

The Hidden History of Zionism by Ralph Schoenman

Bibliographic Note

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By Ralph Schoenman

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About the Author



Ralph Schoenman was Executive Director of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, in which capacity he conducted negotiations with numerous heads of state. He secured the release of political prisoners in many countries and initiated the International Tribunal on U.S. War Crimes in Indo-China, of which he was Secretary General.

Long active in political life, he initiated the Committee of 100 which organized mass civil disobedience against nuclear weapons and U.S. bases in Great Britain. He was founder and Director of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign and Director of the Who Killed Kennedy Committee.

He also has been a leader of the Committee for Artistic Freedom in Iran, Co-Director of the Committee in Defense of the Palestinian and Lebanese Peoples, Director of American Workers and Artists for Solidarity, and Executive Director of the Palestine Campaign which called for an end to all aid to Israel and for a democratic secular Palestine.

Ralph Schoenman broadcasts weekly on WBAI-NY.

Taking Aim with Ralph Schoenman and Mya Shone is a collection of archives at <http://takingaim.info>.

His previous books include **Bertrand Russell: Philosopher of the Century**, **Death and Pillage in the Congo: A Study of Western Rule**, which he co-authored with Khalid Ahmed Zaki, **Prisoners of Israel** written with Mya Shone and **Iraq and Kuwait: A History Suppressed**.

Acknowledgements

During the Dark Ages in Europe, Greek science, mathematics and philosophy were preserved by Arab scholars. From Avicenna to al-Kindi, Arab science and mathematics nurtured the legacy of Greek natural and moral philosophy.

The Zionist movement subdued Palestine and assaulted its culture with a relentless barbarity shocking even to those familiar with the cruel annals of colonial conquest. This history has been suppressed during the past one hundred years. It has only been brought to light through the writings of a relatively few intrepid scholars.

A profound debt is owed to them – Moslems, Christians, Jews and non-believers – whose work of preservation and exegesis has made possible this attempt at synthesis.

Alan Benjamin has devoted hundreds of hours to all facets of this work. Co-thinker, discussant, editor and friend, he has sharpened the analysis, economized the presentation and taken charge of multiple technical problems inherent in its production. It would not exist without him.

Mya Shone, my wife and companion, but for her own reticence would be listed as the co-author of this book. Her role in writing and shaping the text is equal to my own. Every sentence has been tested by her insistence on precision of expression and lucidity. To the extent that either has been achieved, the energy and will flowed from her, the writing shared in a labor of love.

To our treasured Palestinian friends and comrades, I would paraphrase Dylan Thomas: We are alone and not alone in the unknown world, our bliss and suffering forever shared and forever all our own.

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Chapter 1: The Four Myths

It is not accidental that when anyone attempts to examine the nature of Zionism – its origins, history and dynamics – they meet with people who terrorize or threaten them. Quite recently, after mentioning a meeting on the plight of the Palestinian people during an interview on KPFK, a Los Angeles radio station, the organizers of the public meeting were deluged with bomb threats from anonymous callers.

Nor is it easy in the United States or Western Europe to disseminate information about the nature of Zionism or to analyze the specific events which denote Zionism as a political movement. Even the announcement on university campuses of authorized forums or meetings on the subject invariably engenders a campaign designed to close off discussion. Posters are torn down as fast as they are put up. Meetings are packed by flying squads of Zionist youth who seek to break them up. Literature tables are vandalized and leaflets and articles appear accusing the speaker of anti-Semitism or, in the case of those of Jewish origin, of self-hatred.

Vindictiveness and slander are so universally meted out to anti-Zionists because the disparity between the official fiction about Zionism and the Israeli state, on the one hand, and the barbarous practice of this colonial ideology and coercive apparatus, on the other, is so vast. People are in shock when they have an opportunity to hear or read about the century of persecution suffered by the Palestinians, and, thus, the apologists for Zionism are relentless in seeking to prevent coherent, dispassionate examination of the virulent and chauvinist record of the Zionist movement and of the state which embodies its values.

The irony of this is that when we study what the Zionists have written and said – particularly when addressing themselves – no doubt remains about what they have done or of their place in the political spectrum, dating from the last quarter of the 19th century to the present day.

Four overriding myths have shaped the consciousness of most people in our society about Zionism.

The first is that of “A land without a people for a people without a land.” This myth was sedulously cultivated by early Zionists to promote the fiction that Palestine was a remote, desolate place ready for the taking. This claim was quickly followed by denial of Palestinian identity, nationhood or legitimate entitlement to the land in which the Palestinian people have lived throughout their recorded history.

