

Current Opinion: (undated) 1919
CROSS-CURRENTS IN AMERICAN JUDAISM
The Struggle For and Against a Zionist State

ONE of the chief problems with which the Peace Conference at Paris has had to grapple has been that of Zionism. The entire project of a "Jewish homeland" is beset with difficulties. While President Wilson, the Vatican and the governments of Great Britain, France and Italy have all gone on record as favoring the Jewish State, the Jews themselves are far from being of one mind in relation to the plan. Journals of the type of the *Chicago Israelite* frankly oppose Zionism. The *American Hebrew* (New York) is afraid that "the cause of liberty for the Jews of the world has been lost sight of in Paris, due to the Nationalist agitation." American Jewry has sent to Paris a petition signed by Henry Morgenthau, Adolph Ochs, David Belasco, E. R. A. Seligman, and many more, protesting against "the demand of the Zionists for the reorganization of the Jews as a national unit." And Congressman Julius Kahn, of California, who carried the petition, took occasion, just before his departure, to make (in the *New York Times*) the statement: "This whole question as raised by the proposal of a separate Jewish State is much more serious than appears on the surface; and now, before a final decision is reached, is the time to face the issue squarely." He bases his opposition to Zionism on four main grounds:

"First—It creates a divided allegiance, as between our country and its Stars and

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Stripes and Zion with its white flag with the blue star. The Zionists, even in this country, are bent upon following their flag. The real American Jew knows but one flag, the Stars and Stripes. The American Jew sings 'The Star-Spangled Banner' as his national anthem. The Zionist sings 'The Hatikvah' as his.

"Second—The Zionist doctrine is in conflict with our own free institutions. The Zionists believe in the foundation of a government which shall embrace both Church and State. That is not in keeping with the trend of modern statecraft anywhere. In that respect Zionism is decidedly reactionary. Besides, the Jews of Palestine are a small minority of the population. Will the other people who live there consent to domination by this minority?

"Third—There is the practical objection against the huddling together in a confined territory of enormous numbers of the Jewish people. As everyone knows, Palestine is small; it could never support the millions of Jews who live in countries where Jewish persecution is a matter of common occurrence. That huddling together has had a baneful effect in Russia, Rumania, Galicia, and Poland. The result would be a continuance of these disadvantages in the proposed new home.

"Fourth—The greatest danger to the Jews in all those countries where they are on an entire equality with every other class of citizens is that, with the establishment of a separate Jewish State, they would be looked upon as aliens where to-day they are respected citizens. They would frequently be told to go to their own country, Palestine, by those agitators and fanatics who have a hatred of the Jew in their hearts. In fact, I have had a

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number of letters recently which stated the opinions of the writers. They suggested that it would be a good thing if the country got rid of the Jews."

The arguments of anti-Zionists are met in a recent article in the *Century* by Israel Friedlaender, Professor of Biblical Literature and Exegesis in the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York. He deals, in particular, with the objections that the Zionists want to establish a theocracy and that their rule will involve a violation of the principle of self-determination. To quote:

"The idea that the Zionists wish to establish a theocracy in Palestine will cause a riot of mirth among those who are acquainted with conditions in modern Zionism. Dr. Theodore Herzl would turn in his grave could he listen to the charge that he was the protagonist of a Jewish theocracy. Dr. Max Nordau, Louis D. Brandeis, Dr. Weizman, nay, even Ahad Ha'am, the famous champion of 'Spiritual Zionism,' and many other leading Zionists who are in the van of modern thought, will be amazed, or possibly amused, at this implication. . . . There is no question that the relation between religion and state will be one of the most momentous issues which will confront the new Jewish commonwealth, and those Zionists who are thoroly permeated with the religious spirit of Judaism fervently hope that a solution will be found that will harmonize the ancient ideals of Judaism with the requirements of modern times; but . . . there is no Zionist who wishes for the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth that will in any way contradict the ideas of justice

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and equality such as are at the bottom of every modern body politic"

In regard to the second objection,

that a minority of Jews in Palestine

(some 100,000) propose to force their

régime on a majority of 630,000 non-

Jews, Professor Friedlaender says:

"The fact of the matter is that the

Mohammedan Arabs of Palestine,

forming nine-tenths of the Palestinian

population, have heretofore been in

favor of Zionism, seeing what the

Zionists, under most adverse condi-

tions, have already done for the re-

juvenation of their desolate land; and

the Greek-Orthodox Christians, who

form an overwhelming majority of the

Christian population of the Holy Land,

have repeatedly expressed themselves

in the same manner." Professor Fried-

laender continues:

"Palestine is neither historically nor

emotionally an Arabic country. When the

Arabs dream of their ancient glory, they

think of Nejd and Hedjaz, the cradle of

their race and religion; they think of the

splendor of the Omniads at Damascus,

of the magnificence of the Abbassides at

Bagdad, of the power of the Fatimites at

Cairo; but they do not think of Jerusalem.

Spain is far more intimately and far more

gloriously interwoven with Arabic culture

than is Palestine. During the twelve hun-

dred years and more that the Arabs have

lived in Palestine they have, despite their

remarkable achievements in other lands,

never developed an Arabic culture that is

worth speaking of. Nor have the Chris-

tians managed to do so, altho they have

been backed by the powerful influences

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and resources of various European gov-

ernments. But the handful of Jews who

have come to Palestine as the land of

their fathers and have been willing to

brave the dangers and hardships, which

can be paralleled only by the similar ex-

periences of the early colonists of New

England, have succeeded in setting up a

civilization, or, rather, the beginnings of

a civilization, which, in the judgment of

all unbiased observers, is the greatest cul-

tural factor in the Palestine of to-day.

To mention only one example; in less than

one generation the Jews of Palestine have

performed the greatest linguistic miracle

known in history by making again the

ancient tongue of their prophets a living

language, after its having served as a

purely literary medium of expression for

nearly two thousand years. The Jews,

who are of the same race as the Arabs—

a kinship cemented by the profound and

beneficent influence which their cultures

exercised upon one another for many

centuries—have genuine sympathy with

their aspirations, and look forward to the

reestablishment of ancient Arabic glory;

but they see no reason why on the vast

expanse of a new Arabic world which

is now being set up by the great powers,

they have no right to claim a little corner

in which they may rejuvenate the ancient

glory of Zion."

While controversialists debate, the

actual fabric of the Jewish State is be-

ing created. During recent weeks, as

we learn from a Publicity Bulletin of

the Zionist Organization of America,

elections have been held for a Constitu-

ent Assembly in Palestine. Three polit-

ical parties have participated. Wo-

men have voted, as well as men, and

every candidate had to speak in He-

brew. The powers of the Constituent

Assembly are to be limited to internal

affairs. Questions of national interest

are to be left to the Zionist Organiza-

tion.

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