

YEHUDA HARELL

**TABENKIN'S  
VIEW OF SOCIALISM**

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Yad Tabenkin 1988  
Ramat Efal 52960, Israel

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Drawing by M. BERNSTEIN

Production: Ot Paz Ltd., Tel-Aviv

ISBN 965-282-0261

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FOREWORD

This essay was written in 1972 by Yehuda Harrell, who consulted Yitzhak Tabenkin several times whilst preparing it. The original title in Hebrew was "Yitzhak Tabenkin's Socialism". Fifteen years have passed and some progress has been made in research on Tabenkin's thought. Seven volumes of his speeches and lectures have been published in Hebrew, and Prof. M. Mintz wrote a biography of Tabenkin, covering his early years.

We thought it worthwhile to translate Yehuda Harrell's essay because to date Tabenkin's unique theoretical approach to socialist Zionism has not yet been published in a foreign language. His ideas were put into practice in Israel, and the praxis is, of course, the touch-stone of any theory. The roots of Yitzhak Tabenkin's socialism can be found in Marxism as well as in anarcho-socialism, in utopian socialism and in socialist constructivism, and also in the writings of the 19th century Russian populists Belinsky, Herzen and Chernyshevsky. Tabenkin also accepted the use of weapons for self-defence in order to realise the Zionist and socialist aims.

This monograph encompasses only the social aspects of Tabenkin's teachings. It doesn't include his outlook on problems of Jewish settlement, on Arab-Jewish relations and on Israel's frontiers. All those are an important part of his Weltanschauung, and without them Tabenkin's ideology isn't complete.

One chapter deals with constructivism (see chapter 1, from page 11 on) and there Tabenkin describes that aspect of Labour Zionism which fascinated so many leaders of Western socialism. In the second chapter, Harrell tells us how Tabenkin emphasised the importance of the human factor versus the State, which has not lost its actuality even today.

The author has also made a very interesting comparison between Tabenkin's socialism and the different currents of socialist thought in the world; his analysis sharpens the contrasts and gives us a better comprehension of the ideological conflicts of his time.

We decided to publish it in English because, in our opinion, it has a deep meaning not only for Israel. Nowadays the socialist praxis is failing in the

Soviet Union, and Western social-democracy and the Welfare State are in a crisis. Tabenkin's interpretation of socialism gives another answer to the questions which are bothering many of us.

This English version is being published without the original footnotes because most of them referred to Hebrew books. The reader who understands Hebrew will easily find more information on the subject in the short bibliographical list on p. 90. Amongst the staff of Yad Tabenkin we must especially thank the translator Hannah Lash and the copy editors David Greenberg and Ephraim (Fred) Eytan, without whose help it would not have been possible to prepare this publication.

*Shimon Mahler*

## INTRODUCTION

### YITZHAK TABENKIN

Yitzhak Tabenkin was born in 1887, in Bobruysky, Belorussia. 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,<sup>1</sup> the poet, and Berl Katzenelson<sup>2</sup>, the future labor leader. Tabenkin's father, Moshe, 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, and was among the founders of Poalei Zion<sup>3</sup> in May 1905 in Warsaw, and of its Polish branch later in December. 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 thus prevented from representing the Polish branch at the famous Poltava Convention<sup>4</sup>. Later he was deeply involved in the Uganda affair<sup>5</sup> and in the schism with the Territorialists<sup>6</sup> and the Seymists<sup>7</sup>, 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 Krakow. At the same time he remained active in the World Organization of Poalei Zion.

There Tabenkin disagreed with Ber Borochov<sup>8</sup> on such cardinal issues as the latter's determinist attitude. Tabenkin also objected to Borochov's settlement policy and to his intention to participate in the World Zionist Organization. Nevertheless, Tabenkin assisted Borochov in the preparation of several of his books.

In 1912 Tabenkin immigrated to Palestine. From the time of his arrival, he was involved with settlement attempts: the Merhavia<sup>9</sup> cooperative, Kvitza Uria; and the big kvutza in Kinneret<sup>10</sup>. At first he avoided the local Poalei Zion Party and joined the non-aligned circle of the Agricultural Workers Union which objected to the party system and fought for a union of all the workers in Eretz Israel. Tabenkin also joined the Ha'shomer<sup>11</sup> organization (a self-defence organization).

In 1919 he was among the founders and formulators of the platform of Ahdut ha'Avoda<sup>12</sup>, the largest Zionist Socialist labour party, which later merged with Ha-Po'el ha-Za'ir to form the Mapai<sup>13</sup> (Israeli Workers Party). In 1921 he was among the founders of the Histadrut<sup>14</sup> and served as its first secretary general. After a short period in Tel-Aviv, where he was active in the Histadrut executive and in the Ahdut ha-Avoda, Tabenkin joined the Gedud ha-Avoda<sup>15</sup>, the Labor Battalion and Kibbutz Ein-Harod (December 1921). He was involved in the debate on "economic autonomy" which eventually led to the split of Ein-Harod from the Gedud. In spite of some opposition, he turned the "Ein-Harod" Kibbutz into a country-wide organization which in 1927 became the Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uchad movement<sup>16</sup>.

From the beginning of his involvement in Ahdut ha-Avoda and later in Mapai, Tabenkin took a radical stand on most issues and drifted further and further away from the majority opinion on numerous issues. These issues revolved around every aspect of life, including: Ahdut ha-Avoda's political stance; the fight over the democratization and independence of the Histadrut; a demand to intensify the class struggle; Zionist activism; security affairs; his adamant objection to the division of Eretz Israel; the anti-British struggle; illegal immigration; and finally, his objection to statehood. The ever widening schism eventually caused a split in the party (1944) and later also in the kibbutz movement.

Nevertheless, Tabenkin never gave up his determined belief in "constructivism" and the practical realisation of socialist Zionism, and played an active role in the labor movement's constructivist efforts. In fact, in spite of his being in the opposition, or perhaps because of it, Tabenkin and his party were involved, among other activities, in the establishment of Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meuhad, the founding of new settlements of the He-Halutz<sup>17</sup> and Pioneering youth movements in Eretz Israel; in matters of education, defence and the Palmach<sup>18</sup> and the struggle against the British Mandate.

In 1948 Tabenkin was involved in the establishment of Mapam<sup>19</sup>, (United Workers Party) by the union of Ahdut ha-Avoda with Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir<sup>20</sup>. However, within a short time, profound differences of opinion emerged between the majority, Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir and the minority, Ahdut ha-Avoda. The major differences concerned questions of a Jewish-Arab-Party and the dilemma of orientation toward the communist world versus orientation toward ourselves. Other issues concerned the question

whether Mapam should be an alternative to Mapai or aspire to a united labor movement; whether to join the government or concentrate on a strong opposition; whether socialist constructivism or political activism should prevail; whether the party should be centralistic or pluralistic. Finally, the disagreement revolved around matters of defence activities and the question of whether the country could be divided.

As a result of the schism, Tabenkin ceased all political activities in Mapam. In 1954 the split led to the re-establishment of Ahdud ha-Avoda-Po'alei Zion.

In the mid-1960s the tendency to reunite with Mapai led first to the establishment of the "Alignment of Workers in Israel" and later to the establishment of the Israel Labour Party (Mifleget ha-Avoda). Tabenkin opposed these moves. He saw a union without Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir as a departure from the goal of a full union of the working class and an abandonment of a special and unique labor movement and Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meuchad. In spite of this, he participated in the Alignment (Ma'arach)<sup>21</sup> and in the establishment of the Labor Party and continued his fight from within. He devoted his final years to promoting the ideological activities of Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad and to the fight against hired labor in the kibbutzim. He supported Yitzhak Ben-Aharon<sup>22</sup> in his struggle to maintain the Histadrut's independence and fought for the political independence of the kibbutz movement. Finally, he called for a renewed effort of mass settlement in the whole of Eretz Israel.

Tabenkin died in 1971 and was buried in his kibbutz, Ein-Harod.

#### TABENKIN'S IDEOLOGY

The Second Aliya<sup>23</sup> pioneers had a deep aversion to any definite programs or platforms. They had known endless ideological discussions which had not achieved any practical or creative results. The founders of Ahdut ha-Avoda, and especially the unaligned among them, regarded the labor movement's differing ideologies as a prime obstacle to its unity.

Tabenkin, therefore, devoted a cardinal part of his speech at the 1919 founding conference of Ahdud ha-Avodah in Petach Tikva, to a negation of the ideological foundation of that newly established movement.

A union of workers because they are workers and not as

a result of their sharing one opinion or another... United action requires freedom of one's convictions.. The common ownership of land and property ... is going to be the basis of our socialism, rather than ideological convictions...

Prior to the establishment of *Ahdut ha-Avoda*, Berl Katzenelson spoke about the inherent danger of ideologies which might lead to the petrification of the movement and its activities. He stressed the preference of life over dogma, yet he did not scorn ideology *per se*. In fact the entire Second Aliya leadership emphasized the importance of realizing one's ideology in daily life.

Tabenkin's unique attitude to ideas and ideologies had sprung from two somewhat controversial sources. On the one hand, he regarded history as a process of realising ideas through voluntary action, yet on the other he feared the petrifying influence of an ideology, which might eventually lead to schism.

He, therefore, supported ideas while being weary of ideologies and avoided formulas and definitions, while concentrating on lectures and explanations and discussions. However, Tabenkin's fear and rejection of ideology and its petrifying influence, did not prevent him from understanding its importance. "Truth only! No dogmatism! Reality will eventually lead to some kind of generalization that may serve as a kind of ideology."

The *Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meuchad* is a settlement body which supports the ideas of communalism. We not only live in communes, but we realize the communitarian idea. We are not only members of communes, but we are also emissaries of the communal idea.

More than other leaders of the Second Aliyah, Tabenkin stressed the importance of the labor ideology and its theories, but he was careful not to let international socialist thought dictate any of the movement's issues. He regarded it merely as a fertilizing influence.

I think that if an independent-minded person is aware of international ideas, he will gain a lot. Those who disagree are like others who object to translating foreign poetry because it may lose its originality in the Hebrew language... or those who would prefer the introduction of

tariffs to prevent the import of foreign goods so that anyone will be able to sell his milk even if diluted. Some of you may think that our movement has to be kept in ignorance. I am convinced of the opposite; knowledge is going to reinforce us...

An examination of Tabenkin's speeches and lectures throughout the years, points to a remarkably comprehensive and consistent ideology even though it is made up of different trends of thought, influences and profoundly controversial issues. Still, his prime motivation was also the realisation of Zionist socialism.

In the last year of his life, Tabenkin declared that a thorough understanding of his *Weltanschauung* would require 80 years of explanations... and, in fact, the present work may be somewhat inappropriate as Tabenkin himself never attempted to define his doctrine.

Because his life and thought were so completely integrated, there is a certain difficulty in dividing them into chapters and subjects. The purpose of this work is to deal with Tabenkin's socialist doctrine, but he himself never distinguished between the Zionist and the socialist targets or theories. Hence, any division between the two is irrelevant to Tabenkin's life and doctrine and is based entirely on the researcher's point of view.

Tabenkin never succeeded in dividing his doctrine into chapters and topics even though he did from time to time attempt to do so in the various courses he gave. He has repeatedly been accused of repetition, but these contribute to a profounder understanding of the main issues.

Throughout his life Tabenkin never ceased to read, learn and listen. He was open to the influence of philosophers and scientists, to historic and literary persons, to artists and poets, to his rivals as well as his friends. They all contributed to the crystallization of his *Weltanschauung* and his way of life.

#### SOCIALISM OR COMMUNISM?

We face a certain difficulty when we attempt to define Tabenkin's doctrine as communist or socialist. Tabenkin, himself, always preferred the term communism and disregarded the distinction created by the schism in the labor movement and the establishment of the Third International after World War I. Tabenkin regarded himself as continuing the communism of the early First International, which adopted the term socialist after the

schisms between the Marxists and the Anarchists. He expressed this quite clearly in a speech given in May, 1924, at the fourth convention of Achdut ha-Avodah.

I shall devote my speech to the rural and urban communes, to the communist settlements, meaning a way of life and work based on economic and human relations according to the motto: "from each according to his talents and ability: to each according to his needs". Hence, the right name for our movement should be the one applied to the labor movement since the days of Marx and Bakunin: the community movement. Accordingly we should be called 'The Zionist-Communist-Movement'. However, after the schism in the international labor movement, communism has acquired a definite political connotation...

Perhaps Tabenkin was attracted to the term communism because it applied also to some anarchists. Yet, he certainly preferred it to any other term because it symbolized the final target. Tabenkin aspired to abolish all differences between the target and the road to its achievement, between the aims and the means. He said, "There can be no communist state there can only be a communal society".

Tabenkin did not accept Berl Katznelson's objections to calling the kibbutz movement "communist settlements". In his words "Soviet communism is also communism but a communism different from ours. *Communism defines the goal of cancelling private property and the State.*

Nevertheless, the gradual identification of communism of the Soviet kind inhibited him and he often used the term socialism instead. In 1958 he said, "our socialism is the pioneering settlement kind. We cannot refer to our Zionist-socialist-movement as communism".

Tabenkin used both terms, sometimes defining his doctrine as Zionist-socialist and sometimes as Zionist-communist.

In this translation we have, after lengthy deliberations, often adopted the term communalism.

## CHAPTER ONE

### REVOLUTIONARY CONSTRUCTIVIST COMMUNALISM

According to the general consensus, the main and original aspect of the Israel labor movement is its constructivism, its attempt to realise its vision through the establishment of a socialist economy and society, through the creation of Hevrat ha-Ovdim<sup>24</sup>. There were historical and sociological reasons for the emergence of this phenomenon: the failure of the non-working classes to solve national problems; the start from scratch in a new country which enabled the labor movement to design a completely new society; the ideological background of its founders and the era itself.

While constructivism was conceived by a unique generation in a unique era, the following chapters are an attempt to show that Tabenkin played an important role in its formulation.

Constructivism and its concept of a workers' society passed through three main stages: inception, consolidation and realisation. The best stage to try to define and understand it would be the period of consolidation, because before that the idea had still not been fully developed and later reality somewhat distorted it.

The concept of a constructivist workers' economy evolved in the post-World War I period. The workers in Eretz Israel had established Achdut ha-Avoda in order to conceive a plan of action. The Second Aliya had ended with the outbreak of war and there was no further immigration for its duration. The war years were an ideal time to sum up the experiences of the preceding decade. Those years proved the failure of the Jewish workers' attempt to "conquer" work in the Jewish settlements. Throughout the world, it was a time of revolution. In Russia, Bavaria and Hungary, the workers took over and in Germany they attempted to do so. The prevalent feeling was that the working class could solve the social and economic problems of the nations.

Zionism seemed to prevail. The Turkish government had collapsed. The Jewish Battalions arrived and with them news of the Balfour Declaration.

It was a revolutionary situation, one which fosters new movements and ideas.

#### THE PROGRAM OF AHDUT HA-AVODA

This program was first formulated as a call to establish "A union of the working classes in Eretz Israel, called Ahdut ha-Avoda". It was presented at the General Conference of Workers in Eretz Israel in 1919. The program was formulated by Berl Katzenelson and signed by David Ben-Gurion<sup>25</sup> and Itzhak Ben-Zvi<sup>26</sup> who represented Poalei Zion and by four of the unaligned, who represented the agricultural workers unions, Tabenkin from the Galilee, David Remez<sup>27</sup> from Samaria, Berl and Shmuel Yavne'eli<sup>28</sup> from Judea. Tabenkin later regarded the program as a most fitting formulation of constructive socialism ever devised.

Constructivism was defined as "an attempt to establish a human society as a free family of nations with equal rights of work for all". It demanded the transfer of all national resources and the property accumulated through generations from private to public hands and put all labor affairs in the hands of the working class. The Zionist aspirations would be achieved through, "a popular mass immigration, the creation of a free Jewish working community which enjoys equal rights and lives off its toil, is in control of its own property and in charge of its work, its culture and its economy".

This entailed the transfer of all land, water reserves, natural resources to the Jewish people for eternity and the creation of a national fund for investment in soil reclamation, railways, ports, forestry, shipping, water works, electricity etc. It included also the creation of an infrastructure for agricultural settlements and industrial enterprises which would be established by free workers' communities.

#### THE REPORT OF THE PO'ALEI ZION MISSION TO ERETZ

##### ISRAEL

Early in 1920 the international organization of Po'alei Zion sent a committee to study the situation in Eretz Israel and to formulate a socialist construction program. Among those who came from Europe were Nachman Syrkin<sup>29</sup>, Zalman Rubaschow, Nachum Nir and others. They were joined by the local members of Ahdut ha-Avoda: Ben-Gurion; Ben-Zvi; Tabenkin; Yavne'eli and Remez. They divided into sub-committees and examined the prevailing conditions. Their conclusions are presented in a detailed and extensive report which includes a comprehensive program

for a socialist Eretz Israel. Although in the same vein as the Ahdut ha-Avoda program of 1919, it was a more detailed and consolidated document.

Chapter Six of the report was apparently formulated by Syrkin with the participation of other members of the committee, particularly Tabenkin. Under the heading, "A Massive Cooperative Settlement Policy", they stated that the prevalent settlement conditions in Eretz Israel were different from those of all other immigrant countries because there was no economic infrastructure which could absorb the newcomers and everything had to be started from scratch. There existed no native population which might be exploited, as elsewhere. The Jewish people had no former experience in any of the required professions and that under these circumstances private capital would not be interested.

So far, facts have indicated that the future of agriculture, industry and trade is doubtful if continued in the present trend. Only rural and urban cooperative settlements can solve the Jewish problem in Eretz Israel. Furthermore, if we take into account the human composition of the immigrants, their future economic requirements, technical know-how and psychological make-up, we will be even more convinced that cooperative ventures are the foundation of mass immigration. Neither the oldtimers nor the new immigrants are going to work for private employers, especially when they realise that the latter use national funds as well but not for the benefit of the people. As far as they have been permitted to do so, Jewish workers have already taken the first step towards cooperative ventures. It must be the solution for all settlements, for a new economy, an independent one. Building up the country for the people of Israel is an enormous and unique enterprise. The means have to be unique as well. Only if the entire nation sets out to undertake the job, will they be masters of their construction and prosper...