The second is the myth of Israeli democracy. Innumerable newspaper stories or television references to the Israeli state are followed by the assertion that it is the only “real” democracy in the Middle East. In fact, Israel is as democratic as the apartheid

state of South Africa. Civil liberty, due process and the most basic human rights are by law denied those who do not meet racial, religious criteria.

The third myth is that of “security” as the motor force of Israeli foreign policy. Zionists maintain that their state must be the fourth largest military power in the world because Israel has been forced to defend itself against imminent menace from primitive, hate-consuming Arab masses only recently dropped from the trees.

The fourth myth is that of Zionism as the moral legate of the victims of the Holocaust. This is at once the most pervasive and insidious of the myths about Zionism. Ideologues for the Zionist movement have wrapped themselves in the collective shroud of the six million Jews who fell victim to Nazi mass murder. The bitter and cruel irony of this false claim is that the Zionist movement itself actively colluded with Nazism from its inception.

To most people it appears anomalous that the Zionist movement, which forever invokes the horror of the Holocaust, should have collaborated actively with the most vicious enemy ever faced by the Jews. The record, however, reveals not merely common interests but a deep ideological affinity rooted in the extreme chauvinism which they share.

Chapter 2: Zionist Objectives

The objective of Zionism has never been merely to colonize Palestine – as was the goal of classical colonial and imperial movements during the 19th and 20th centuries. The design of European colonialism in Africa and Asia was, essentially, to exploit indigenous peoples as cheap labor while extracting natural resources for exorbitant profit.

What distinguishes Zionism from other colonial movements is the relationship between the settlers and the people to be conquered. The avowed purpose of the Zionist movement was not merely to exploit the Palestinian people but to disperse and dispossess them. The intent was to replace the indigenous population with a new settler community, to eradicate the farmers, artisans and town-dwellers of Palestine and substitute an entirely new workforce composed of the settler population.

In denying the existence of the Palestinian people, Zionism sought to create the political climate for their removal, not only from their land but from history. When acknowledged at all, the Palestinians were re-invented as a semi-savage, nomadic remnant. Historical records were falsified – a procedure begun during the last quarter of the 19th century but continuing to this day in such pseudo-historical writings as Joan Peters' **From Time Immemorial**.

The Zionist movement would seek alternative imperial sponsors for this bloody enterprise; among them the Ottoman Empire, Imperial Germany, the British Raj, French colonialism and Czarist Russia. Zionist plans for the Palestinian people anticipated the Ottoman solution for the Armenians, who would be slaughtered in the first sustained genocide of the 20th century.

Zionist Plans for the Palestinian People

From its inception, the Zionist movement sought the “Armenianization” of the Palestinian people. Like the Native Americans, the Palestinians were regarded as “a people too many”. The logic was elimination; the record was to be one of genocide.

This was no less true of the Labor Zionist movement, which sought to provide a “socialist” patina for the colonial enterprise. One of the principal theorists of Labor Zionism, a founder of the Zionist party Ha'Poel Ha'Tzair (The Young Worker) and a supporter of Poale Zion (Workers of Zion), was Aaron David Gordon.

Walter Laqueur acknowledges in his **History of Zionism** that, “A. D. Gordon and his comrades wanted every tree and every bush to be planted by Jewish 'pioneers'.”(14)

Gordon coined the slogan “conquest of labor” [*Kibbush avodah*]. He called upon Jewish capitalists, and the Rothschild plantation managers, who had obtained land from absentee Turkish landlords over the heads of the Palestinian people, “to hire Jews and only Jews”. He organized boycotts of any Zionist enterprise which failed to employ Jews exclusively, and prepared strikes against the Rothschild colonists, who allowed Arab peasants to sharecrop or to work, even as cheap labor.

Thus, the “Labor Zionists” employed the methods of the workers’ movement to prevent the use of Arab labor; their objective was not exploitation but usurpation.

Palestinian Society

There were over one thousand villages in Palestine at the turn of the 19th century. Jerusalem, Haifa, Gaza, Jaffa, Nablus, Acre, Jericho, Ramle, Hebron and Nazareth were flourishing towns. The hills were painstakingly terraced. Irrigation ditches crisscrossed the land. The citrus orchards, olive groves and grains of Palestine were known throughout the world. Trade, crafts, textiles, cottage industry and agricultural production abounded.

Eighteenth and 19th century travellers’ accounts are replete with the data, as were the scholarly quarterly reports published in the 19th century by the British Palestine Exploration Fund.

