious strengthening.

Nor did the Six-Day War, which had opened up new areas, lead to the expected mass immigration. Tabenkin's predictions correlated neither with the Jewish nor with the international reality of the times, because he adhered to principles and measures that had applied during the early years of the century. Or, might his realistic perception of the conservative forces within the Jewish people have induced him to emphasise the value of those forces that actually revolted against tradition, namely the pioneers and the *avant-garde*?

To a large measure, Tabenkin has been deprived of his place in history as well as in Mapai, because of the controversy between himself, Ben-Gurion and Berl Katzenelson. The latter found it difficult to accept Tabenkin's success as a mentor of youth. This success was mainly the result of his being an integral part of the settlement movement. The controversy between Tabenkin and Ben-Gurion which, eventually, led to the schism within Mapai, was caused by their disagreeing on fundamental issues such as Tabenkin's adherence to his concept of an undivided Israel and Ben-Gurion's perception of statehood as an immediate target. Moreover, while the former tended to criticize the red tape which was prevalent in the party's and the Histadrut's apparatus, the latter had gradually grown away from some of the earlier principles which they had shared.

It transpires that Ben-Gurion was right in regard to two cardinal issues:

(1) He agreed to the partition of Palestine, in order to achieve political independence even in only a part of the country. Among other things, this step was to ensure free *Allya*, a cardinal principle of Zionism, to which they both adhered.

(2) His approach to the Arab problem. Both agreed with the platform of *Ahdut ha-Avoda*, formulated in Ein Harod (1924) and which ignored the existence of Arab nationalism, yet granted full

rights to Arabs individually. This was based on the assumption that the controversy between Arabs and Jews was not caused by nationalism, but rather by class distinction, namely, by the conflict between a feudal society and the dynamic Zionist progress.

Both realized the inevitability of the conflict, (in fact, Tabenkin preceded Ben-Gurion in that respect) and that a military confrontation was possible, even probable. Both were involved in creating a Jewish defence force, whether an independent one or within the British Army. However, while Tabenkin consistently refused to admit the existence of an Arab national movement, Ben-Gurion was more realistic and drew the necessary conclusions. On the one hand, he was ready to the partition of the country, in the hope of avoiding a military confrontation and on the other, he prepared the army, just in case.

Tabenkin, however, was correct in his assessing the dangers of government and statehood to the character of an emerging society. Even after political independence had been achieved, he persistently objected to the reliance on an all-powerful state and instead, aspired to maintain free voluntary organizations. He insisted on the importance of the individual who was motivated by his convictions and who would realize the social and economic tasks ahead. Even within the framework of a state, Tabenkin aspired to maintain the vision of a free society of working people which was to realize Zionist socialism. Ben-Gurion, on the other hand, adopted an *etatist* approach, thus abandoning the doctrine they had both shared in former years.

In fact, Tabenkin was more consistent in his approach than any of his comrades, with whom he had formulated the ideological and administrative principles of the Zionist labor movement in Eretz Israel. He adhered to his utopian visions, but in spite of his zealous convictions, he was neither dogmatic nor pragmatic in his approach. This explains his attraction for young pioneers, but also explains his own and his followers' relative political weakness.

His conviction of Palestine's historical, geographical, economic and political unity, was to lead to many misunderstandings. He often emphasised his historical affinity to Israel. Hence it was not to

be partitioned; he preached the establishment of settlements throughout the country, yet limited these to unpopulated areas in order to prevent expulsion of Arabs. However, he did not clarify his attitudes sufficiently and therefore they led to misinterpretations and to the deviation of some of his followers.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Tabenkin used to say that every idea had to be tested through practice and in fact, to a large extent, his ideas withstood practical tests. The Zionist socialist approach crystallized in Eretz Israel during World War I, following the stormy events of the times, including: the great expectations of a global revolution, which was already in the making; the signs of an approaching collapse of all empires and the Balfour Declaration, which the Jewish people regarded as the coming of the Messiah. Combined, they served to inspire dreamers and visionaries with grand utopian ideals and administrative plans that required ideological crystallization. The people of the Second *Aliya* directed their thoughts and hopes towards "the ships that were on their way," carrying thousands of pioneers who would instill new power and incentive into Zionism. This was the background for the maximalistic and radical platform of Achdut ha-Avoda and its socialist and Zionist approach.