National ownership of all natural resources, of the entire economy and of the work force, are prerequisites for mass immigration. The land, water supply, minerals and other resources, the coast-line, the forests,



transportation and communication, railways and ports, telephone and telegraph, industry and construction, schools and cultural institutions, everything must be common property. All agricultural and industrial produce is to be shared among the citizens. Housing and public works are to be undertaken by cooperatives and the latter will all be united under a single, supervising management....

This cooperative society is based on unions of free workers: groups of farm workers, companies of industrial labor, of public works etc. All cooperatives of the same kind of work are organized in a single professional union. Besides, all workers in an area or a city form the cooperative movement under regional management which is in charge of economic and local affairs.

These professional and local unions are represented proportionally in a central federation of cooperatives. This Central Federation of Cooperatives is, in fact, responsible for all economic affairs, national resources, means of production.... It is in charge of public works, supervises production, establishes cultural institutions and supervises them, arranges the allocation of goods and overseas trade.

...In short, the Federation is the economic order of the nation.

Justice and commonsense require equal pay, an equal work load, equal conditions.... All unpleasant jobs should receive higher pay or hours should be shorter, furthermore they should be shared by all members of society.

Private farmers and Arabs too will eventually organize in cooperatives so that finally the cooperatives and the people will be one and the same. The nation will apply to all workers in general, that is our vision of the future.

Chapter Seven of the report, apparently written by Yavne'eli, states, "We, the workers here in Eretz Israel together with those who are about the arrive, but are still in the Diaspora, we are responsible for the construction of the country."

#### TO SUM UP:

- a. Only the working class can realize Zionism and is responsible for its fulfillment;
  - b. Zionism will be realised via the establishment of a workers' economy in Eretz Israel;
  - c. Eventually, the entire nation will become a working class and there will be complete identification between the class and the nation;
  - d. The economic and social structure will be federative as all unions and cooperatives will be organized under a central federation;
  - e. Management will be egalitarian;
  - f. There are no dividing lines between the socialist vision and the practical program of the labor movement and the Zionist movement.
- Tabenkin's way may be aptly defined as a consistent struggle to realize the Abdu ha-Avoda program. We have, therefore, to examine the role he played in the complicated process which brought the labor movement in Eretz Israel to adopt its 1919-20 platform.

#### THE LABOR MOVEMENT'S WAY TO CONSTRUCTIVISM

The prevalent notion claims that the labor movement's constructivism was the result of the prevailing conditions in the country, rather than an a priori ideology. However, constructivist programs may be found in the labor movement (and not just in the labor), even before they were adopted by the workers in Eretz Israel. Dr. Y. Slutzki points out several cases in which the kevuza was predicted prior to the establishment of the first one. The more outstanding prophets included: Nachman Syrkin, Oppenheimer and Kaplanski.

The constructivist trend in Po'alei Zion was negligible and disappeared almost entirely after Syrkin retired, during the Uganda crisis. In fact, the Po'alei Zion in Eretz Israel had to take the road from Borochovism to socialist-constructivism completely on its own.

On the other hand, members of Ha-Po'el ha-Za'ir<sup>30</sup> had not belonged to a socialist movement abroad. They, too, had to reach the socialist-Zionist target on their own. This was also the case of the non-aligned, of whom only some had been members of Po'alei Zion abroad.

The Eretz Israel branch of Po'alei Zion was established in November

1905. Two years later they adopted the "Ramle Platform" a Borochovist document par excellence. It was printed in Yiddish and called "The Platform of the Jewish Social-Democrat Workers Party in Eretz Israel". Their program called for the realization of Zionism with the help of Jewish capital and mass immigration, "which would have to converge in Eretz Israel".

Several weeks later, at a meeting of Po'alei Zion representatives in Jaffa, they adopted a program which declared that the class struggle was the one and only way to achieve socialism. Most of their demands concerned the improvement of the workers' lot. Contrary to the Russian Po'alei Zion, they also demanded the establishment of a framework to organize immigration, and with this in mind they declared that the party would participate at the Zionist Congress.

However, the 1907 election platform of Po'alei Zion did not mention any constructivist program. Paragraph Six called for improved work conditions and the establishment of model industrial and agricultural enterprises in order to assist the immigration of individual capitalists.

There was no significant change in regard to constructivism at the third convention of Po'alei Zion in 1908. There was, however, a positive attitude in regard to the establishment of small-holders' settlements in Ein Ganim and Be'er Ya'akov.

In 1910 Ben-Zvi still regarded the immigration of capital as more important than the aliya of labor. A year later Po'alei Zion declared that "the workers' fate depended only on the influx of capital and mass immigration as in the United States".

In the pre-war years disillusionment with "the conquest of work" from Arab labor prevailed. But even this did not lead to constructivism. Instead, Po'alei Zion suggested that a "natural laborer" should be imported from countries such as Yemen, where Jews were used to hard labor and a low standard of living. Such immigrants would, no doubt, replace the East European intellectuals.

Ben-Gurion formulated the idea in a letter to his father, right after coming on aliya in 1907. He wrote that the only way to create a Jewish working class would be through the *aliya* of "natural workers instead of enthusiastic intellectuals... We will, then, have a strong and healthy, down-to-earth type of Jewish worker, the hope and power of all free people". Po'alei Zion's failure to adopt constructivism, the doctrine that the labor movement should be responsible for the nation, was not due to lack of

courage and daring. The party was actually very enterprising. This is evident in the decision to send Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi to Constantinople to study law so that they might influence local politics. Another daring move was the establishment of the Ha-Shomer organization. It was not easy to give up Borochovism which relegated merely social and political responsibility to the party. Borochovist Marxism, was, in fact, an obstacle to the constructivist socialism of Po'alei Zion.

An obstacle to Ha-Po'el ha-Zair's adoption of constructivism was their lack of a socialist ideology. In 1906 the party adopted a program in which there was no mention of constructivism. It saw its *raison d'être* in the creation of a working class, in the improvement of work conditions and in the participation in Zionist activities. In this respect they differed from Po'alei Zion. Their lack of all socialist ideology prevented them from seeing the advantage of a socialist economy and society, Paragraph Seven in their 1907 platform, under the heading "Our Demands as Laborers", merely calls for Jewish work and improved conditions."

In their 1908 conference, Joseph Vitkin<sup>31</sup> proposed the establishment of workers' settlements, but was defeated in his famous dispute with Abrahamowitz. As a result, they published a declaration stating that "Our organization aspires to increase the number of Jewish workers in towns and villages and to improve their conditions. This will put an end to any proposals of turning them into peasants".

After their attempt to gain a foothold in the *moshavot*<sup>32</sup> failed, the Po'alei Zion also proposed to solve the problem by importing "natural workers". When toward the end of 1910, Deganya<sup>33</sup> was established as the first *kevuza*, Po'alei Zion refused to give its approval even though the majority of its members were also members of the party.

The third group, the un-aligned, did not, at least in the beginning, take to constructivism either. Years later, Berl Katzenelson defined them as a group with profound political convictions that regarded parties as rooted in the Diaspora. They believed in the supremacy of Eretz Israel and thought that there was room for only one workers' organization. In their attachment to one another they were similar to the other groups.

The un-aligned, however, had several characteristics which prepared them for constructivism: their objection to all party politics; their severance of all ties with the parties and ideologies of the Diaspora; and their regard for action above and beyond any ideological convictions. They were active mainly in the agricultural workers union and they were the first to conceive

of constructivist workers' settlements. This idea was first discussed at the third convention of Judean workers in 1913. This same convention also adopted the establishment of contracting work groups for the first time. The un-aligned were, therefore, the pioneers of constructive socialism. Foremost among them was Berl Katzenelson.

Katzenelson had come on *aliya* in 1909 and had immediately seen the feasibility of collective settlements. Years later he recalled, "I felt a special affinity with Vitkin... having arrived during the big depression...I believed that the only way out would be the establishment of workers settlements with the aid of the tool of the Jewish National Fund..."

Katzenelson may have been of the first to see the possibilities of the workers settlements because he came with a socialist background, free of the influence of Borochovisim and yet a disciple of Syrkin. Even then, his settlement policy was undefined and years would pass before it became a political concept and a practical program. In 1911 he wrote to his brother: "I want to work, but I refuse to be a proletarian...In order to love work, to be a human being, to be free of bosses, one has to be independent. The worker in Eretz Israel desires independence, *yet the ways are still obscure...*"

Written documentation of Tabenkin's role in the slow and difficult process towards constructivist socialism is scanty. He spoke at several meetings of the Galilean workers' union, but no notes have survived. We have to rely on circumstantial evidence which points to the fact that Tabenkin played a special role in the general process.

He was the most important leader of Pa'alei Zion who came during the Second Aliya and yet he joined the un-aligned. He was among the few who had both a practical and a theoretical socialist background. His reason for not joining Po'alei Zion may have lain in his disagreement with Borochov. He was closer to Syrkin's ideology and therefore joined the worker's groups and the Agricultural Workers Union in Eretz Israel.

In 1937, at a lecture on the labor movement, Tabenkin mentioned that before the war there had been just a handful of people who regarded the workers groups as something permanent. "If I claim that I was among those few who was aware of the general human value of the groups, it was thanks to my socialist background abroad".

He expanded on this theme somewhat at the Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad council, the same year:

Those who regarded the communes as a way of life not

just for a chosen few, who saw it as a way to be taken now and not only after the revolution, who wanted it to be a means of establishing an economy, a culture, a new society, a place to absorb immigrants and conquer the country, all have called: let's begin immediately in order to create the new society gradually. Ours is a way of life for each and everyone....That was the idea of Kinneret, the way Trumpeldor<sup>34</sup> believed in...

His mention of Trumpeldor refers to the 1911 convention in Romny (Ukraine) at which Trumpeldor and Zvi Schatz had proposed the communes. However, there was no follow-up because the group in Migdal disintegrated during the war years, while Trumpeldor was absent.

Tabenkin also mentioned Kinneret where he had found himself together with Katzenelson, A.D. Gordon and many others. Here the communal idea crystallized during the war years as exemplified by the opening of the letter he wrote in 1918 to Arthur Ruppin<sup>35</sup>:

At a meeting of the Galilean workers' representatives we have decided to appeal to your honor and to your associates abroad....Ever since last Passover we have noticed a new spirit among the workers, a will to be independent through mutual help. We value work even more...and get ready for settlement.

Before proceeding with our examination of the Eretz Israel labor movement's constructivism and the unique role played by Tabenkin, we must follow the constructivist trends in the European Po'alei Zion.

#### TABENKIN IN PO'ALEI ZION, UNTIL 1912

Tabenkin was a member of Po'alei Zion even before it organized as a country-wide and later world-wide movement. He regarded Syrkin as his first teacher, years before Borochov joined the movement. In the 1950s, when Mapam stressed its Zionist convictions by quoting Borochov, Tabenkin said, "We are a fifty-year-old movement. As far back as 1898, Syrkin wrote an article on the Jewish problem and the Socialist Jewish State. We have progressed in direct line from there..."

The Polish branch of Po'alei Zion was closer to Syrkin than the Russian

branch. They had to go underground because they supported the struggle against the Russian Empire. The big debate between the Polish branch and Borochov revolved round the issue of a "prognostic Palestine" or "a principle-oriented-one".

In an effort to reinforce the classical Marxist element of Po'alei Zion, Borochov had adopted the "Prognostic" concept which regarded Zionism as an inevitable economic process. This left no scope for an active involvement of the Zionist workers. The Polish branch adhered to Syrkin's concept. At the turn of the century he had declared that the Zionist State would be established via socialism or not at all. This concept required an active involvement and was thus adopted by the Polish Po'alei Zion of which the young Tabenkin was a member.

During the Uganda Affair in 1904-5, all former concepts were upset. Tabenkin found himself isolated from the entire leadership in Warsaw who had all adopted "Territorialism"<sup>36</sup>. He initiated the schism in his party when he turned against his mentors, among them Syrkin, and was suddenly on the same side as his former opponents, such as Borochov who had fought the Uganda proposal inspired by Ussishkin<sup>37</sup>.

Retrospectively, Tabenkin regarded the Uganda affair as the most important episode in his life. He used to say that without it he might have turned into a writer, a scientist or even a philosopher. However the affair had a more immediately result.

Syrkin left us and Borochov became our mentor. However even after Syrkin had left and turned into a Territorialist, we continued to believe in his concept of socialist settlements... At 15 I had attended lectures proving that the later a country was settled, the more advanced its agricultural development. It made sense.

Following the Uganda affair, Tabenkin became one of Borochov's assistants, yet the differences of opinion between them continued. Borochov had objected to Uganda for "Prognostic" reasons while Tabenkin's were a matter of principle. This led to the debate between constructivist socialism and the involvement in the Zionist movement and from there to the dispute between Shlomo Kaplansky<sup>38</sup> and Borochov on the Oppenheimer project.

The German Jewish sociologist and economist Franz Oppenheimer (1864-1943) had formulated a plan for a cooperative settlement which the

Zionist Congress adopted and realized in Merchavia, in 1911. Borochov opposed the involvement of Po'alei Zion in the project because it was supported by Jewish capitalists. Shlomo Kaplansky (1884-1950), on the other hand, was head of the Austrian branch that had not rejected the Zionist organization. He demanded the active participation of the party in Oppenheimer's experiment. Tabenkin opposed Borochov and sided with Kaplansky.

In Eretz Israel Po'alei Zion had started out as Borochovists, but the prevailing conditions caused a change of heart. Gradually they found themselves at cross-purposes with the leadership abroad. Tabenkin recalls that in all those debates he instinctively sided with the Eretz Israel branch.

In spite of his being in the leadership and especially close to Borochov, there were many misunderstandings as exemplified by the following story that Tabenkin used to tell.

On the eve of my aliya, I went from Vienna to Krakow in order to print Borochov's pamphlet on immigration for the Zionist Congress. Returning to Vienna on my way to Eretz Israel, I was given a farewell party at which Borochov toasted me saying that now we would finally have a proper branch in Eretz Israel. I replied that I was going to be a real worker and farmer and not a party functionary whose place was in New York or in Warsaw... I had been strongly influenced by Syrkin and I was a worker first and foremost... I knew that our movement involved not merely aliya but also planned settlement; that the class struggle went on everywhere, even within the Zionist Congress and the J.N.F.<sup>39</sup>. I was a member of Poalei Zion before Borochov and had received my first lessons from Syrkin.

In fact, when Tabenkin arrived in Eretz Israel in 1912, his Zionist-Socialist-Constructivist ideology had clearly crystallized. He seems to have been the only one among the Second Aliya leadership who combined political experience with the ideological motivation of the labor movement. Syrkin's profound influence, along with his uncompromising and stubborn character, enabled him to stand up against friends and mentors when it concerned matters of principle. And above all, the fact that he was living in Eretz-Israel was decisive.

Perhaps Katznelson preceeded him in acknowledging the importance of the J.N.F. but only Tabenkin could have said, "I would certainly not have adopted this attitude towards the J.N.F. had I not read the third volume of Das Kapital in which Marx analyzed rent.

### TABENKIN'S STRUGGLE OVER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HEVRAT HA-OVDIM

As mentioned above, the post-war period was a time of revolutionary ferment among the workers in Eretz Israel. Most of them eagerly adopted the socialist constructivist idea of Hevrat ha-Ovdim and Tabenkin was among its enthusiastic promoters. However, Katznelson was more emphatic in expressing the point on various occasions in 1918/19.

Our party is going to foster a community of workers in Eretz Israel, called Hevrat ha-Ovdim... The federation of unions will see to it that each of the workers according to his profession, will live a life of collective activities... The urban workers union must stop fighting with the bosses and instead create a healthy economy...

At the seventh conference of the Agricultural Workers Union in 1918, Katznelson gave expression to the prevalent mode of thought:

Whatever we may think about our situation, our weakness and our scars, we should not forget our responsibility. Ours is an individual pioneering effort, a daily attempt to realise Zionism, to establish a free Jewish society, a society that lives off its labors...

The Degania experiment, which so far had not been taken seriously by anybody, was defined by Katznelson as "the first social experiment among our settlements, the point of departure for our peaceful revolution.

In February 1919 Tabenkin gave a speech at the Agricultural Workers conference:

Politics is only the means. Our one and only aim is to create a working people. With this in mind we organize all our activities, whether cultural, professional, political or economical. We are not sure which of them should have

priority... We are busy doing the practical jobs and are, therefore, not concerned with the ideological foundations. We aim at achieving a freedom of thought and opinion, the nationalization of land, international acceptance, the revival of Hebrew, but we are not concerned with any abstract ideologies that may lead to them.

At the Petach Tikva conference of the same year, Tabenkin gave an important programmatic lecture on constructivist socialism and its universal significance.

Socialism is not an abstract idea but a practical one to be realised right away... In post-war Russia, the balance is moving from political activities towards the economic and cultural ones... European Workers' Councils are being organized according to professional, social, and political priorities, the balance has moved from the legislative and political activities to more practical matters such as the working classes' ability to control industry, economy and production. Nationalization requires a practical policy of the working classes.

In August 1920 the Po'alei Zion convened at Vienna to discuss whether to join the Communist Third International. Tabenkin's speech concerned the attitude towards constructivist socialism. Expressing a certain identification with the Third International, he claimed that the discussion concerned an entirely different issue.

You, in the Diaspora, demand your members' support and solidarity we, in Eretz Israel, require the entire individual's commitment... Anyone who ploughs with one hand and holds his gun in the other, is a better revolutionary than all your Jewish communists in Vienna, who adopt workers doctrines without living a worker's life.

The Third International is an expression of power. The workers in Eretz Israel aspire to be a power that is our connection with the International... The question of the Third International can only be discussed in relation to our work in Eretz Israel.