In fact, it was precisely the social cohesiveness and stability of Palestinian society which led Lord Palmerston, in 1840, when Britain had established a consulate in Jerusalem, to propose, presciently, the founding of a European Jewish settler colony to “preserve the larger interests of the British Empire”.(15)

Palestinian society, if suffering from the collaboration of feudal landowners [effendi] with the Ottoman Empire, was nevertheless productive and culturally diverse, with a peasantry quite conscious of its social role. The Palestinian peasants and urban dwellers had made a clear, strongly felt distinction between the Jews who lived amongst them and would-be colonists, dating from the 1820’s, when the 20,000 Jews of Jerusalem were wholly integrated and accepted in Palestinian society.

When the colonists at Petah Tikvah sought to push the peasants off the land, in 1886, they were met with organized resistance, but Jewish workers in neighboring villages and communities were wholly unaffected. When the Armenians escaping the Turkish genocide settled in Palestine they were welcomed. The genocide was ominously defended by Vladimir Jabotinsky and other Zionists in their attempts to obtain Turkish support.

In fact, until the Balfour Declaration [1917], the Palestinian response to Zionist settlements was unwisely tolerant. There was no organized Jew-hatred in Palestine,

no massacres such as the Czar and Polish anti-Semites prepared, no racist counterpart in the Palestinian response to armed colonists (who used force wherever possible to drive Palestinians from the land). Not even spontaneous riots, expressing pent up Palestinian rage at the steady theft of their land, were directed at Jews as such.

Courting Imperial Favor

In 1896, Theodor Herzl set forth his plan for inducing the Ottoman Empire to grant Palestine to the Zionist movement:

Supposing his Majesty the Sultan were to give us Palestine; we could, in return, undertake to regulate the finances of Turkey. We should there form an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism.(16)

By 1905, the Seventh World Zionist Congress had to acknowledge that the Palestinian people were organizing a political movement for national independence from the Ottoman Empire – a threat not merely to Turkish rule but to Zionist designs.

Speaking at this Congress, Max Nordau, a prominent Zionist leader, set forth Zionist concerns:

The movement which has taken hold of a great part of the Arab people may easily take a direction which may cause harm in Palestine. ...The Turkish government may feel itself compelled to defend its reign in Palestine and Syria with armed force. ...In these circumstances, Turkey can be convinced that it will be important for her to have in Palestine and Syria a strong and well-organized group which ... will resist any attack on the authority of the Sultan and defend his authority with all its might.(17)

As the Kaiser undertook to forge an alliance with Turkey as part of his contest with Britain and France for control of the Middle East, the Zionist movement made similar overtures to Imperial Germany. The Kaiser took nearly ten years in his on-and-off dealings with the Zionist leadership to formulate a plan for a Jewish state under ottoman auspices which would have as its principal task the eradication of the Palestinian anti-colonial resistance and the securing of the interests of Imperial Germany in the region.

By 1914, however, the World Zionist Organization was already far advanced in its parallel bid to enlist the British Empire to undertake the break-up of the Ottoman Empire with Zionist assistance. Chaim Weizmann, who was to become president of the World Zionist Organization, made an important public announcement:

We can reasonably say that should Palestine fall within the British sphere of influence, and should Britain encourage Jewish settlement there, as a British dependency, we could have in twenty to thirty years a million Jews out there, perhaps more; they would develop the country, bring back civilization to it and form a very effective guard for the Suez Canal.(18)

The Balfour Declaration

Weizmann secured from the British what the Zionist leaders had sought simultaneously from the Ottoman and German Imperial governments. On November 2, 1917, the Balfour Declaration was issued.

It stated, in part:

His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object(19)

The Zionists were cynical in the delineation of their claim to Palestine. One moment they would assert that Palestine was a wasteland visited by occasional nomads; in the next breath they proposed to subjugate the very Palestinian population they had attempted to render invisible. A. D. Gordon, himself, repeatedly declared that the Palestinians whom, he insisted did not exist, should be prevented, by force from cultivating the soil.

This translated into the total expulsion of non-Jews from the Jewish "fatherland". A like description informed pronouncements by British and Zionist leaders in their plans for the Palestinian population. By the time of the Balfour Declaration, British imperial armies had occupied most of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, having enlisted Arab leaders to fight the Turks under British direction in exchange for British assurances of "self-determination".

While the Zionists in their propaganda insisted that Palestine was unpopulated, in their dealings with their imperial sponsors they made clear that subjugation was the order of the day and offered themselves as the instrument.

The British responded in kind. The Balfour Declaration also contained a passage intended to lull Arab feudal leaders shocked by the treachery of the British Empire in handing over to the Zionists the very land in which Arab self-determination had been promised:

it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.(20)