Great expectations also characterized the Poalei Zion delegation's report. Although the people who formulated it believed in Utopia, they wanted to base their program on a realistic analysis of the situation. Their report was an authentic expression of the prevalent atmosphere and so was Ben-Gurion's program for a "Worker's Army" and David Remez' plan to introduce communal consumption among all the workers in Eretz Israel.

These plans never materialized, but they contributed a lot to the crystallization of Zionist socialist constructivism and to one of its cardinal objectives, namely, the creation of a working class in Eretz Israel. Eventually, the working class that emerged was far from

being a proletariat according to an orthodox Marxist definition of the term. These workers had consciously opted to become a proletariat, because of their convictions. They believed that they were participating in the national Zionist revolution by returning to a life of work and to nature.

The realization of constructivism, which was perceived as a value *per se*, required ideological and administrative compromises within the labor movement (between Abdu ha-Avoda and Hapoel ha-Tzair) as well as within the Zionist movement, in so far as it meant cooperating with non-socialist circles. These compromises may eventually have led to positions of leadership in the Yishuv as well as in the Zionist movement.

Socialist Zionism rejected the Marxist approach of regarding nationalism as a false ideology, whose inception was rooted in the middleclass economy, and which was intended to preserve the existing order of things. It maintained the Zionist element in its ideology, even when certain circles within it began to search for ways to join the Marxist camp that had rejected nationalism in general and Zionism in particular. At the same time, the socialist Zionist camp adamantly rejected all signs of Jewish chauvinism.

Throughout the years, socialist Zionism had to fight on two fronts, namely, defend Jewish nationalism and its right to national freedom, on the one hand and on the other, defend socialism for its being a humane and democratic dream, one that aspired to release man from enslavement and exploitation and to create a free and egalitarian society. Fighting on two fronts is hard enough, but it is even more so, if one attempts to realize an idea that integrates Zionism and socialism in daily life. Actually, this required making concessions as well as agreeing to compromise.

Political realism frequently dictated Ben-Gurion's pragmatic approach. This gradually increased in the late 1920s and was expressed in both areas: in the socialist, when the radical revolutionary approach was replaced by a reformist one; and in the national, by agreeing to a compromise on Eretz Israel and to the adoption of a partition plan. However, while the majority perceived these steps as an expression of political realism, Tabenkin claimed

that they undermined important values and principles.

Constructivism saved both Zionism and socialism from turning into a movement of talkers, who convened one congress after the other and who were mired in a swamp of idle words. The practical aspects of constructivism steered the Zionist socialist ship into open waters and towards the wide horizons of hope.

Although, over the years both Zionism and socialism were to experience crises and undergo a certain erosion, the hard nucleus prevailed. It was a kind of "Pretorian guard", which formed around Tabenkin, keeping the fire of radical Zionism and activist constructivism alive.

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## GLOSSARY

- Ahdut ha-Avoda*, the Israeli branch of Po'alei Zion, founded in 1919. Affiliated to the Socialist International.
- Aliya*, Immigration to Eretz-Israel (Palestine).
- First *Aliya* (1982-1903), consisted of individuals and small groups.
- Second *Aliya* (1904-1914), consisted, among others, of the founding fathers of the Eretz Israel labor movement.
- Third *Aliya* (1919-1923), consisted mainly of young pioneers who established the Histadrut and many kibbutzim.
- Fourth *Aliya* (1924-1928), included many middle class immigrants from Poland.
- Anglo-American Mission of Inquiry* (1947), endorsed the recommendations of the Peel Commission.
- Arlosoroff Haim*, (1899-1933). Labor leader in the World Zionist movement. Assassinated in 1933.
- Balfour Declaration* (1917), British declaration of sympathy with Zionist aspirations, communicated to Lord Rothschild by the foreign secretary A. J. Balfour.
- Ben-Gurion David*, (1886-1973) First Prime Minister of Israel and the most prominent labor leader.
- Borochov Ber* (1881-1919) Po'alei Zion leader and theoretician who formulated the analysis of Socialist Zionism using the tool of historic materialism.
- Brenner Joseph Haim*, (1881-1921) Novelist and publicist of labor, killed in the Arab riots on May 1st, 1921.