Right after the establishment of Ahdut ha-Avoda, there was a feeling of disappointment with the great expectations which led, among other things, to a retreat from socialist constructivism. Tabenkin's reaction was to cease his activities in the party and the Histadrut and join Gedud ha-Avoda and Ein Harod. Nonetheless he continued to fight fanatically for his constructivist-socialist concepts.

There emerged a number of divergences, such as the differentiation between unprofessional and professional workers and gaps in the standard of living between families and singles. Tabenkin regarded these as a threat and began to warn against the trend. He proposed to tax those who earned higher wages, and demanded public support for families. He also suggested that professional studies be financed by special funds and that the unemployed be provided for. All of this was intended to solve acute problems, but the fundamental solution was to be something he termed "a union of settlement and administration".

The cornerstone of our Socialist-Zionist doctrine is our settlement policy. The workers are going to establish a Jewish socialist economy.

Tabenkin demanded that the Histadrut's contracting groups and workers' housing quarters should be run communally. He warned of the danger of the deterioration in some cooperative sectors, meaning the *moshav*<sup>40</sup> which was based on private family units. He also feared that the Gedud was gradually growing away from Histadrut and settlement values. At the 1922 Histadrut conference, Tabenkin proposed that the entire economy be owned by the Histadrut in order to prevent private enterprises. At the Ahdut ha-Avoda conference of the same year he elaborated: all farms should legally belong to the Histadrut; finance and marketing should be Histadrut-controlled; agreeing to the concept of *moshav*, he nevertheless asked for a full control over its institutions, manpower and capital.

However, in the early 1920s private enterprises prospered and the plan to establish an absolute workers' economy never materialized. Tabenkin was uncompromising and still hoped to reverse the trend. He spoke out against private capital.

We have begun to realize that private capital does not have the power to create a national economy because it does not cater to the needs of absorption, it does not adopt advanced technology because it is interested only in

cheap labor... We must create a national economy so that every newcomer may live off his labor and not his property... Only an independent co-operative economy can ensure Jewish work. Private capital is usually anti-national and anti-social...

Tabenkin said, "*The class struggle is concerned with the question of who will make use of the national funds, the working man or the capitalist. Let us stop private enterprise from using national funds.*"

\* \* \*

In the mid-1920s, reality proved to be different from all that had been envisioned. The labor leadership was helpless and attempted to solve all problems through administrative and political means rather than through settlements.

Early on, Tabenkin was aware of the trend and at the Fourth Congress in 1924 he warned Ahdut ha-Avoda: "Our political problems concern settlement, immigration, the Histadrut." At the Sixth Congress the next year he expanded, "For one reason or another, the Histadrut no longer relies on the movement, on the public... We have to make sure that it maintains its popular settlement characteristics..."

Great expectations accompanied the establishment of "workers' housing" projects. They were to solve the problems of the many who opted for life in the cities after finding work in the private sector and after having abandoned all their egalitarian aspirations. Yavne'ei presented his plan in May 1924. Most of the land would be farmed and only a small part set aside for housing, public institutions and industry. About 200-300 of the inhabitants would be farm workers. The same number would organize in public service co-operatives and provide food and clothing, the rest might undertake construction jobs and public work. Everything would be controlled by a single management.

Tabenkin drew attention to the weakness of the program, namely the lack of any ideologically motivated human factor who would carry out the urban settlement program. Having hoped that Ahdut ha-Avoda would undertake the urban workers housing project, he was deeply disappointed and at the 1924 Ein-Harod conference he said: "Ahdut ha-Avoda is not merely a political party. We also have an economic and social task, one

which we have neglected... we need a kibbutz which would be willing to undertake the urban settlement of workers..."

Enthusiastically supporting the concept of an urban settlement, his concept, nevertheless, differed from that of Yavne'eli. According to him it was to be the means of conquering the city, and taking over the private economy.

I don't object to small workers suburbs, they are better than nothing at all, but for us in Ahdut ha-Avoda, it should be the foundation for a big workers' city... A commune of all the workers in the city... built on communitarian foundations... A bridge, a way of life for everyone in town, village, moshava...

The differing proposals of Yavne'eli and Tabenkin were debated at the Council of Ahdut ha-Avoda meeting at Nahalat Yehuda in 1925. Tabenkin and others from Ein-Harod stressed the centrality of the communal idea to the party. Ben-Gurion, on the other hand, saw the commune as only one of the elements.

The fourth congress of the party finally adopted a proposal closer to that of Tabenkin. The decision, however, in reality left it up to the future to decide, as both proposals were given the party's blessings.

\* \* \*

In the mid-1920s there was a turning point in Ahdut ha-Avoda as the party gave up its aspiration to control the economy via Hevrat ha-Ovdim and opted for political leadership of the country. They decided to collaborate with the Liberals and the immediate result was a decrease in the percentage of agricultural workers from 60% to only 30%.

Tabenkin reacted by forming an opposition in the party and Histadrut and demanding the return to the original program of Ahdut ha-Avoda. He expressed this opposition in October 1926 at the fifth convention of Ahdut ha-Avoda:

We must once again raise the red flag, the flag of physical labor, of egalitarian values, of an untiring pioneering spirit... There is only a single option to return to our former program of nationalized capital, land and the pioneering effort. Without these Eretz Israel will not be rebuilt.

Tabenkin was aware not only of the slow progress of Hevrat ha-Ovdim, but also of the internal weakness in Labor, the increasing bureaucracy, inequality and lack of motivation. He objected to the administrative form of Hamashbir<sup>41</sup> and Shikun Ovdim<sup>42</sup>. "We rely too much on administrative measures and too little on the worker. This poses a danger to our Histadrut and its integrity."

In 1927 the Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad was established. It was Tabenkin's answer to the regression in the labor movement. He claimed that the kibbutz was the foundation of a working Eretz Israel. In those years he expressed his growing disappointment with the urban communitarian settlements and hoped that the Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad would undertake the establishment of both rural and urban kibbutzim.

After having opted for the political road, Ahdut ha-Avoda no longer regarded the kibbutz as its vanguard. Tabenkin expressed his bitterness at a meeting of the Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad executive. "The pride of our party, the course which was to have been right for the entire working class, has suddenly become the course of the kibbutz alone".

He now put the responsibility for a workers' economy on the kibbutz's shoulders and said that they would prove to be one of the most sincere attempts at socialism throughout the world. Although he had put his hopes on the kibbutz, Tabenkin continued to fight within the Histadrut and the party.

At the 1931 Histadrut Council, he was in the minority when he fought against the abolishment of the autonomous "workers' educational system"<sup>43</sup>. Even though he was realistic enough to see the way the wind was blowing, he continued to oppose certain trends, urging the kibbutz to get more involved. In 1932 he said, "Our activities in towns and moshavot are crucial for the entire communitarian settlement movement".

On the occasion of the establishment of the urban kibbutz at Efal, in 1949, Tabenkin said, "Throughout the years our weakest point has been in the establishment of urban communes..." It was to be the last attempt.

Until the end of his life he fought for a strong Hevrat ha-Ovdim, for an independent workers' educational system, for an autonomous Histadrut, for equality and cooperation and for a strong settlement movement.

He said, "There are two ways to realise the Zionist vision, the capitalist and the settlement way. The contrast between these is expressed in the class struggle and will determine the fate of the country and of millions of Jews.. I fear complete bankruptcy if we leave the job to others..."

## COMMUNAL CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Tabenkin has been presented as a disciple of Syrkin and opposed to Borochov. Let us now examine his unique position between the two. In regard to the role of the class struggle in Zionism, Borochov and Syrkin were poles apart, and in that respect Tabenkin identified with neither. Borochov had seen no place or possibility for the class struggle in the Diaspora and understood that the solution to the problems of the Jewish workers would be found only in their immigration to Eretz Israel. Eretz Israel would be built on a capitalistic basis which would supply the proletariat with the needed strategic position to wage the class struggle which would create the socialist state. Borochov gave the workers the role of liberators rather than builders; in this he remained an orthodox Marxist. Seeing no place for the class struggle within the Zionist movement, he was against the participation of Po'alei Zion in the Zionist organization.

Syrkin, on the other hand, regarded Zionism as being realised by the building of a socialist-cooperative society by the working class and supported by the entire Jewish people and Zionist movement. This was so self-evident, logical and just to him that he did not take into account any opposition and the idea of a class struggle played no part in his thinking. Although in most matters Tabenkin was closer to Syrkin than to Borochov, he said, "*Being a utopian, Syrkin disregarded the class struggle within the Zionist movement and thought that his program would be carried out by all the Zionists. In that respect, Borochov proved to be right*".

Tabenkin regarded the class struggle as a salvation force and saw no reason why the Zionist movement should object to Hevrat ha-Ovdim. Neither did he see any controversy between constructivism and class struggle. The latter was just one of the principal expressions of constructivism and the workers had to undertake both tasks, that of constructing and that of liberating.

He elaborated on this when speaking to German immigrants at Givat Brenner in 1935.

Once there was a notion about two separate periods in the labor movement the first, a period of revolution and war and the second, a period for constructing... However, since the first period has already lasted over a hundred years, one cannot wait, this generation must also build. We must educate a fighter and a builder one who has both

characteristics: the courage to hate and the calmness and the self-assurance to build. It is symbolized via the plough and the rifle...

The collapse of capitalism has lasted decades. Zionism is a part of the socialist revolution. Just as the Russian revolution would have no meaning without the five year plan. Constructivist socialism must also be a fighting socialism.

At a seminar in 1964 Tabenkin explained the point.

To see constructivism and class struggle as two separate stages, is nowadays a dated concept... In the 20th century the class struggle is in every country but there is also a co-existence. However, no capitalist flexibility is going to prevent the final battle of transferring all the means of production to the people. The biggest danger faced by a socialist party is the notion that one can leave the means of production, the land ownership and the technological knowhow in private hands.

Tabenkin regarded the settlements as a cardinal expression of the class struggle and Hevrat ha-Ovdim as a battlefield. He perceived the workers' struggle for freedom within the capitalist system as an integral part of the class struggle. This, in turn, led to the union between the majority in Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad and the radical wing of the urban trade unions, and to the establishment of "Sia B" in the 1940s.

The first signs of this development had appeared in 1934, when Ben-Gurion returned from London where he had come to an understanding with Ze'ev Jabotinsky<sup>44</sup>. In order to put an end to violence between Revisionist workers and members of the Histadrut, he had agreed to give up the freedom to strike. Tabenkin opposed this agreement with all his strength. Joining the radicals within the Histadrut and Mapai, he declared that he did not believe in peace at the expense of the workers who would have to give up their strike weapon. On October 31st, 1939, he said, "It is an act of violence to deprive those who don't control the means of production of their freedom to strike and the power of the state is to make a slave of the workers. Mandatory arbitration is nothing but cancelling the right to strike".

According to Israel Kolath, Tabenkin regarded the Histadrut as a means



## THE REALIZATION OF SOCIALISM

of establishing a classless society by abolishing private property. The fight with the Revisionists was a part of this concept. The leadership under Ben-Gurion and Berl Katznelson, on the other hand, regarded the Histadrut as an organization which would combine social and economic activities in order to effect society as a whole without being instrumental in the class struggle.

Tabenkin defined his ideas at a kibbutz teachers' meeting.

According to Marx, the working class is an *avant-garde*.

It goes ahead of the camp and as a result of its struggle will bring salvation to humanity. Hence the workers have a national as well as an international responsibility, the class struggle must lead to the unity of the entire nation. Those who demand an inter-class unity will cause nothing but discord for eternity. We aspire to achieve unity via the class struggle. That's what the Jabotinsky agreement is all about... Ben-Gurion agreed to it only in order to be popular with the people...

One of the slogans of the workers movement in Eretz Israel was the idea "from a class to a people". Ben-Gurion took this slogan as the title for his book on the Histadrut. It referred to Ben-Gurion's opposition to the narrow class struggle. He aspired to influence and to lead the entire nation.

It seems as though Tabenkin had been the first to coin this phrase, but with an utterly different meaning. In 1919, at the founding convention of Ahdut ha-Avoda, he had said, "The labor movement is not merely class oriented, but aspires to instill the entire nation with its doctrine, not just lead the way, but be the nation, create a working nation..."

In 1944, after the split from Mapai, Aharon Zisling<sup>45</sup> defined the controversy clearly.

Class independence is in no way opposed to national unity, on the contrary, only a certain regime requires the obscurity of its character. We are not one of those. From a class to a people but not by abolishing class independence, and not even by achieving the supremacy of the working class, but by abolishing classes altogether.

Tabenkin added, "From a class to a people but not a working class which precedes the people, but one that is the people. The Histadrut and the party are the people. In Marxist terms the abolishment of the classes. In A.D. Gordon's<sup>46</sup> terms A Working People (Am Oved)".

The people of the Second Aliya\* were characterized by their ardent wish for action and realization. In fact, they had immigrated in protest against the lack of both in the Zionist organization and in the Jewish labor movement abroad. Early in the century, these two large Eastern European movements had come up against a stalemate. Zionism was concerned mainly with Herzl's political and diplomatic efforts which only led to the "Uganda affair", to Territorialism, Autonomism and Sejmism.

Po'alei Zion had arrived at the conclusion that there was no "strategic foundation" for a Jewish class struggle and offered its members absolutely no practical activities. Even though those who had believed in the Russian revolution, like the Bund<sup>47</sup> and others, were disappointed after the 1905 fiasco. There ensued an endless and fruitless preoccupation with political discussions, the formulating of new platforms and a futile hair-splitting aptly described by J.H. Brenner<sup>48</sup> in his novels.

The few who came on *Aliya* in those years did not do so for ideological reasons, but because they felt deeply revolted by the politics of the Jewish establishment in Eastern Europe or in Whitechapel. Realizing this fact, one can understand their aversion to all parties and their preference for action.

Tabenkin was among the most determined and his convictions eventually chrysalized and formed his doctrine. He expressed his feelings on several occasions.

Generation-old theories are not going to relieve Zionism or socialism from the task of realisation...

Pioneering is more effective than speech making... We don't aspire to communalism — we realise it. Other may consider themselves communists when, in fact, they are nothing but self-centered. From a political point of view they may, perhaps, be communists, but in practice they are Philistines who have achieved nothing but decay...

In 1950 he went even further, "There are millions of communists throughout the world — but only a few thousand who realize their theory, who live community..." Nonetheless he admired the greatness of Marx because he had insisted on practical socialism. "Marx found the way to the realization of socialism... The Marxist doctrine has prevailed because of its ardent wish for realisation."

According to Tabenkin there was no dichotomy between the means and

the aims, between theory and practice. As soon as the means had become identical to the aims, socialism was no longer a vision, but had become a reality, and the creation of a socialist man had become an imperative.

"Socialism now" was the motto. It had to protect the labor movement from the bitter disappointments of not achieving its aims. After all, their time had not been wasted in idle political thought or futile action. This being one of Tabenkin's most profound convictions, it justifies further examination, as, for example, a lecture he gave in 1943.

Pioneering is a simple concept, do with your life whatever you consider to be important for your people. Do it personally — and if you love Eretz Israel, don't put it off till next year come on Aliya now! ... If you believe that the future of the world depends on the victory of the working classes, don't be satisfied with your membership in a political party — be a worker! Start out as a Jewish farmer, realise your dreams, become a pioneer.

Earlier, in 1933, he expressed himself in the same vein at somewhat greater length.

Every revolutionary movement demands a change in the individual's life, a change in his moral and humanist values. It is not merely a matter of formality, the question of private or collective ownership, but of egalitarian relations. It is a question of providing the individual's needs and appreciating his creativity... this is the foundation of all utopian thought in the labor movement...

In the international labor movements, revolutionary ardor is expressed through a person's political commitment, in our movement every individual experiences a personal revolution on coming to Eretz Israel, after he has created a completely new attitude to others and to the nature around him... The entire movement aspires to create a working society and a new way of life which is not based on selfishness... Kibbutz values are not expressed through an ideology, but through a day to day realization... Kibbutz is not just an instrument, but a value per se... We reject the argument

about the issue of whether the kibbutz is an instrument or a target... after all, our life is instrumental in achieving Zionist socialism. Every member is instrumental and so is the entire labor organization

In 1938, while Nazism was rapidly spreading, and the labour movements in Europe had shown their weakness, Tabenkin talked to new immigrants from Germany in Givat Brenner.

We are not content with generalizations. We demand aliya now! We demand the realisation of communism and egalitarianism. It is the one and only practical approach to our revolution which was started decades ago... The Messiah may arrive sooner or later, nobody is sure when — but one thing is certain a part of him arrives with every one of you, who comes to Eretz Israel... Those who only belong to a Zionist or a socialist party and don't realise their vision, will eventually feel cheated. We are different from our friends in other socialist parties who declare: a new society will be achieved! We demand of you to be the ones to establish it.

Tabenkin blamed the German socialists and communists for their shameful defeat. Both parties were the same in practice and only their declarations differed. The Austrian socialists, on the other hand, stood up and fought the Nazis because they had different values: a love for the working man; solidarity; friendship; collectivism; and a practical approach to socialist values rather than just abstract programs. The heroic stand of the Viennese workers was of the same origin as that of Tel Hai<sup>49</sup> — socialist realisation and the creation of a socialist individual.

The priorities of Tabenkin's realisation theory made the formulating of an ideology redundant. According to Tabenkin himself, at the Histadrut Council in 1928, "... Some of you may wish for a program... However it is shallow optimism to think that the formulation of a platform is preconditional... Our settlement policy is *the program per se* and not its pre-condition".

Tabenkin devoted most of his life to Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad. He aspired to establish "a socialist movement which was not just a political idea but a human one and a yardstick for our ideals."

Hence the difficulty in defining Tabenkin's ideology — for, after all, his

priorities were realisation and settlement. Any ideology which was not an act of realisation was unacceptable. Tabenkin's ideology was first and foremost concerned with the realisation of kibbutz, Hisadrut and the Yishuv<sup>50</sup>.

## CHAPTER TWO

### VOLUNTARY SOCIALISM

Lately, doubts have been raised whether determinist materialism was imminent within Marxism. Students of Marx' early philosophical writings are beginning to realise that his historical materialism was not as simple as had been surmised for many decades.

In his book "The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx" (1957), Shlomo Avineri deals with this issue. The chapter "Homo Faber" is based on the early writings of Marx which were published only in the 1930s. The conceptual world in Marx' theory of consciousness is the result of man's actions or social activity, in interaction with material conditions in nature, Man's actions and social activities create the object.

The first to connect Zionism and Marxism was Borochoy whose concept of Marxist was extremely deterministic. He regarded Zionism "an immanent process of immigration" and Eretz Israel as the most suitable place from the economic and physical aspect. Not so Syrkin, who was far from being a Marxist and who believed in the power of ideology and commonsense.

The labor movement could not exclusively adopt the classical Marxist attitude of Borochoy. Borochoyism could not explain the reality encountered by the Second Aliya pioneers. The labor movement in Eretz Israel was not created by a proletariat, but rather by people who had consciously opted for the socialist way and turned into proletarians.

They were not compelled by predestination but by economic factors. Each and everyone had immigrated from free choice, motivated by his convictions. Here, in the new country, they created a working class and organized a socialist society not as the result of any capitalist crisis, but in order to realise their ideology. It was left to Tabenkin to reconcile Borochoy's and Syrkin's doctrines with the reality of Eretz Israel.

## TABENKIN'S VOLUNTARISM

Tabenkin's public life started with the debate on Borocho's "Prognostic Palestine" versus the concept of "Principalist Palestine". Even then Tabenkin's voluntarist attitude was clearly evident.

Years later, in 1943, Tabenkin eulogized his mentor: "...And so I was also his rival... With others I fought against his ineffectual fatalism, against his concept of predestination... the State of Israel would never have been established".

Tabenkin not only criticized Borocho's "Historical Process" but he also adopted it as evidenced by his lecture at the kibbutz seminar in Ein-Harod in 1937.

Borocho's immense importance lies in the fact that his prognosis instilled the people with an enormous confidence in their efforts and struggles. However, from there it is only a step to an "ineffectual fatalism"...

Borocho's prognostic-fatalistic theories were the result of the difficulties encountered in the effort of realisation... Prognosticism was the cause for Po'alei Zion's deterioration. It is opposed to revolutionary socialism.

At a teacher's conference in 1956 Tabenkin defined his criticism of Syrkin's concept of voluntarism.

Voluntarism is utopian when it has no historical causes. But historical causes are realised via voluntarism. Syrkin's error was his lack of proportion... He believed that it would suffice to encourage people to establish cooperative settlements. The love of Eretz Israel was not arbitrary but historical. It was not a question of voluntarism but of objectivity. Causes are not resolved in a mechanical-fatalistic manner, but via voluntarism... An objective reality creates an objective will. Voluntarism is utopian only if it is opposed to an objective-historical reality.

Early on, as evidenced by his words at a kibbutz council in 1933, Tabenkin was aware of the connection between the debate on voluntarism and the discussion about constructive socialism.

The kibbutz was not established arbitrarily. It is not merely a voluntary phenomenon. Freedom of choice does not exist, the will is not unconditional, it is indispensable. Therefore the ideological awareness of kibbutz members is imperative. It will help us to understand the dependence of the creative instincts of our way of kibbutz life in the class and national struggles.

Tabenkin's voluntarism was expressed in his unique attitude to the state and political power, it was not merely his opposition to predestination, but also to all forms of *Etatism* and government control. He based his voluntarism on the labor movement's experience in the pre-State days when everything had been done voluntarily.

In 1961 he said, "In the pre-State days, we never relied on political power...the state was the creation of an historical imperative... there was no element of government and everything was based on our free will..."

Even after the State of Israel had been established, Tabenkin called for a continuation of voluntarism. He claimed that the most cardinal processes such as aliya, fund-raising, security and settlement, could not be achieved without it.

## A THEORETICAL EXAMINATION

According to Tabenkin, voluntarism was not contrary to Marxism, it was an improved understanding of Marx. Fifty years after the death of Marx, in 1933, he spoke about "Marx the Symbol". His statements were not only different but opposed to the generally accepted views of Marxists on Marx.

"There is nobody better known, no one who has affected people's lives and their struggles more profound than Marx. He has become a symbol and flag of socialism. Why?"

Tabenkin went on to point out that Marx had not joined the labor movement for material reasons. Just like the people of the Second Aliya, he had never been a laborer, but had been influenced by Hegel and motivated by an idea. In common with Hegel, he regarded humanity in the light of its ideals and their realisation.

"Marx aspired to recognize the ways to realisation and instill the people

with them. Most of his opponents don't fear this idea or another, they fear Marx's entire ideology which is his concept of realisation".

Tabenkin's analysis is original and differs from that of his contemporaries in regard to several relevant points. Marx was generally regarded as *the* labor movement's theorist, while Tabenkin admired his practical approach to realisation. Most socialists chose to obscure Marx' non-proletarian origins and emphasize his years of poverty. Tabenkin, on the other hand, admired him for adhering to his convictions in spite of his origins.

Marxists believe that Marx freed Hegelianism from its ideological point of departure and from regarding history as a process of realisation. Tabenkin presented Marx as a loyal disciple of Hegel, especially in this regard.

Tabenkin saw his activity as an attempt to create a reality which conformed with his ideals. Talking to new immigrants at Giv'at Brenner he said, "Our kibbutzim offer an historical objectivity which is being realised daily...and even if it sometimes seems as though we are ruled by dogma, it is merely a yardstick with which we measure our reality critically".

Tabenkin's reservations towards religion were inspired by his determinism.

There is no return to religion. It is not truth, it does not withstand the test of reality and is, therefore, harmful. It prevents a person from seeing reality and is an expression of a person's dependence on exterior factors... Atheism is a higher level of perception of life and death, of the spiritual and the material...

Tabenkin's voluntary-activist attitude was not only politically-historically motivated but had a sociological-philosophical depth. According to him the means of production were not determined but conditional. He preferred to use the term "culture" (spiritual and material) instead of means of production in order to stress the fact that the superstructure-society (culture and free will) were also a part of the means of production.

Several lectures of his, at Efa<sup>51</sup>, were devoted to an analysis of his voluntarist philosophy:

Human consciousness is an integral part of the objective world. Consciousness is an active phenomenon. One

cannot perceive the world per se, unless one is an object of reality. Even the subject is objective. Human society is influenced and influential. I exist only by being active within the objective world.

Some matters may withstand determination; but there is nothing in society, in history, in humanity, in life, without determination. It is not arbitrary, but an integral part of the objective world. A movement has no less objective value than the reality in which it exists. Ideas and values are objectively valuable. There is a relation, a dependence, a unity, between the subject and the object, between existence and consciousness, but existence is not the result of consciousness. The subject is part of the object and not vice versa...

The philosophical concept of the real world, the realistic one, is action... There is no static matter, only the moving one... Life is movement... This means work and man's involvement in the universe, - human life is one of toil and I don't mean the social or historical aspect, but the philosophical one: the same outlook which Marx seems to have ignored once he had entered the public and political life...

Tabenkin was also influenced by A.D. Gordon, with whom he agreed on identity between cosmos and work. He was aware of this influence even though he never considered himself a Gordonist. In fact, he may have been closer to Gordon than most of the people of the Second Aliya, and he always regarded him as one of his teachers. He took from Gordon as he took from Borochov and from Syrkin. From their conflicting doctrines, Tabenkin produced his own unique *Weltanschauung*.

Summing up his doctrine in 1961 he said, "Our movement is vitally important for the Jewish people, however, it can achieve its doctrine only on a voluntary basis".

## CHAPTER THREE

# SOCIALISM, GOVERNMENT AND ETATISM

## THE DANGER OF POLITICAL POWER

Tabenkin was often half-seriously accused of "anarchist deviance". He once remarked, "I am aware of the fact that my sons and other people think that I have anarchist sympathies. I don't. But though I accept the revolutionary aspect of anarchism and its morals, I nevertheless am an anti-anarchist".

Tabenkin's adamant rejection of any form of government was unique among non-anarchist socialists. It was not merely a rationalistic-ideological phenomenon, but a deeply emotional one. Tabenkin often related two stories which may illustrate the point.

When Tabenkin was eight years old his father was arrested by the Tsarist gendarmes, and died in prison. This traumatic experience affected him deeply. The picture of the police breaking in, smashing the furniture and taking his father away, left an indelible impression. This goes a long way in explaining his attitude towards uniforms, police, violence and political power.

Tabenkin also used to tell the New Testament story about Jesus meeting the Devil, who tried to tempt him. The most tempting offer was that of political power, through which he might achieve all his aspirations. Yet Jesus withstood even this temptation and eventually achieved his aims in his own way. Tabenkin himself had a pessimistic view of political power:

It makes sense that political power is so very tempting for human beings. It leads to the illusion that everything is possible, communism, socialism, statehood, all may be achieved without education, without economic considerations, without morality or art. But this is far from being the case. Everything, the economy, education, morals, art, will eventually be subjugated to serve the government.

The capitalist society was defined by Tabenkin in the anarchist term of "the ruling society" and he often said that "Government equals inequality". According to him, all socialist-national aims lay in a government-less society. "There are no communist states, only communal societies". Jewish independence was to be achieved without statehood or political power. "Our only hope is Zionism, an independent people in their own country... I put all my hopes into our universal revolution and the abolishment of all governments throughout the world".

In 1942 Tabenkin said, "We can't expect peace, just a long and bloody war... It will be over only when all governments have been abolished".

Although he abhorred all forms of government and feared their threat, Tabenkin nevertheless acknowledged their necessity.

There was a man who opted for a governmentless course; his name was Tolstoy. Did he have any hope to free the Russian peasants? Did he have a chance to achieve the freedom of his convictions as long as there were tsars, gendarmes, landowners, or a middle class that had turned Russia into a colony? Just as we had no choice but voluntarism, they had no option but to adopt the political course. But they also used fire and with this they burned everything they had fought for, human attitudes, education and constructiveness. Still, there is some progress.

One has to realise Tabenkin's difficulties. In those few lines he faces the dilemma of whether to use political power or not.

He elaborated on this dilemma at a workers' meeting in 1944.

The labor movement hopes to educate a free man and establish a brotherhood of the working people of all nations. But our aim will not be achieved without a struggle. The labor movement exists within the State, and the State presents the rule of one class over all others. Socialism cannot be achieved without the political power of the State, and the constant contact with that power presents a real danger to the labor movement itself... The aim does not justify the means but the means are not determined only by the aims... they are determined also

by the opponent...if you are forced into a fight you should never preach sermons while your opponent aims his gun...

Tabenkin was aware of the destructive forces inherent in political power. In a talk given in 1961 he regarded even Stalin as a victim:

If Stalin had been an ordinary member of a kibbutz, he might have become the general secretary who stirred up the members against him and his methods, but he would never have wielded any power, used concentration camps, murder and other forms of deviance in order to achieve his "communist" aims. As a young man in Georgia, Russia, he did not deliberately choose a career of power, he merely joined a revolutionary movement and was sent to Siberia for fighting the authorities; but when he reached power after the Bolsheviks's victory, he was a power-hungry despot and we all know that he killed his opponents, his friends and finally the very ideal which elevated him and put the power into his hands. It is indeed difficult to wield power in order to achieve non-power.

#### REALIZATION WITHOUT POLITICAL POWER

Although Tabenkin was aware of the danger of political power, he realised that the labor movement would eventually have to make use of the State.

The use of power is like the use of fire one must beware of getting burned in the process. Anarchism has departed from the stage of history. It has become evident that one cannot proceed directly from capitalism to a government-less society.

doubted whether this applied also to the global labor movements.

Because of our 2000 years of statelessness, the Jewish people can choose the voluntary way. I doubt if the whole world will follow us...

Out of necessity we have taken a different road from that of the Soviet Union. This, however, is a blessing in disguise. Having been dispersed in foreign countries

without being able to enforce our authority, our organization, or even a common language, we have come to accept that national independence does not have to be based on power and violence, but is dependent on our free will alone. The rule of the law is indeed bitter, but voluntarism and free will are also under a tremendous pressure of the economy, history and of political forces.

From a number of aspects, constructive socialism can serve as an alternative to political power: as long as the purpose is not economic and social dominance but the construction of an economy and a society and as long as the intention is the creation of a working class and not its political dominance.

Evidently political action always aspires to achieve political power and influence. Thus the objection to political power leads to a rejection of political activities.

In 1919 Ahdut ha-Avoda was established, and a naive belief in Hevrat ha-Ovdim still prevailed. The entire movement rejected all political activities as well as parties in general. Katznelson summed up the movement's attitude succinctly.

We don't aspire to form a party. At the core of every party there is political power, propaganda, elections and politics in general. The balance shifts from the individual and his inner strength to the center, the leader, the establishment... A working community in Eretz Israel will never be established on political foundations.

In 1920, the Yiddish periodical "Tribune" published Jabotinsky's anti-Bolshevik article in which he warned against the danger for the Jewish State. In his reply, J.H. Brenner expressed the labor movement's attitude to Etatism.

We are not keen on Etatism or on any form of political dealings... We are not after a kingdom but we aspire to establish a modest Jewish community in which every young person can find his place. We want a country based on the toil of our hands, on a humane, socialist culture... and even if we dislike Lenin, it does not mean that we agree with his opponents. We don't fear Bolshevism

because it endangers Etatism but because of the Etatism inherent in Bolshevism itself.

Tabenkin's objection to Etatism did not have any anarchist significance. He was all for organization, discipline and social authority, but he rejected political power as he stated quite clearly in 1924.

Communism does not mean formal equality, but the authority of a society over the economy. In our case this means the Histadrut's authority over the kibbutz economy and its development. While the entire world is dependent on the prevalent political powers, we are, first and foremost, concerned with the internal organization of our members and of our farms.

At the same conference a constitution was tabled, proposing to hand over some of the political power to the people. Tabenkin spoke up against the proposal and demanded that all efforts should be invested in non-political activities. "We have the feeling that every economy, cultural and social action is more important than national autonomy."

Talking to immigrants from Germany in 1935, he again stressed that "the basis for workers' achievements was revolutionary rather than political."

The issue of a Jewish State arose in the summer of 1937 after the British Peel Commission had presented its findings on the Palestine problem. They proposed a partition of Western Palestine, with a Jewish government in a small area.

The majority of Mapai led by Ben-Gurion, were all in favor of adopting this proposal. Tabenkin protested and until his last day he violently rejected any form of partition. Without examining his attitude towards partition, let us clarify one point: his rejection was in part due to his opposition to any form of government and political power. Ben-Gurion and his followers, on the other hand, supported partition because of their aspiration to Statehood and their belief in the power of Etatism.

Prior to the Zionist Congress in 1938, Zisling said, "We are all attracted to the mirage of statehood to such an extent that we have lost our sense of proportion and the very foundations of our movement have been undermined. On the same occasion Ben-Gurion and Eliezer Kaplan (1891-1951), the finance man of the Labor movement, spoke in favor of partition and stressed the importance of political power and statehood.

In addition to his objection to partition per se, Tabenkin drew attention to the danger of Etatism which would cause the Yishuv to neglect its pioneering spirit. It would cease to regard the return to physical labor and life in rural areas as its prime target.

Education will be aimed at preparing youth for the army, for office work, for brokerage. Instead of the simple, healthy life of work and activities people will have to study diplomacy and politics... Nationalism will strangle all socialist trends... A State is not a homeland, it is not our final aspiration, still, a sovereign State in the entire Eretz Israel is important.

Again and again Tabenkin attacked the "fetishism of Etatism," the notion that an establishment of a Jewish State was a precondition of settlement. Throughout the debate over partition, he repeated his warning and insisted that the situation was comparable to the Uganda affair. It was a struggle against the illusion of political-diplomatic solutions to human problems. Bartering our agricultural lands for the sake of a State was the same as giving up true values for false ones.

In the spirit of the Second Aliya pioneers, Tabenkin fought consistently against Ben-Gurion's political Zionism. When in 1944 a new Ahdut ha-Avoda party was established, it adopted an anti-partition platform. The Biltmore Program<sup>22</sup> was attacked in a programmatic article written by the publicist Menachem Dornan who explained that the movement had never regarded statehood and a Jewish government as its ideal.

One of the leaders of Mapai and previous head of its populist wing, Pinchas Lavon, (1904-1976) wondered how some of the most zealous anti-British fighters were among those who opposed partition and wanted the despised British Mandate to carry on.

The writer Aharon Meged (1920), a follower of Tabenkin, who accused Mapai of having lost its faith in the people, replied to Lavon...

They nowadays believe mainly in management, in jobs, in administration... They oppose illegal immigration and the Hagana and instead propose an army wearing uniforms and commanded by generals... They objected to fighting the "White Paper" with the help of the people and rather fight it through administrative measures...



Ahdut ha-Avoda continued to reject the partition plan almost to the last moment. Even in 1947, after the U.N. commission had published its findings on the British Mandate in Palestine, Ahdut ha-Avoda spoke up in favor of an international mandate. Its platform ignored all mention of statehood and demanded only *aliya*, settlement, and a promise of Jewish rights and independence in the entire country.

In November, 1947 the demand for a State appeared for the first time. Tabenkin declared that although a Jewish State was the ultimate aim, it should, nevertheless, be the final stage of the Zionist settlement process and not its beginning. In fact, it might even take generations to accomplish.

Tabenkin's consistent objection to the State, in spite of the Mandate's failure and regardless of his active struggle against the British, must have had deeper motives than his opposition to partition.

M. Shertok<sup>53</sup> was probably right when he assumed that Tabenkin's objection to partition was a matter of principle. In fact, during the years to come, this issue would crop up again and again, and would become the cardinal reason for the schism within Mapai. It was a question of two different concepts which could not be reconciled within one party.

Those who foster the false notion that Zionism and socialism will be achieved merely through political power, rely on the party while all the rest, the Histadrut, the Yishuv, Zionism, the settlement organizations, the youth movements, and all our other achievements, are regarded as merely technical means...