- Brith Shalom*, founded in 1925 by Y. L. Magnes and others to seek a joint Jewish-Arab solution to the Palestine problem. Favored a bi-national state.
- Bund*, a non-Zionist Jewish socialist party in Russia and Poland. Established in 1897.
- Gallii Israel*, (1910-1986) Labor and Haganah leader. Prominent member of ha-Kibbutz ha-Meuchad.
- Gadud ha-Avoda*, (Labor Battalion), 1920. A communal movement, aspiring to encompass all the Jewish laborers.
- Gordon A.D.*, (1856-1922) spiritual spokesman of the Zionist labor movement who emphasized self-employed labor and agricultural work.
- Haganah*, the illegal defense movement of the Jewish population in mandatory Palestine.
- Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meuchad*, the largest kibbutz movement, founded in 1927.
- Ha-Po'el ha-Tz'ir*, non-Marxist socialist Zionist party, est. 1905.
- Ha-Shomer ha-Tz'ir*, Zionist socialist youth movement, founded in Poland after the first war.
- Hess Moses*, (1812-1875) German Jewish socialist, father of modern socialist Zionism. His *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862) is a classic of Zionist literature.
- Hewat ha-Ovdim*, organisation of all economic, cooperative and financial activities of the Histadrut.
- Histadrut*, the General Federation of Jewish Labor, est. 1920. Includes trade unions, cooperatives etc.
- Katzenelson Berl*, (1887-1944). Spiritual leader of the labor movement, among the founders of Ahdut ha-Avoda and Mapai, first editor of the influential daily *Davar*.
- Katzenelson Yitzhak*, (1886-1944). Poet and dramatist in Hebrew and Yiddish. Died in Auschwitz. His *Poem of the Murdered Jewish People*, written in a French concentration camp, is one of the greatest literary expressions of the Holocaust.

- Magnes Yehuda Leon*, (1877-1948). U.S. rabbi and communal leader. First president of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Known for his activity to foster Arab-Jewish togetherness.
- Mapai*, Erez Israel Workers' Party, est. 1930 by the merger of Ahdut ha-Avoda and Ha-Po'el ha-Tzair.
- National Funds*, est. by the World Zionist Organization to support settlement activities.
- Pale of settlement*, the territories in Southern Tzarist Russia, where from 1791 (unlike in other parts of the country) the Jews had a right of residence.
- Palmach*, permanently mobilized volunteer commando force of the Hagana.
- Peel Commission*, (1937) British Royal commission on Palestine which recommended partition.
- Po'alei Zion*, Socialist Zionist labor movement, strongly influenced by Marxism.
- Rothschild, Baron, Edmond de*, (1845-1934), from the French branch of the family, gave crucial support to the early Jewish settlements in Palestine.
- Sejmism*, a socialist party in Russia, Ukraine and Poland, that proposed local Jewish autonomy.
- Syrkin Nachman* (1868-1924) labor movement theoretician who lived in New York from 1907.
- Tel Hai*, North Galilean kibbutz, was overrun by Arab rioters in 1920 and became a symbol of Jewish defence.
- Territorialism*, a movement which agreed to adopt any country for Jewish settlement and state.
- Uganda Affair*, (1904) a British proposal to settle Jewish refugees in Africa when Palestine was still a part of the Ottoman Empire.
- Weizman Haim*, (1874-1952) distinguished scientist, president of the World Zionist Organization (1920-30 and 1935-46). First president of the State of Israel.

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