The difference between Mapai and us is not just a matter of political priorities but of our concept of a party per se... When Mapai severed its ties with the settlement movement at the Kfar Vitkin conference, it ceased to be the same party it had been since its inception. It turned into a "party of the State" and regarded political power as the only means of achieving Zionism...

During the intoxicating period after the State of Israel had been established, Tabenkin was filled with fear for the Eretz Israel socialism, for Hevrat ha-Ovdim, for his constructivist way to Zionism. He ever warned of the immediate danger to Zionism itself and never agreed, as witness his statement in 1954, that the State should undertake the voluntarist, non-political tasks of the labor movement.

Declarations and politics are not going to establish settlements. Even if we eventually join the government, we will not be able to achieve more than Mapai has done so far... We are not going to nationalize the banks because the Jews of the world would stop investing their money. There is no alternative to voluntarism. We will never opt for the Soviet way of communism and Zionism will not be achieved in this country before it has become the territorial center for all the Jews...

Tabenkin, who fought Etatism throughout his life, summed up his doctrine in 1967.

...to create an intellectual working class, farmers, workers, artists... to create social facts never known before, that is the task of the kibbutz, of the Histadrut... 18 years of Statehood have not succeeded in destroying these living organism, these economic, educational organizations, but they have emptied them of much of their content... Although the State is a necessary evil it must not replace voluntarism... The focus of our life is the people and not the State.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# SOCIALISM AND THE NATION

## SOURCES

Was the Second Aliya a national or a socialist movement? Were the founders of Ahdut ha-Avoda in 1919 concerned with national or socialist issues?

Any attempt to answer these questions would be futile because it is impossible to separate the national vision of the founding fathers from their socialist one.

The Bund proposed to solve the Jewish problem via the class struggle and the global victory of socialism. Borochoy, on the other hand, believed in the realisation of Zionism first by the middle classes, and only afterwards by a Jewish workers' "war of liberation". Syrkin envisioned the realisation of Zionism via socialism, but he did not admit the need for a class struggle within the Jewish people and for Zionist realization.

Tabenkin and the founders of Ahdut ha-Avoda regarded the class struggle as a means of solving the Jewish national problem. They made no distinctions between Zionism and socialism. Their attitude was an organic part of the labor movement which undertook responsibility for the entire nation, and it was summed up clearly by Tabenkin.

I was never merely a Zionist or merely a Socialist. Our movement aspires to free the Jewish people through work and through the creation of a working class. That is our Zionist socialism... Our labor movement... is national oriented in its aims and means, the working man is deeply involved in the national struggle... There is no place for

socialism unless it is national oriented just as there is no future for nationalism unless it is socialist... Zionism and socialism are not two separate concepts. The present day reality of Zionism and our security problems require greater numbers, and the immigration of thousands of Jews to work and settle here...

Tabenkin's socialism was fundamentally Zionist, as can be seen from a statement made in 1926.

The red flag requires no addition in order to express loyalty to our nation. The same flag is an expression of our national distress as well as a guide in search of a way. Our great struggle, the effort of the Jewish masses in building up Eretz Israel also includes our class struggle, our search for a way...

It was an odd combination of social and national radicalism. In some aspects, Tabenkin was not far from Soviet communism and unrelenting in his support of the class struggle. He opposed any form of reconciliation between the classes. Nonetheless, he also fought the various proposals of partition of Eretz Israel and was an activist in security affairs.

According to Tabenkin and his contemporaries of the Second Aliya, proletarianization and the establishment of Hevrat ha-Ovdim were the one and only way to realise their Zionist socialist vision after the Uganda affair.

## THE NATION

The prevailing conditions in Eretz Israel and in the labor movement were the background for Tabenkin's critical attitude towards classical socialism and communism and their concept of nationalism as a necessary evil.

According to Tabenkin, nationalism, national culture and existence, were the only expressions of human existence. "The nation is the one and only expression of civilized humanity. Culture is universal but the form it takes is always national. Matter without form, without movement, is a negation of dialectic materialism."

He rejected the notion that nationalism was a capitalist phenomenon which would disintegrate once capitalism had been abolished. "Some day, perhaps, all nations will cease to exist but not in our time... A nation

requires territory in order to enhance its human, social and individual development.”

In a booklet, “Consistency and Change of Socialist Concepts” (1958) Tabenkin defined his attitude towards the national problem and its origins.

When we attempt to define our aims and the current trends, I would like to stress that this is a period of transition from capitalism to communism. Communism equals an organized society in which peoples and individuals enjoy equal rights. Internationalism is as important as the liberation from slavery, as women’s liberation, as the freedom of nations. It is a process in which discrimination against people and against economic, national, racial and sexual oppression will eventually be abolished. From its inception, our movement adopted the motto ‘Workers of all nations unite’ instead of Marx’ slogan ‘Workers of all countries unite’. In other words, we, the Zionist labor movement, have always regarded man’s affinity to his national as equalling his affinity to humanity... We need an international labor movement in which no single country enjoys supremacy neither the Russians nor the British or the Americans, but an international movement with equal rights for every nation, as the most oppressed of all the nations, the Jews, will serve as a yardstick...

One of Marx’ principles must, therefore, be reassessed history is not just the story of the class struggle. It is the development of classes and of people, their wars, their creations... Human culture progresses only in national environment... A real international solidarity does not mean that nations have to disappear, but that they should unite in a brotherhood of equals, in which all enjoy the same rights to progress.

Our enterprise dictates our attitude towards international socialism. A socialist party is obliged to formulate a program for its people and its country.

Marxism was wrong not only about the Jewish

problem, but also in diminishing the value of nationalism in the past, present and future.

Tabenkin could not accept the rule of one single International over all the labor movements in the world. He naturally objected to the concept of “a single way to socialism”, as he stated quite clearly in 1940.

Reality has created a different kind of socialism in every country and period... There is no place for socialism if it entails the abolition of nations... The communist attitude towards nations is the result of Marx’ and ultimately of Stalin’s cosmopolitanism.

This may explain why Tabenkin, even when he was not far from Soviet communism ideologically, never joined that movement in one way or another. He put his “orientation on ourselves.” His affinity to the U.S.S.R was always motivated by his attitude to the Eretz Israel labor movement and not the result of his need to rely on external and international forces. Tabenkin’s stands on the relationship with world communism, his preference for a national party instead of a territorialist party and the question of joining a Mapai government eventually caused a schism within Mapam.

CHAPTER FIVE  
TABENKIN'S ORIENTATION TOWARDS GLOBAL  
LABOR MOVEMENTS

Even though we have already noticed that Tabenkin's ideology was not oriented toward a single trend in the variegated movements, a review of his attitude towards them may contribute to a better understanding of his unique brand of socialism.

TABENKIN AND SOVIET COMMUNISM

Tabenkin's attitude towards Soviet communism is still a matter of controversy. Among the founding fathers of Ahdut ha-Avoda he was unique in his adherence to the U.S.S.R. This was a principle cause of friction in the labor movement. Yet in spite of it, he never adopted the international communist attitude in matters pertaining to nationalism and Zionism. He adhered to his motto "orientation on ourselves" and said, "We have been attracted to communism since its inception in Russia. Our affinity with it is decades old... Yet we are not prepared to be a copy of that original..."

Tabenkin's relations to communism were somewhat like a blood relationship. He used to stress that Po'alei Zion, the Bund and the Russian S.D. had all been established at the same time, early in the 20th century, in the same Russian Empire, and by the same kind of people, in order to solve similar problems but in different ways. Tabenkin's father had been among the founders of the first Social Democratic organization in Poland and he himself had participated in the anti-Tsarist revolutionary movement.

Educated largely in Russian revolutionary terms, he was closer to the Russian way of thought than to the European one. This goes a long way to explain his affinity with Bolshevism, but there must have been additional reasons.

The post-war revolutionary wave which swept through much of Europe,

was the background for the establishment of Ahdut ha-Avoda in 1919. Speaking in 1937 in Ein-Harod, Tabenkin described the situation as part and parcel of the Soviet revolution, a class organization with political orientations. Wagons laden with workers from the Galilee and from the towns, ex-soldiers in their long-coats, carrying their guns, all arrived at Petah Tikva, in order to participate at the founding ceremony of Ahdut ha-Avoda. (The situation was almost identical to any in Russia, Bavaria or Hungary of those days). Their intention was to unite in order to create a workers' dictatorship.

The receding wave of the revolution throughout the world and the comeback of the lower-middle classes in Germany, Hungary and Eretz Israel, resulted in the failure of the Soviet concept. According to Tabenkin, Ahdut ha-Avoda of 1919 was a kind of "Soviet" organization rather than a "syndicalist" one. Indeed, it was amazingly similar to the Russian Soviets, which were unions of workers and political organizations at one and the same time. They strove to control production and to construct a new society. It is very difficult to determine which aspects of Ahdut ha-Avoda were the result of Soviet influence and which were caused by the unique conditions prevalent in Eretz Israel in 1919. In any case, Ahdut ha-Avoda was the most original creation of the labor party at that time.

Tabenkin called attention to another point of similarity, namely that both, the Soviets and Ahdut ha-Avoda, were trying to exploit the revolutionary ardor and the social and political vacuum in order to create a "total" organization. This organization would elevate the masses and compel them to adopt the new society and create a new man.

The Soviets attempted to attract the peasants and the middle classes while Ahdut ha-Avoda hoped to reach out to the Jewish Diaspora: to people who had not yet been proletarianized, had not come on aliya; had not learned Hebrew; and who were divided into many different factions. The only chance to turn this heterogeneous mass into a working society, was via unity, via the Ahdut ha-Avoda.

As a matter of fact they failed in the new country just as they had failed abroad. The reason, according to Tabenkin, was the influence of the lower-middle class which prevented Ahdut ha-Avoda from becoming a labor movement and a political party at one and the same time.

It is a tragedy that the opportunity was missed and that even Trumpeldor was not able to grasp the idea behind Ahdut ha-Avoda. In 1933 Tabenkin said, "During the post-war years and the revolutionary fervor, there was

still hope that communes would no longer be an obscure phenomenon but would become the main road for the multitudes.”

He was aware of the great influence the world revolution and the socialist sister movements had on the situation in Eretz Israel, as witness a statement he made in 1923.

The regression of the kvutza<sup>24</sup> and the progress of the moshav were influenced by global events too. Although the connection may not be evident, it is clear that a few years after the Russian revolution a new kind of socialism no longer seems practical.

Tabenkin was also close to the Bolsheviks because of their practical approach. In 1917 they had decided not to be content with their political achievements, but to undertake the responsibility for Russia and its reconstruction. In Tabenkin's eyes this entitled them to be regarded as “constructivist socialists” and he described them as such at the founding convention of the Histadrut (1920).

The working class in Russia has undertaken the responsibility for the country and they have thus become a force to be reckoned with. We have to do the same... In a country that is being settled, there is no place for war against private farming, it is imperative to establish new settlements.

Because of his regard for Soviet constructivism, Tabenkin was willing to understand and even to condone many of its failures and weaknesses as he did in 1928.

...Our labor movement needs wider horizons than those provided by our daily life. It must feed on its ideals, on its aspirations... Even though our situation is determined by our working hours, our daily affairs and not by a single revolutionary act we nevertheless require different forces, different characteristics than those required by the international labor movement. Hence, our thirst for information about the way of life in the Soviet Union. There, too, under different circumstances, people achieve their targets which had only been aspirations at the outset of their struggle.

During one of our talks at Ein-Harod, somebody mentioned that every ideal is threatened by our attempt to realize it in practice. Perchance it might be better to leave our ideals in a never-never land? After all, our Ein-Harod, the one we live in, breathe in and where we meet our friends over everyday affairs, is nothing at all like our dream-come-true... And yet, there is no cause of despair. Our revolution is being realised through our pioneering effort.

At a May Day party in 1945, during the height of euphoria over the victorious Soviet Union, Tabenkin returned to the point. He called for “loyalty to the revolution, to those who realise it on a daily basis the freedom fighters, the industrial workers, the Red Army soldiers rather than to merely the idealists.”

Tabenkin was attracted by Lenin's willingness to do without any dogma. In fact he regarded him as one of his mentors. “Lenin did not adopt the classical Marxist doctrine, yet he was a Marxist in his daring and in his search for progress.”

One must remember that the above was said in the 1930s. By that time Tabenkin had already had a shrewd insight into Stalinism.

Stalinism had paradoxically turned Leninism into dogma. The very same Leninism, whose greatness lay in its independence of any kind of dogma, and whose development was geared to the most specific circumstances... was now proposed as the dogma for all times, all countries, all people...

Tabenkin always regarded himself close to Lenin but never a Leninist. It is interesting to note that Syrkin, who was far from being a Marxist, identified to some extent with the Bolsheviks. Tabenkin said, “Syrkin, who died in 1924 admired Bolshevism and Lenin's revolutionary daring.”

Voluntarism and the party organization were two additional points of similarity with Bolshevism. Tabenkin was strongly influenced and in 1961 he said, “A party is a union of people who share the same idea. Lenin added his concept of a New Type Party which should also be based on aspirations meant to achieve the target.”

The connection between Lenin's “New Type Party” and the Zionist Pioneer movement, was emphasized by Tabenkin in 1956. “Individual

pioneering is a part of Lenin's doctrine. He wrote that social change does not occur through the whole body but through individual parts within it, which are the carriers of change. Every movement has its heralds."

One must remember that Po'alei Zion in Warsaw and the Bolsheviks were both influenced by the populist and terrorist organizations which had preceded Marxism in Russia. Po'alei Zion had their own "fighting units" which acted against the regime and also participated in self-defence actions.

Many have point out the voluntarist character of Bolshevism. Eduard Bernstein wrote, "Bolshevism does not admit limits of free will... The Bolsheviks act as though revolutionary ardor is limitless."

Tabenkin was aware of the parallel between himself and Bolshevism in their belief in organized will power. It was a force that could change circumstances and indeed, the similarity was evident. Both in the Soviet Union and in Eretz Israel the labor movements had created the foundations for their existence, namely, a working class. In both places a minority had attempted to dictate its doctrine, to establish an economy and a working class. These, according to classical Marxism, were not the target, but rather a pre-condition.

It would be misleading to assume that Tabenkin identified with the aims of the Comintern and the world revolution. In fact, Tabenkin regarded "orientation on the Soviet Union" as false and insignificant. He disagreed, as noted below, with the Russian Po'alei Zion who were leftists and later adopted an anti-Zionist communism.

I must tell Lenin's disciples that instead of the lion, I see only the lion's skin... actually, what are you, revolutionaries, doing in the 'counter-revolutionary' Eretz Israel? Herzl believed that he could hand us a country without investing any effort, now you believe that the Third International will hand you the country on a silver platter. Aaronsohn thought that spying would be our salvation, instead of practical work... all follow the ancient Jewish trend of petitioning. How come the revolutionary Po'alei Zion have sent us representatives who are petitioners? You can see the country being built with your own eyes, why do you scoff at our socialist efforts? ...Our country will be constructed on national

land and with national capital and you will have to accept this. I must appeal to your Zionist conscience. The kind of revolution which you are anticipating will not drive the Arabs out in order to hand us the country. We are only a minority here.. but we believe in our settlement policy. It is the one and only solution to the national problem."

These lengthy quotes are meant to clarify Tabenkin's attitude towards the Soviet Union, which are often misunderstood. His attack on Lenin's disciples who should have been greeted open-heartedly as the representatives of the Soviet Union, goes to show that Tabenkin never expected the international revolution to solve the Jewish problem. He was attracted by the Soviet Union because of his attitude regarding the labor movement's problems. In the debate between Plekhanov and Lenin, or between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, Tabenkin supported the latter because of their revolutionary daring, their voluntary socialism and their practical realisation.

When Tabenkin accused the leftists of being only the lion's skin he actually blamed them for not being real revolutionaries, but only clothed in revolutionary phraseology, occupied with sterile politics instead of with revolutionary action.

In 1951, during the discord within Mapam, Tabenkin said, "Leninism plays a cardinal role in the socialist revolution. Every revolution aids Leninism. Yet a group of people in our country have adopted this Leninist stance without being anything but a political zero."

This was also why Tabenkin refused to regard the concept of "orientation on the Soviet Union" as relevant to the labor movement. In 1940 during a debate on that issue at the Histadrut Executive meeting, he said, "There is no sense in splitting the movement now over remote political issues... any decision would be irrelevant to our being Jews and Zionists."

#### TABENKIN'S CRITICISM OF SOVIET COMMUNISM

As much as Tabenkin admired the Soviet Union, some of its tenets roused a deep aversion in him. For instance, their use of political power as a means of achieving socialism. This had reached new heights in the 1950s

and Tabenkin said, "...It is an administrative socialism, one that was enforced on the workers from above. Even the *kolchoz* is managed by administrators... Competition has remained the foundation of Soviet socialism and its production."

Objecting to any sort of division between the means and the aims, he said, "...There exist no aims that justify the means, and certain means are liable to alter, even betray and distort the aim... Socialism will never be realised via non-socialist means."

Although Tabenkin realized that the Soviet Union was forced to use a centralized political power system, he always stressed that they were overdoing it. Any kind of political power was anathema to him and he was content, as he stated on one occasion, that it could be avoided in Eretz Israel.

The anarchists were doubtlessly wrong in hoping to progress without some form of political power. Communists and socialists of all shades are right when they assume that without the power of a state their aims would never be achieved. Still, they have vastly overdone it and I regard this as a failure...

When Lenin wrote his book *The State and the Revolution*, on the eve of the October revolution, he did not make this mistake. "We aspire to establish a society that makes the State redundant and have, therefore, to gain political power first. The Soviets are wrong to assume that productivity depends on administrative means... Khrushchev has failed because agriculture is not going to flourish on political orders."

By 1958 Tabenkin had become extremely critical of the Soviet government and accused it of not realising communism at all.

In that country (Russia) there are no capitalists nor landowners or other pre-revolutionary classes and yet, there exists a rule of the new class: the party bureaucracy. They use force and violent measures in order to organize society. Forty years have passed and they have not accomplished the transition from dictatorship to a socialist democracy. I wonder whether that government is, in fact, attempting to realise communism at all... One

has to admit that the workers' dictatorship was necessary to begin with, but in the forty years since, it has deteriorated and actually produced contradictory results.

In spite of this criticism, Tabenkin knew that the use of political power was an objective, historical imperative.

Regardless of Kropotkin's proposal to establish numerous cooperative organizations and labor unions, the Soviet Union was compelled to adopt a centralist policy in order to control the 150 million people, in times of external threat.

The Bolsheviks preferred a dictatorship of the party to communist ethics and way of life. I dare not judge them... neither they nor we have chosen our course, it was determined by circumstances. If Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev had been replaced by Berl, Ben-Gurion, Tabenkin, A.D. Gordon or Arlosoroff's, we could still not have accomplished there what we did here; and Lenin, Stalin and others could not have acted here as they did there. A sculptor produces different statues from different materials...

In 1958 Tabenkin commented further on socialist dictatorship.

...Dictatorship is not an ideal. Socialist Democracy is... Dictatorship must be regarded as a passing evil which is historically justifiable under special circumstances... yet it is an error, a sin to maintain it for over forty years... There exists a better way, the one we chose. And though our numbers are but small, we are quality and have gained attention in the entire world. In the future our way will serve as a model to be copied.

Tabenkin also opposed Bolshevism on the issue of the labor movements unity. He rejected Lenin's concept of divide and rule which caused much disunity throughout the world. He never shared the communist centralist dogma. The Third International was established on the basic assumption that all labor movements copy the organizational, political and revolutionary methods of the Russian Bolsheviks in order to succeed. They maintained that a global revolution required a single, united and uniform

movement. This led to the establishment of the Comintern, which demanded a strict discipline as well as uniformity of structure, style and opinion.

In time the Soviets gained complete control over the Comintern and turned the international communist movement into a political tool that served the U.S.S.R. It attained the utmost political, organizational and ideological uniformity. Tabenkin never adopted that side of communism and rejected the notion of giving up any of the labor movement's independence. He insisted that ideological coercion was anti-socialist and anti-Leninist.

When Mapam censored Tito and Titoism because of the demand for the Yugoslav Communist Party's independence, Tabenkin's comment was typically consistent.

...Anti-Titoism does not take a definite stand in the dispute between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. But it is a declaration that no revolutionary party may decide how and when to realise communism in its own communist 'orientation', yet my attitude to our movement and to the world in general is geared to our specific needs... We have returned to the traditional dispute concerning 'orientation on ourselves' as the point of departure for our internationalism.

In the 1950s, at a time when admiration of the Soviet Union was prevalent, Tabenkin warned of the danger of imitation.

Human history and the socialist revolution are not dramas to be repeated at different places... The same conditions never repeat themselves... Our revolutionary value depends on our efforts. Everything that strengthens the people and the country reinforces the revolution.

The fact that the Soviet Union recognized us, was the result of our strength and our value as socialists... We have not attempted to translate scientific socialism, but we are guided by it and recreate it according to our own needs.

One has to remember, that at the time, these ideas were anathema to most followers of Soviet communism. In 1952, after the "Prague Trials",

matters came to a head. It was a choice between Zionism or the communist world and Tabenkin wanted to make sure that Mapam did not jeopardize its loyalty to Zionism. He spoke up against the communist world, deeply proud of the originality of the Labor Party of Eretz Israel.

Czechoslovakia is no longer a "People's Democracy"...

Coming here 40 years ago, we nationalized the land and turned it into our source of culture and the brotherhood of people. We are proudly loyal to the real communism, to our nation and to the historical process.

Naturally, communist hostility towards Zionism and later the State of Israel, were the main reasons for Tabenkin's rejection of the communist world. Some circles in the Zionist reacted differently and became more and more critical of Zionism. Tabenkin's point of departure had always been the real Zionist socialism, rather than an "orientation" on the international labor movements or on the global revolution. He never adopted the Soviet model of communism for Eretz Israel and there was no similarity between his kind of admiration for the Soviet Union and that of other Zionist circles.

However, Tabenkin's regard for the revolution sometimes modified his criticism and even after the Six-Day War, when the Soviets severed relations with Israel, he still found some things to admire. It was all a matter of degree.

#### TABENKIN AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

Tabenkin's opposition to the Social Democrats originated mainly from his objection to their use of political power.

They aspire to achieve socialism in their countries exclusively via political means. The State is inseparable from the class structured society, and the latter can't exist without the State... There is no significant difference between the sins of the Bolsheviks and those of the Social Democrats: neither is a manifestation of the pure socialism. Even if they declare that their use of political power is only a temporary measure, it has, throughout the years, become a value per se... Our advantage lies in the



fact that we have achieved everything without the help of a State. Even though the causes were dictated by circumstances, this does not diminish their value.

In other words, Tabenkin rejected the European Social Democratic "Reformist" movement because it was primarily politically oriented and had invested all its efforts in party activities. Tabenkin claimed that the workers' achievements could only be measured by their revolutionary actions and not by their political successes, which in any case, were only illusory.

In spite of their sin of Etatism the Bolsheviks had at least realized the revolution. This the Social Democrats had neglected to do and Tabenkin, therefore, rejected them categorically. According to him, the Eretz Israel labor movement was the most revolutionary in the world and thus opposed to Reformism. His view was shared by Beri Katzenelson.

Even though Tabenkin did not entirely object to the use of political power, he pointed out the danger it posed to the Reformist movement.

Admittedly, a parliamentary democracy can also serve as the way to a socialist democracy. However, the former has caused most socialist parties to deteriorate and to lose their independence. Their hands are no longer clean of bloodshed, colonialism and of capitalist militarism.

Tabenkin also disapproved of the Social Democrats' belief in parliamentary democracy because of the party politics it called for. He dismissed out of hand the passivity of the voters and their representatives and said that even though they had been elected, the leaders would take one side and the people the other.

Political democracy, being no democracy at all, has not elevated the individual or the people because it has not achieved social and economic equality; political democracy is, in fact, not democracy at all because it does not enable the people to participate in charting their course and determine their fate. Democracy has become one of the ways of ruling, of faking real democracy by voting. The entire people give up their rights and hand them over to the leadership.

Tabenkin was sensitive to the events in the international labor

movements and this caused his controversy with the majority within Mapai and led him to analyze the difference in his and their outlook in 1948.

The Social Democrats in Eretz Israel differ from those in other countries. We have achieved our success not through political reforms but via continuous revolutionary changes. The kibbutz is perceived as an ideological entity which competes with the political party (Mapai), that aspires to realise Zionism and socialism through reform. However, the party is not based on an active group of people... but on representation, parliamentary institutions and on international diplomacy.

#### TABENKIN'S UTOPIAN SOCIALISM

Would it be correct to define Tabenkin as a utopian socialist? Would it be correct to regard the Eretz Israel labor movement as a branch of utopian socialism? The answer is ambivalent. Y. Gorny, in his study of the Ahdut ha-Avoda, defined its platform as utopian, and devoted many pages in attempting to establish his assumption. In an essay devoted to Shlomo Lavie<sup>56</sup> Berl Katzenelson tried to prove that utopian socialism was one of the cardinal tenets of the movement and that Lavie's trend of thought was utopian in the sense that it did not disregard reality but rather saw it clearly. Instead of dreaming about a never-never land, Lavie called for action, claiming that everything depended on people's intelligence, honesty and devotion.

Katzenelson carried his analysis even further in regard to utopian socialism.

In case you did not know, there were different levels of utopian socialism within the Eretz Israel labor movement. Sometimes people were completely unaware of it and often disregarded their convictions. Utopian elements crept in and affected to an amazing degree many actions. This at a time when throughout the world utopianism was on its way out. The kvutza and the moshav were both conceived by social-utopianism.

Thus Katznelson rehabilitated utopian socialists who had been stigmatized during their bitter debate with Marx. According to him, Utopianism did not mean the lack of realisation, but rather an ardent wish for immediate action and revolutionary achievements. It is clear that Tabenkin was attracted to this side of utopianism and its belief in the ultimate vision of humanity and its achievability.

Brenner, referring to Trumfeldor, said, "He was always a utopian. Yet, he lived with both feet firmly planted in reality, and amongst the people who surrounded him."

Syrkin, too, was inspired by a utopian vision of the future and at the same time believed in the ideology of realisation. Two of his disciples, Katznelson and Tabenkin, both commented on this. In an essay on his mentor, Berl Katznelson wrote, "Syrkin was always attacked for being a utopian... the closer he approached Zionist realization, the higher his utopian socialism soared."

In 1964 Tabenkin commented in the same vein:

Syrkin gave expression to the young movement which in its early stages was utopian and disregarded all future problems. Syrkin, the utopian, ignored the class struggle within the Zionist movement and thought that everyone would realize Zionism... Utopism is not always unrealistic and doubtlessly we shall return to utopianism; even the Bolsheviks, who rely on planning, will eventually return to utopian thought. We must examine which aspects of utopianism we want to adopt and use realistically in order to achieve our aims.

Tabenkin aspired to integrate some utopian elements in his Marxism. He believed that Marx had rejected Utopianism in the manner of a Jewish scholar attacking his opponents. But in fact, Marx had been inspired by both, the utopians and the socialists.

In his book *Paths to Utopia*, Martin Buber<sup>57</sup> quotes the above mentioned words of Katznelson on Lavie. He attempts to rehabilitate utopian socialism and communist anarchism and also produces evidence to prove utopian elements in Marxist socialism. Buber arrived at the conclusion that the Eretz Israel labor movement and the *kvutza* were a continuation of utopian thought. Let us examine some of his words.

...In utopian socialism there exists a constructive element which designs organically planned programs and aspires to renew the structure of society... This renewal is to start here and now, and in the conditions of the here and now...

Both quotes prove Tabenkin's affinity with utopian-voluntary-socialist elements on a concrete and realistic level. Buber regarded the anarchist-communists Proudhon, Kropotkin and Gustav Landauer as part of the utopian trend. The connection between their doctrines and Tabenkin's is even more evident.

#### TABENKIN AND ANARCHO-COMMUNISM

Tabenkin's aversion to any form of political power and his anti-Statism were so strong that some of his associates spoke about his "anarchist deviance." We have already mentioned the fact that Tabenkin adopted the anarchists' critical attitudes. This chapter deals with the positive elements of anarcho-communism, according to Tabenkin. Anarchism has many different aspects. We intend to discuss anarcho-communism in general and that of Kropotkin and Proudhon in particular.

Anarcho-communism aspired to an immediate, non-Statist society, based on a federation of communes that did not require any government or political rule. Hence anarcho-communism tended to adopt syndicalist workers' organizations and rejected any form of political activity, whether revolutionary or electoral.

However, anarcho-communism was aware of the connection between the Leviathan-state and the atomization of human beings, leading to the destruction of all internal organization.

The alternative to economic and social centralism proposed by Proudhon was federalism: "The forging of individual forces into groups and the interaction of these groups, will eventually lead to the creation of a single national body. These national bodies will create the federation of federations a real humanity."

Kropotkin said, "Less representation more independent leadership." He feared that the revolution might lead to centralization and therefore, to an

even worse form of government. In order to avoid this, he proposed that the people proceed with their constructivist tasks.

Gustav Landauer<sup>58</sup> perceived the new society not within urban, alienating surroundings, but rather as "socialist villages with rural workshops and factories..."

According to Kropotkin, the failure of communist villages was, in part, due to their smallness which caused members to withdraw from one another. In order to prevent this and also their trend to retreat from society at large, he proposed a federative organization of these villages.

The original road taken by the Eretz Israel labor movement was surprisingly similar to the above. At the 1919 founding convention of Ahdut ha-Avoda, Berl Katzenelson said, "We are not a party, and we don't aspire to form one. We are a federation of professional workers' unions." Tabenkin called Ahdut ha-Avodah "A federation of non-aligned labor unions." In fact this form of organization was adopted because they preferred practical constructivism to political activities.

In common with the anarcho-communists, Tabenkin rejected all economic, social and Etatist centralism. He formulated his ideas in an identical manner to Proudhon "By adopting the vote, people hand over their rights to the elected leaders." He perceived Ahdut ha-Avoda as a non-atomized society that maintained the autonomy of all its components.

In 1919 Katzenelson said, "Every union or group lives its independent life within the sphere of its activities. The "center" unites them and undertakes to realise their common interests.

In principle, Tabenkin rejected the administrative setup of the Histadrut, even though he was aware of its necessity for the time being. He repeatedly demanded the establishment of an independent economy which would serve as the means to prepare the workers to take over. An enterprise such as Solel Boneh was to educate its workers so that eventually they would take over and turn it into a commune.

When the Gedud ha-Avoda split up as a result of the debate over the common purse, Tabenkin was in favor of autonomous settlements. In 1954 he explained that his position had been dictated by the way he perceived society.

What is better for socialism, a centralist organization or an autonomous one? The answer depends on how a person attains his utmost job satisfaction, the best results

at work. In fact, I must insist, that the autonomous communes are the ideal form....

This autonomy, however, has to submit to the dictates of production and consumption, taxes and budgets. Investments, too, are provided by the commune's funds. We must not perceive socialism as a way to abolish surplus values, instead, the worker has to be aware of the need to create surplus value for the society he lives in. It is a matter on which Marx and Proudhon disagreed...

Gedud ha-Avoda adopted centralism. People worked and their wages went to the common purse. They were provided neither according to their income nor their needs, but according to the amount deemed suitable by the treasurer. This was a centralist form of organization.

We are neither an anarchist federation nor a centralist state, but we will create a free federation of autonomous communes. By the way, I also support the autonomy of our production branches to the extent that they have to know whether they are profitable or not.

We aim to establish autonomous communes that are supervised by the society at large. This is also the future of nations. They will be autonomous under the sovereignty of a federation of nations.

From early on, Tabenkin fought to establish the sovereignty of the working class over its autonomous sectors. At the international conference of Po'alei Zion in Vienna, 1925, he said, "Even a workers' economy may become bourgeois. Only the sovereignty of the entire class can ensure the content and structure of its economy. Hevrat ha-Ovdim is the means to ensure our socialist creation."

Tabenkin always supported a strong and sovereign movement. Instead of a communist State he envisioned a society of communes. "There is no future for mankind without independent workers."

In conclusion, Tabenkin was attracted to anarchism because of his attitude that, "The person and his development are a value *per se* and not the means to achieve some general purpose such as an improved economy, state or nation". He also identified with the anarchists' rejection of all political power, yet, he did not believe that the nation or the State were to

be disregarded or completely abolished. He perceived it to be a necessary but dangerous stage on the road to a socialist society.

Tabenkin also criticized anarchism for regarding man as the basis for society and community rather than seeing the commune as the foundation for man. "I am an anti-anarchist because I don't believe that the worker deserves all the goods. An important part of his work-product has to go to the economy, the State, culture and humanity". Having defined himself as an anti-anarchist he noted then: "I remain orthodox in that I agree with Marx as opposed to Proudhon and Bakunin".

Tabenkin, none the less, disagreed with the severity of Marx' attack on the latter, and recalled that they had formerly been very close. Furthermore, he criticized Marx for deciding to split the International over the anarchists and claimed that it was historically unjustified.

#### TABENKIN AND PACIFISM

Tabenkin's repudiation of pacifism was absolute. It was the result of his activist-achievement-oriented *Weltanschauung* and of his loathing of all Jewish weakness. This, in fact, paved the way for that generation's self-defence, *alya*, and the establishment of the Ha-Shomer organization.

In his article, "Work or Militarism", Brenner gave expression to this aspect of anti-pacifism, while dismissing out of hand any form of militarism.

On the other hand, those who forbid us any kind of military activity, the use of arms and force because of their so-called radical pacifism... those who regard the establishment of a Jewish army as a national tragedy... those who talk of ideals in parables about the lamb and the wolf and who preach again the use of force under any circumstance all of them are mistaken. They don't understand that there are factors beyond our anti-militarist convictions.

Tabenkin's ideas on pacifism are to be found in his famous lecture on "Schools and War" (1942).

Pacifism is unrealistic and even harmful... it is not the

love of peace, the love of life, the love of mankind... it is a pipedream... it weakens the power of the righteous and gives a chance to the powers of evil.

The weak, the enslaved, the conquered, the homeless, the landless and the people who have not as yet achieved their independence, if they adopted a pacifist ideology they would do worse than merely dreaming they would cause harm.

Constructive socialism must also be a fighting socialism. We must introduce education about war into our curriculum a war to end all wars. We must have a fighter who is an anti-militarist.

A few years earlier, in 1940, Tabenkin was even more outspoken.

For twenty years we have lived under an illusion, an illusion of social peace, a peace between people and nations. We believed in a false God.

Utopian pacifism, non-resistance to evil, pacifism as an ideal means the abolishment of violence without abolishing slavery and oppression. The post-war pacifism called for disarmament without first eliminating the root of all evil, the source of war between nations and classes. Pacifism is no more than the self-protection of the satisfied.

Just as Tabenkin regarded national and class struggles as one and the same thing, he also opposed national and class pacifism. He justified the use of force against strike breakers and he supported workers who used it in order to protect their rights. He objected to mediation and said, "Even if we could find a neutral mediator he would only decide against the unarmed."

#### TABENKIN AND MARXISM

Calling himself a Marxist, Tabenkin often claimed that the Marxist method was important for the understanding of the Jewish-Zionist world. Just the same, he saw no deviance in taking the liberty to disagree with Marx on several issues "I endorse only the scientific-revolutionary socialist

side of Marxism. In regard to the rest, I'm as free as Marx himself."

In his old age, Tabenkin was asked whether he still regarded himself a Marxist. His reply was typical, "I learnt more from Marx than from anyone else. However, I am not prepared to adopt all his theories. He was wrong about the national issue and especially the Jewish problem."

Tabenkin's attitude towards movement and ideas was often ambiguous. Although he might dismiss certain ideas, he would nonetheless be influenced by others. He never blindly endorsed any authoritarian personality. Neither Marx, nor Syrkin, Borochof or Lenin. He was the disciple of many and always acknowledged A.D. Gordon, Brenner and Trumpeldor as his mentors.

Tabenkin believed in playing an active role, "Consciousness means action, work and internalization of facts". This is how he regarded his mentors and that is how we should deal with his doctrine as well.

## CHAPTER SIX

### STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

It would seem that in an essay about ideas and ideology, structural and organizational issues might be irrelevant. As a matter of fact, though, these played an important role in the labor movement's deliberations and internal struggles. Disagreement over organization and structure inevitably led to schism and Tabenkin was usually involved, even though he consistently called for a united working class.

This contradiction was the result of the special demands dictated by Tabenkin's doctrine regarding realisation and responsibility. He was against any kind of compromise and often found himself in the opposition. The communist structure of a working society required a single labor party, while his aspiration for perfection and the purity of ideas, required an organized vanguard.

#### A GENERAL WORKING CLASS PARTY

Tabenkin never saw any justification for more than one single labor party. However, he did not believe that the party should be the one and only form of organization. In many cases circumstances dictated his conception and caused him to change his mind.

When in 1945, the structure of the Agricultural Workers' Union was on the agenda, he said his flexibility was evident.

This complicated problem which concerns the organization of hired farm hands must be carefully considered. When a working man is unable to influence his own affairs for the lack of an organizational structure, something must be done to change the situation. Democracy begins in the work place. *Form of organization is not sacred. It must be flexible.*

According to Tabenkin there was always room for pluralism and variety, "Development means pluralism... when a baby is born, it recognizes only its mother, after it grows up a bit, it soon learns that there are many different people and things."

The first argument between Tabenkin and Borochov was an organizational one, concerning the unity of the labor movement (1909). At the Po'alei Zion congress he demanded both the participation of Po'alei Zion in the World Zionist Organization and unity with the anti-Zionist but socialist Bund. In these issues he was met by Borochov's adamant objections. At the time he was 23 years old, but throughout his life he continued to believe in a united labor movement because of his ardent wish to escape the quarrlsomeness, idleness and deterioration of Diaspora Jewry.

In matters concerning the class struggle, he demanded a union of all labor organizations and in Zionist affairs he was prepared to join forces with the General Zionists. As a result he proposed a complicated structure according to which a person might belong to three different organizations simultaneously: the Zionist organization, in order to realise Zionist aspirations; a united Jewish workers' organization, in order to achieve socialism abroad; and the Po'alei Zion, a political-ideological organization.

This was too complicated and consequently he failed to convince the Po'alei Zion to support his position. He reacted by immigrating to Palestine.

Several years later, he was again involved in a similar struggle in Eretz Israel and reacted by leaving all party activities and joining Ein-Harod and Gedud ha-Avoda.

On his arrival in Eretz Israel in 1912, he did not join the small number of party functionaries who led Po'alei Zion, but went to work as a laborer. However, in the same year he was elected a candidate of Po'alei Zion at the Agricultural Center. According to Katznelson, "He was a disappointment. They even accused him of never adhering to any of his party's decisions." In fact, he soon joined the unaligned who invested all their efforts in limiting the party's influence and its scope of action.

The establishment of Ahdut ha-Avoda in 1919 was a victory over the party system. Tabenkin said, "We must abolish all parties in order to achieve a free hand for our productive activities.... Parties mean political actions, while the Agricultural Workers' Union implies practical work."

Justifying the establishment of Ahdut ha-Avoda, he said, "Conditions in Eretz Israel differ from those in the Diaspora, both in respect to Zionist affairs and the class struggle... We must avoid the influence of the parties over there, and concentrate on our practical activities. Actions unite but parties divide."

Katznelson conceived Ahdut ha-Avoda as a kind of syndicalist organization, a combination of different unions in a federative structure. The leadership, however, was to be elected by the entire movement. In all, it aspired to be the one and only organization of all the workers in Eretz Israel, a party, a union and a worker's society simultaneously!

Ahdut ha-Avoda was established by all 1,071 workers of the Second Aliya. During the war years they had been isolated and had crystallized into an avant-garde movement. Tabenkin wanted them to compel all new immigrants to adopt their ways. This was not intended as a dictatorship for there were no compulsory methods available. Nevertheless, he hoped that by the unity of Ahdut ha-Avoda and its "total" involvement in all the aspects of life in the country, it would overcome the new immigrants, conquer them and create the miracle of a society of workers' Hevrat ha-Ovdim.

Alas, his dream never materialized. As a matter of fact it was still-born because Ha-Po'el ha-Za'ir refused to join Ahdut ha-Avoda, nor did Trumpeldor, who aspired to a general Histadrut which would recognize the existence of parties. All attempts to persuade him to change his mind failed and Ahdut ha-Avoda entered into negotiations with ha-Po'el ha-Za'ir to establish the Histadrut.

As a result, Ahdut ha-Avoda actually became just another party and it was indeed a tragic moment when they had to give up their cherished dream of abolishing all parties. Tabenkin was among the first to admit that their aspirations had been unrealistic. He acknowledged the existence of parties and proposed to reinforce the authority of the Histadrut.

I am not as optimistic as Ben-Gurion, to believe that the entire Histadrut will turn into Ahdut ha-Avoda... The chance was missed right after the war when there had been no aliya... we must now aspire to establish a Society of workers, Hevrat haOvdim.

However, as late as 1922 Tabenkin still objected to calling Ahdut ha-Avoda a party, because it seemed to imply the wish to rule others. He also

objected to the formulation of a program. "I don't believe in dictating opinions to a large, heterogeneous number of people. Still, Ahdut ha-Avoda has adopted a plan of action."

Although he had accepted the state of affairs, he did not give up on his main target (creating unity among all the workers of Eretz Israel). It was a difficult period for Ahdut ha-Avoda. Their organizational concept had been rejected and they groped for a new one. Three different forms of organization emerged: the Histadrut, the party and the settlement movement. The problem was now to divide their respective tasks.

After 1926 Tabenkin's attitude to Ahdut ha-Avoda had altered. It may have been as a result of the establishment of the ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad. Up until then Tabenkin had still hoped that in one way or another Ahdut ha-Avoda would serve as a framework for the settlements' movement. He adhered consistently to a pluralistic settlement organization. Although he opposed the moshav form and feared that it might endanger the kibbutz, he, nonetheless, disagreed with those who proposed to fight it via administrative measures, such as the ousting of moshav members from Ahdut ha-Avoda. "We must foster mutual aid and encourage the Moshav to become communal settlements."

In 1930 Ahdut ha-Avoda united with Ha-Po'el ha-Za'ir to form Mapai. Tabenkin finally realized that his idea of a united labor movement was doomed and that the Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad would have to face the fact that it was a minority within Mapai. As a matter of principle, he did not join those who opposed the union.

Matters came to a head early in 1934, during the debate on the agreement between Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky. For the first time, Tabenkin enlisted the radical elements in Mapai as well as other parties in the Histadrut, to support him on this political issue. It led to his victory but eventually also was the beginning of the schism within Mapai.

The next big confrontation with the majority in Mapai, occurred in 1937, and was the result of the Peel Commission's proposal of partition of Palestine. Fighting with all his power against any form of partition of Eretz Israel, Tabenkin nevertheless did his best in order to avoid a final split in the party.

In those years, Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad had to face severe pressure from the majority in Mapai who regarded its political crystallization as a threat to the party's unity. They demanded that the kibbutz movement should unite with other forms of settlement, should obey all party directives and

discontinue its independent political and educational activities.

Tabenkin still believed that the Histadrut might serve as a framework for all voluntary-realization-oriented organizations. He was opposed by the majority in Mapai that feared the threat to the party. All authority would be in the hands of the independent bodies which would make up the movement.

In 1941 Katznelson said, "Only here, in Eretz Israel, is it conceivable to have a party without a body, an image, floating in space without any instruments or compass... The Labor Party may have to pay a very high price for this state of affairs."

Katznelson had indeed pointed to a crucial element in Tabenkin's doctrine. A party was merely a union of people with similar opinions who aspired to gain political power rather than to build the foundation for a creative life. Tabenkin had never wanted a party to fulfil an important, cardinal role. He said, "Our movement is neither based on political convictions nor on political struggles."

Believing in tolerance, he said, "When I chose a certain course, it does not mean that I must disqualify all others. We take ours and let others take theirs."

When the majority in Mapai rejected Tabenkin's concept of a party structure, the schism became inevitable. In 1943 Tabenkin said, "...Without the kibbutz, the moshav, the kvutza, the organized workers and the settlement movement, the Histadrut is of no value. They are the target, the Histadrut is merely the means."

Even after the split, he did not despair of his hope for a united labor movement. But he had given up on Mapai as a means to achieve his aims. The establishment of the new movement Le-Ahdut ha-Avoda, in the final years of World War II, raised hopes for a renewal of the unification of the workers movement. This, in addition to mass immigration from the Soviet Union, invited a comparison to the events that had followed World War I.

The new movement did not aspire to replace Mapai at the helm, but strove for a union with all labor organizations. Early in 1946 negotiations started with the left wing of Po'alei Zion that had at the time adopted an activist Zionism.

The union with Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir followed in 1948 and Mapam was established. An atmosphere of hope prevailed that a powerful alternative to Mapai had been found. At its founding convention, Tabenkin sounded out of place when he said, "We are out to achieve a political unity of all

Eretz Israel workers. We are allies of Mapai... I regard the new union as a continuation of the revolutionary workers movement which aspires to be an *avant-garde*."

However, Tabenkin's earlier warning proved to have been justified. He had warned of the danger inherent in a programmatic union with another political party. The ideological gap between Ahdut ha-Avoda and Ha-Shomer ha-Zair was too wide to be bridged and another schism was inevitable.

Years later, in 1957, when Ahdut ha-Avoda joined the Alignment with Mapai to form the Israel Labor Movement, Tabenkin objected because he feared for Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad. He was also opposed to the element of political power that had replaced the achievement oriented course of Ahdut ha-Avoda.

Throughout his life, Tabenkin aspired to a dual purpose. He wanted to establish a broad-based movement to realise the ideal of unity and simultaneously serve as an *avant-garde*. It led to the tragic internal contradiction in Tabenkin's outlook.

#### THE AVANT-GARDE

The creation of an *avant-garde*, or as Tabenkin preferred to call it, a pioneering movement, was the main task to which he devoted his life. It is, therefore, justified to examine his attitude.

When Tabenkin came to Eretz Israel in 1912, he did not join his party, Po'alei Zion, but went to work in a settlement and became active in the Agricultural Workers Union. He rejected the notion that Po'alei Zion was the kind of *avant-garde* movement it assumed to be and that it might lead all the workers in Eretz Israel.

At the time there existed another *avant-garde* organization, the Jewish self-defence "Ha-Shomer", which was affiliated with the Po'alei Zion, but never heeded its dictates. They were influenced by the Russian Narodnaia Volya organization<sup>59</sup> to lead and guide the people by serving as an example and not through political power or superiority.

Tabenkin, who scoffed at the political-Marxist-*avant-gardist* pretensions of Po'alei Zion, decided to join the Ha-Shomer. Because the archives of Ha-Shomer were lost during World War I, it is difficult to ascertain when

he joined. However, it is clear that he was already a member under the Turkish rule, at the time Lishansky was arrested as a spy.

Tabenkin's motives for joining Ha-Shomer, and his struggles within it, were similar to those of his good friend Elijah Golomb<sup>60</sup> who described their experiences.

We found ourselves remote from the working class and decided to join Ha-Shomer, hoping to induce it not to become an autonomous entity in conflict with labor, but to be a part of the Histadrut. Tabenkin and I were both at the meeting at which Eliezer Shochat proposed to abolish Ha-Shomer. We both objected adamantly and insisted on adapting the organization to the current events and to the Histadrut... As a result the Ha-Shomer was disbanded and the blame put on Tabenkin and especially on me.

In fact, it may have been true that Shochat disbanded the organization because he could not bear the internal debates with Tabenkin and Golomb and looked for an alternative. Why did they join the Ha-Shomer in the first place? Did they intend to undermine it from within? They were obviously very critical of many aspects of it and Golomb<sup>60</sup> explained why clearly.

The labor movement could not succeed unless it created a loyal and organized cadre. Yet this very cadre might endanger the movement unless it was at the disposal of the Histadrut. If it decided to compete, it would lose the trust of the people and only serve to undermine the workers' interests. We need a united nucleus and this is now being established by Gedud ha-Avoda...

Actually, Golomb supported the idea of a united achievement-oriented *avant-garde*. However, in his opinion, it would be a part of the general labor organization and not in its place. He shared Tabenkin's hope that the Gedud would become such an *avant-garde* and the above-quoted letter was written a month after he had visited him and the Gedud at Ein-Harod. He repeated his ideas in a letter to Katznelson and also expressed his concern over the anarchic state of affairs in the labor movement. According to Golomb, the solution might be found in a strong, united and disciplined party within the Histadrut. Tabenkin was aware of the importance of a



body whose members were actively committed. Consequently he joined Ha-Shomer, hoping to moderate its autonomous trend. Realising that he had failed, he left to establish a pioneering body and Ahdut ha-Avoda was to be the answer (1919). He moved to Tel-Aviv in order to participate in the Ahdut ha-Avoda executive. Never missing a single session, he also travelled all over the country in an effort to organize and explain the movement's activities.

By 1921 it had become evident that Ahdut ha-Avoda could not simultaneously be a union of all workers and an *avant-garde*. Many were of the opinion that after the establishment of the Histadrut, Ahdut ha-Avoda must be dissolved as there was no need for an additional party.

Tabenkin proposed to turn it into an a-political pioneering *avant-garde* within the framework of the Histadrut. Every member would put himself at the disposal of the Zionist socialist aims. There would be no program, only actions. Ahdut ha-Avoda would be a small, disciplined party within the Histadrut. It would not be ideologically motivated, but act according to the movement's targets. It would not aspire to take over the working class, but to gradually transform the entire working class into an *avant-garde*.

Many years later, Tabenkin recalled how he had joined Gedud ha-Avoda because his political activities had been frustrated. He had failed to turn Ahdut ha-Avoda into such an *avant-garde*. Tabenkin gave his reasons for leaving at an executive meeting shortly before he left to join Gedud ha-Avoda.

The Histadrut neglects its Zionist-socialist functions as long as it maintains its present form of organization, in which everyone can join without obligations. Unless a group of people devote themselves completely to aliya, public service, agricultural settlement, cultural and educational activities, the Histadrut will fail...

In order to achieve Zionist socialism, it has to rely on members who are not merely convinced ideologically, but who are prepared to devote their lives to the practical work it entails. Let us add two additional demands to our set of rules: first, a member of Ahdut ha-Avoda must be a working man who puts himself completely at the disposal of Zionist-socialist activities. He must agree to live and work wherever he is needed. Secondly, Ahdut ha-Avoda must organize party branches everywhere.

He went on to explain that all political activities would be left to the Histadrut and that the *avant-garde* would merely serve to realise its program. Tabenkin repeated his objection to three separate bodies, the Histadrut, the political party and the pioneering body. In order to prevent this, he proposed to join Gedud ha-Avoda with the intention of turning it into Ahdut ha-Avoda. In fact, three months later, he did just that.

Tabenkin's connection with Gedud ha-Avoda had been formed before he joined it. He was among those who had formulated its set of rules, but he was none the less very doubtful about its chances, as witness his comments about it a short while before joining.

Gedud ha-Avoda has failed ... They lack conviction and are not consciously communarians... They are a group of singles who share their lives without being a family. They are not committed ideologically. In time this may change, but meanwhile people just come and go at their convenience.

It is easy to understand Tabenkin's hesitation. He had been deeply disappointed by the failure of Ahdut ha-Avoda as an *avant-garde*. Joining Gedud ha-Avoda meant leaving his old comrades of the Second Aliya for the "green immigrants" of the third. It was a difficult personal, social and political decision. Tabenkin must have been aware of the fateful step he was taking. It meant that he had to overcome the suspicion all pioneers of the Second Aliya felt for the Third Aliya. It was indeed the beginning of his split from the leadership of the party, which included his closest friends.

Tabenkin had very definite ideas concerning the structure and the character of the *avant-garde* he envisioned. The leadership of the Gedud, though, had their own ideas. This soon resulted in a period of internal struggles and Tabenkin was accused of attempting to undermine the Gedud from within. An examination of the facts shows that this was not the case. In spite of the harsh conflict between him and the leadership, he really regarded himself as continuing along the true path of Gedud ha-Avoda. Eventually, in 1924, Tabenkin and his group of followers were expelled. Forty years later he recalled his experiences prior to the expulsion.

I joined Ein-Harod eight months after they had settled must put its members at the disposal of the kibbutzim, the nucleus of our enterprise.

the land and 15 months after Gedud ha-Avoda had been formed... Although, at the time, I was still active in the Histadrut executive, I felt responsible for Gedud ha-Avoda and its set of rules which was formulated in my room in Tel-Aviv... Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad has kept many of the Gedud's principles. They are not the pioneering principles of a Zionist party, nor of a socialist one, but of an avant-garde organization. They entail individual realisation; one could not be a member of Gedud ha-Avoda without living there. My personal will for realization brought me to Ein-Harod and even though I had been among the members who formulated the Gedud's platform, I became a member only on coming to Ein-Harod to live.

Tabenkin agreed to the aims of "A communitarian organization for all Eretz Israel workers." Nevertheless, he objected to the declaration of territorial autonomy within the organization. "At the time of the schism we agreed to autonomy but not to sovereignty..."

Autonomous settlement and the affinity with the Histadrut, were the two controversial issues. Tabenkin termed the former, "A debate between a settlement movement and a consumer society."

He constantly objected to any form of centralization and administrative economy. But no less cardinal was the Gedud's trend to withdraw from the Histadrut. Tabenkin insisted that, "Relations with the Histadrut must not be formal or technical, we are a part of a whole, of the entire working class... the Histadrut is our framework and the settlement movement is its content."

Although Tabenkin tried to prevent the schism, it eventually happened and he set out to steer Ein-Harod into becoming a country-wide settlement movement. At the beginning he perceived it as a realising body of the party, a spearhead to be followed by the periphery of party members who were to serve as a reserve, which concept he spelled out in May 1924.

The Russian Army is not party affiliated, but its members enlist in the army and are supported by the party. In the same manner we must create a relationship between Ahdut ha-Avoda and the kibbutz. The party

At the following conference of Ahdut ha-Avoda in 1922, his concept seemed to have been adopted.

The party undertakes to organize kibbutzim and Gedudim within the Histadrut on the basis of integrating agriculture and other branches of production. These communal and independent working communities share the responsibility and the obligation for work and consumption and provide equal living conditions for their members. Ahdut ha-Avoda undertakes to establish and assist the development of such kibbutzim within the framework of the Histadrut and calls its members to join...

The fourth conference at Ein Harod decided to go a step further.

... the cardinal element of our economic activities, in agriculture, industry, public work, etc. is the kibbutz... Ahdut ha-Avoda regards the establishment of large kibbutzim with a large potential for work and which can absorb immigrants, educate workers and introduce equality, as of vital importance for the labor movement. Ahdut ha-Avoda must assist in establishing new kibbutzim and therefore organize and educate youth in Eretz Israel and abroad. We must establish large pioneering kibbutzim which can fulfil the many tasks within the Histadrut.

Tabenkin could now perceive the kibbutz as a pioneering body and as "the army of the party and the Histadrut." All educational and ideological issues could safely be left to the party which completely identified with the kibbutz idea and its way of life.

Under the surface, however, a slow process of alienation between the kibbutz and Ahdut ha-Avoda set in. Members of the party accused Tabenkin and other kibbutz members of being condescending and Tabenkin said that those city-bred party members could not truly understand the labor movement's ideology and that they were not to be completely trusted. While the party leadership was willing to regard the kibbutz as the cardinal executive arm of the movement, Tabenkin also wanted the kibbutz to steer and direct the party. No wonder he met with resistance.

An additional reason for alienation arose after the fourth convention of Ahdut ha-Avoda during which Tabenkin criticized the leadership for backing down in regard to concept of Hevrat ha-Ovdim.

At the fifth convention he called for a renewed effort in adopting a physical labor and egalitarian pioneering life-style. When party leaders accused the kibbutz of "imperialism" and objected to the establishment of a country-wide kibbutz organization, Tabenkin decided to voice his idea for Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad, a settlement movement which would be ideologically motivated.

We now number over 600 members. Although we are not a party, we are motivated by our convictions. This is a kibbutz ideology that has evolved from our settlement activities and is not the same as a party ideology which merely plans ahead.

In 1926 he added, "The Histadrut and the party, each have a different mode of action. The kibbutz differs from both."

He had returned to the concept of the organizations: the Histadrut; the party and the kibbutz. However, in June 1927, He indicated that the kibbutz might have to part company with the party.

Most of our ideological activities were done by the party. However, it is now clear that the party has some reservations about the kibbutz way of life and we must have our own ideology. Ours is an independent trend of constructivist socialism realised by each and every individual who joins us.

The kibbutz movement was established in 1927. It was the crystallization of Tabenkin's *avant-gardist* concept. "A camp cannot proceed without those who lead the way who break out of the circle who are the kernel from which the tree may grow..." "The *avant-garde* must not dominate the camp, but has to be integrated as a part of it."

According to Tabenkin, the kibbutz was to serve as an *avant-garde* of the entire Eretz Israel labor movement and he explained why in 1937.

The kibbutz movement, its human values and principles, are an organic part of the labor movement and not a separate entity... We must march in front of the whole camp because we are light-footed and stronger. We are also very deeply convinced of the rightness of our way.

No one elected us to lead the camp, we have volunteered and not because we are blessed with any special talents...

In 1943, however, Ben-Gurion tried to explain the reasons for the schism within Mapai. "We perceive the historic mission of the working class differently from those [meaning Tabenkin] who think that a minority can act for the entire working class, rather than *through* it.

Although Tabenkin perceived the party as a pluralistic society, he insisted that the kibbutz, as a pioneering *avant-garde*, should maintain strict discipline. Unity and discipline were prerequisites for the success of all kibbutz undertakings, as he stated at the eleventh Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad convention in 1936.

We are not a kibbutz with only one single opinion, but we are single-minded in our motivation and our actions. However, differences of opinion do not cause members to be expelled. Although we strive to achieve a collective ideology for the entire working class, it is not a precondition for our success...

Tabenkin's concept of discipline was not ideologically or politically motivated. Yet it was of the severest kind. This may be difficult to understand and the distinction between the two is problematic. Tabenkin put the priority on actions and realisation. However, it is doubtful if he adhered to his concept when it was put to the test.

As an illustration, let us look at the events after Nezah Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir, from Russia, agreed to establish their own kibbutzim within the framework of Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad. All its members had come from one and the same country and from the same movement. They also recruited their own reserves from abroad. Having a different outlook on the kibbutz way of life, the kibbutz movement allowed them to maintain their autonomy for the time being.

Matters came to a head in 1933 when Tabenkin decided that the time had come for a complete union. He objected mainly to Nezah's independent educational organization and demanded an immediate decision: Nezah must abolish its independent internal organization or leave Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad. Nezah regarded this as an expulsion and accused Tabenkin of being unwilling to bridge the gap between different groups that had formed Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Kibbutz together.

There were, in fact, many cases of different groups being fully absorbed

within the kibbutz movement. This case, however, depicts Tabenkin's adamant insistence on discipline. He wanted the kibbutz to be united and the party heterogeneous. Let us, therefore, examine Tabenkin's conception of the Histadrut, the party, and the kibbutz, and the relations among them.

According to Tabenkin, the party had to fulfil only political functions which were, in any case, of less importance. Therefore the party was inferior to the kibbutz, which was a living and social entity and must at all cost maintain its unity since "action unites, theory divides". He put this quite clearly in 1933.

Socialism is of vital interest to humanity. The working class reflects the interest of all humanity. Belonging to a class is an objective fact. Only when the working class turns into a movement does it reach full consciousness. The next step leads to individual responsibility for the actions required. An individual has to have a strong will power and moral norms, the basis of every society. While the class is an objective fact, the kibbutz is the result of conscious decision-making...

Although the kibbutz is a pioneering body, it is not meant for just a chosen few. Circumstances, may, in time, turn it into a mass movement... This can never be achieved by a party. It requires a united group of people, who know where they are headed.

According to Tabenkin, people join the Histadrut for objective reasons, the party from a conscious decision, the kibbutz from their own free will. Lecturing in 1956, Tabenkin emphasized the superior position of the kibbutz.

The class struggle is an objective circumstance. It can never realise its social ideals without the party organization. The party, however, is not an objective dictate, but an ideological union. It can, therefore, remain static and when obstacles and struggle ensue, there have to be deviances... The kibbutz of course, is an objective pioneering phenomenon... A kibbutz member can leave his kibbutz whenever he feels like it, but his economic and cultural interest, etc. cause him to identify with the common interests. His emotions are dependent on

objective issues. An affinity with the kibbutz, unlike the affinity with a party, cannot be realised in halves and in quarters.

Tabenkin was aware of the fact that the more the labor movement became involved in politics, the more his organizational concept was being undermined. And indeed, after the State of Israel was established, the balance shifted considerably, to the disadvantage of the kibbutz.

#### SUMMARY

Tabenkin's unique and original idea, which was never fully realised, was to seek the establishment of a single and broadly-based party, and to create an avant-garde to implement its ideology.

This ideal was the result of a most significant combination - constructivist and realising socialism together with maximalist radicalism. Constructive socialism required the organization of the entire working class and its responsibility for society at large. This in turn required the party's participation in a coalition that would be responsible for the working class and the people.

The realising radicalism asked for the formation of a small maximalist body which would call on its members' utmost participation. A voluntary socialism that believes in the power of organized will to further historical processes, requires the formation of an avant-garde. Its pioneering spirit must be expressed through its advanced way of life and its adherence to the interests of the entire people.

A victory of such an avant-garde cannot be achieved by overcoming the majority, because its revolutionary character does not depend on political power.

The progress of a pioneering avant-garde may be measured by its growth and its victories. It aspires to transform the party into an avant-garde, the entire class into one party - and the entire people would become a working class.

The Eretz Israel labor movement adopted the constructivist way of realisation and this required one organization of the entire working class. When on the road to realisation, difficulties, deviance and weakness were encountered, the majority would adopt a slower rate of progress in order to maintain unity. Tabenkin, however, always opted for the hard course. He supported the general rate of progress to the utmost, while aspiring to create an avant-garde which might proceed unhampered by the majority.

Tabenkin, furthermore, strove to undertake the responsibility for the entire class and the whole people and maintain, at the same time, a radical-maximalist attitude. He criticized everyone who slowed down and he

always pushed with all his might in order to achieve his aims, even if they sometimes seemed to be inachievable.

This problematic combination of aspirations was the cause of most of his difficulties and failures. However, it also led to many amazing achievements.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Yitzhak Katzenelson*, (1886-1944). Poet, dramatist in Hebrew and Yiddish. Died in Auschwitz. His "Poem of the Murdered Jewish People", written in a concentration camp in France, is one of the greatest literary expressions of the Holocaust.
2. *Berl Katzenelson*, (1887-1944). Spiritual leader of the Israeli labor movement, among the founders of Ahdut Ha-avoda and Mapai. First editor of the influential daily "Davar".
3. *Po'alei Zion*, Zionist-Socialist labor movement, strongly influenced by Marxism.
4. *Poltava Convention*, (1906) adopted the ideological platform of Po'alei Zion.
5. *Uganda Affair*, (1904) a British proposal, at the time of the Ottoman Empire, to settle Jewish refugees in Uganda.
6. *Territorialism*, a movement which agreed to adopt any country for Jewish settlement and State.
7. *Sejmism*, a socialist party in Russia, Ukraine and Poland, that proposed local Jewish autonomy.
8. *Ber Borochov*, (1881-1919) Po'alei Zion leader and theoretician who formulated the analysis of Socialist Zionism using the tool of historic materialism.
9. *Merchavia Cooperative*, settlement founded by members of Ha'shomer (1911), inspired by F. Oppenheimer. See below no. 11.
10. *The big kvutza in Kinneret*, its concept was formulated in 1912, differing from the small kvutza prototype.
11. *Ha-Shomer*, the main illegal defence organization of the Jewish settlements (1909-1920), later the nucleus of the Hagana.
12. *Ahdut ha-Avoda*, the Israeli branch of Po'alei Zion, founded in 1919. Affiliated to the Socialist International.
13. *Mapai*, Eretz Israel Workers' Party, founded 1930 by the merger of Ahdut ha-Avoda and Ha-Po'el ha-Za'ir.
14. *Histadrut*, General Federation of Jewish Labor, founded in 1920, includes trade unions, cooperatives etc.
15. *Gedud ha-Avoda*, (Labor Battalion), 1920. A communal movement, aspiring to encompass all the Jewish laborers.
16. *Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad*, the biggest Kibbutz movement, founded in 1927 by uniting Ein Harod and smaller kibbutz movements.
17. *He-Halutz*, Zionist-socialist pioneer movement in the Diaspora, founded in 1917 in Russia by J. Trumpeldor. See below no. 34.
18. *Palmach*, permanently mobilized volunteer striking force of the Hagana.
19. *Mapam*, Left-wing Labor Party.
20. *Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir*, Zionist-socialist youth movement, founded in Poland (1912), became a world movement, established Ha-Kibbutz ha-Artzi and became the nucleus of the left wing Mapam.
21. *Ma'arach* (Alignment), a political front of Mapai and Ahdut ha-Avoda, joined later by Mapam.
22. *Yitzhak Ben-Aharon*, (1906). Member of Kibbutz Givat Haim. Prominent leader of Ahdut ha-Avoda, Israel Labor Party, Histadrut leader and former cabinet member.
23. *Second Aliya*, (1904-1914). The second wave of Jewish immigration.
24. *Hevrat ha-Ovdim*, organization of all economic, cooperative and financial activities of the Histadrut.
25. *David Ben-Gurion*, (1886-1973). First Prime Minister of Israel and the most prominent labor leader.
26. *Yitzhak Ben-Zvi*, (1884-1963). Second President of the State of Israel, leader of Ha-Shomer.
27. *David Remez*, (1886-1951), Labor leader, General Secretary of Histadrut, Cabinet Minister.
28. *Shmuel Yavne'eli*, (1884-1961), Labor leader, initiator of Aliya from Yemen.
29. *Nachman Syrkin*, (1868-1924). Labor movement theoretician. Lived in New York from 1907.
30. *Ha-Po'el ha-Zair*, Non-Marxist Zionist-Socialist party, founded in 1905.
31. *Joseph Yitkin*, (1876-1912). Called (1905) to unite for Aliya, settlement and self-employed labor.
32. *Moshavot*, the first Jewish non-cooperative settlements in Eretz-Israel. Generally established on privately-owned land.
33. *Degania*, the first Kvutza, founded in 1909. See below no. 54.
34. *Joseph Trumpeldor*, (1880-1920). One of the initiators of the Jewish Legion in World War I; founder of He-halutz in Russia (1917); organized defence of Jewish settlements in Galilee. Fell defending Tel Hai. See below no. 49.
35. *Arthur Ruppin*, (1876-1943). Economist and sociologist. Head of the Settlement Department of the World Zionist Movement.
36. *Territorialism*. At that time the Territorialists had a good chance to become the major trend in Po'alei Zion.
37. *Menachem Ussishkin*, (1863-1941). Zionist leader, main opponent of the Uganda proposal.
38. *Shlomo Kaplanski*, (1854-1950). Zionist labor leader in Austria, representative of Po'alei Zion at the Socialist International.
39. *J.N.F.*, The Jewish National Fund; established in 1901 by the Zionist organization to redeem land in Eretz Israel.
40. *Moshav*, Moshav Ovdim, cooperative settlement of individual farms.
41. *Hamashbir*, wholesale marketing enterprise of the Histadrut.
42. *Shikun Ovdim*, cooperative building enterprise of the Histadrut.
43. *Autonomous Workers Educational System*, school system of the labor movement.
44. *Ze'ev Jabotinsky*, (1880-1940). Leader of the right-wing Zionist-Revisionist Party; officer in the Jewish Legion (1917), publicist and writer.

45. *Aharon Zisling*, (1901-1964), founding member of Kibbutz Ein-Harod, Labor and kibbutz leader, Cabinet Minister.
46. *A.D. Gordon*, (1856-1922), spiritual spokesman of the Zionist labor movement, emphasized self-employed labor and agricultural work.
47. *The Bund*, Jewish, non-Zionist Socialist party in Russia and in Poland. Established 1897.
48. *Joseph Haim Brenner*, (1881-1921). Novelist and publicist of labor; killed by Arabs on May 1st, 1921.
49. *Tel Hai*, North Galilean kibbutz, was over-run by Arab rioters in 1920 and became a symbol of Jewish defence.
50. *Yishuv*, The pre-State Jewish population in Eretz Israel.
51. *Egal*, Kibbutz Study Center, whose founder and moving spirit was Tabenkin.
52. *Baltimore Program*, Ben-Gurion's proposals "to open the gates of Palestine to Jewish immigration and settlement and to create a Jewish State", adopted in New York by the Zionist world movement (1942).
53. *Moshe Shertok (Sharett)* (1894-1965), Prime Minister of Israel, Minister of Foreign Affairs and prominent labor leader.
54. *Knitza*, generally used for smaller kibbutzim or for the principle of communal life.
55. *Chaim Arlosoroff*, (1899-1933). Labor leader in the World Zionist movement. Assassinated in 1933.
56. *Shlomo Lavie*, (1882-1963). Theoretician of the large kibbutz, member of Ein Harod, publicist.
57. *Martin Buber*, (1878-1965). German-Jewish philosopher, theologian, influenced by humanism and anarchism.
58. *Gustav Landauer*, (1870-1919). German-Jewish anarchist thinker, assassinated in Munich by right-wingers.
59. *Narodnaya Volya*, Russian populist movement, which had many Jewish student members.
60. *Eliahu Golomb*, (1893-1945). Main architect of the Hagana and Jewish defence.

## SOME BOOKS ON YITZHAK TABENKIN AND HIS ACTIVITIES

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2. יצחק טבנקין: **בדרכי השליחות**. דברים בשאלות ההסתדרות ותנועת הפועלים, תרבות וחינוך, תל-אביב, 1969.
3. יצחק טבנקין: **לקח ששת הימים**. ישובה של ארץ בלתי מחולקת, הוצ' הקיבוץ המאוחד, 1970.
4. יצחק טבנקין: **על דרך הקיבוץ המאוחד ועל עקרונות הקומונה**, הוצ' יד טבנקין, 1974.
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6. 1985. *Yitzhak Tabenkin, The Kibbutz, a Non Utopian Commune*, Yad Tabenkin.
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8. יצחק טבנקין, **האיש ופעלו**, ערכו יוסקה רבינוביץ ואריה פיאלקוב. הוצ' יד טבנקין 1982.
9. **תאריכיו האישי של יצחק טבנקין**, ערכה יוכבד בת-דחל, אורכיו יד טבנקין 1973.
10. **מדריך לזכר יצחק טבנקין בעין כוח ומגן**, **בטחון ישראל**, **עניינים מדיניים וחסות ישראל** – עיתון 1919-1971, אורכיו יד טבנקין 1986.
11. אורי ברנר, **טבנקין בהמגה** (עד 1924), הוצ' יד טבנקין, 1976.
12. יהודה הראל: **הסוציאליזם של יצחק טבנקין**, מחברת מחקר א', יד טבנקין 1972.
13. יום עיון **בעקבות חיבורו של יהודה הראל**, 1973.
14. מתתיהו מיני: **חבר ויריב – טבנקין במפגמי פועלי ציון**, יד טבנקין והוצ' הקיבוץ המאוחד, 1986.
15. חיים הדרי: **הקיבוץ המאוחד, החלטות ותעודות**  
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