

THE ZIONIST CONQUEST OF AMERICAN OPINION

by Murray N. Rothbard

What I will be focussing on in this paper is not the Zionist conquest of Palestine and the creation of the state of Israel, but on the necessary precondition of that achievement: the virtually total Zionist conquest of American public opinion. So complete is this victory that it has become literally impossible in American public or even intellectual life to be even mildly critical of Zionism or Israel. When, for example, General George S. Brown, in attempting to explain to an audience the dominance of Zionism over American policy, mentioned Jewish control or ownership of the media, the firestorm that descended upon his head was such that we all know full well that General Brown will not be repeating these remarks ever again. It is noteworthy, and an index of Zionist domination over the channels of opinion, that not one of the vituperative critics of Brown bothered to discuss the truth or falsity of Brown's empirical generalizations; and further that no one cared or dared to defend Brown in public. The charge that Brown's empirical statement was ipso facto "anti-Semitic" was enough to silence any possible defenders (including Brown himself) and to carry the day automatically.

This absolute Zionist control of opinion, which has succeeded in stifling any sort of free inquiry into these topics, is a remarkable success story for a minority movement whose aims were once

radical (that is, radically different from the original status quo.)
How was this conquest of American opinion achieved?

First, we must separate the Zionist success story into two distinct though interconnecting areas: the Zionist conquest of Jewish opinion, within the Jewish community; and the Zionist conquest of Gentile American opinion. The two are intertwined, for one of the effective methods of Zionist control over Gentile opinion has been to identify Zionism with Jews and Judaism; hence, if the two are perceived to be identical, any criticism of Zionism or Israel by Gentiles then becomes ipso facto "anti-Semitic."

It was not always thus; indeed, when the Zionist movement began, in the late 19th century, it was ^a disliked minority within Jewry both in Europe and the United States. Since the early 19th century, the Jewish religion had been split into two broadly different groups, each of which contained many variants and splinters. First, was Orthodox Judaism, which, though containing many variants, cleaved to the Talmudic laws which dominate every aspect of Orthodox Jewish life. The great split from Orthodoxy was the Reform movement in the early 19th century, which was particularly strong among German Jews and among Jews in the United States, almost all of whom were of German descent. The reason was that whereas Orthodoxy was a clanish, ghetto-born religion (for Talmudic Judaism enveloping Jews in a network of laws was a far different cry from the ancient, pre-medieval Judaism of Palestine), the Jews of Germany and the United

States had successfully assimilated into the life of their respective countries, and saw Orthodoxy as a ghettoizing, reactionary force unsuitable to their new role as individual citizens of a modern society. Reform Judaism discarded Hebrew and virtually all aspects of Jewish ritual and the Yiddish language, indeed converting Judaism into a religion virtually indistinguishable from Unitarianism or Ethical Culture. Judaism was now virtually confined to the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule.

Zionism therefore met a totally hostile reception among American Reform Jews, who held the mystical "return to Palestine" and the Holy Land to be a reactionary, tribal nationalism incompatible with their status as Americans and with the universal ethical precepts of what the Reformers saw to be the valid core of the Jewish religion. The angry and common reply of the American rabbis to Zionism was that "America is our Zion." Zionism met a more friendly reception among the more numerous Jews of Russia and Poland, where the ghetto still prevailed over any feeble tendencies toward classical liberalism, a liberalism which had ended the ghetto in Western Europe. Among Orthodox Jews, many felt that Zionism fulfilled the long-repeated prayer, of "next year in Jerusalem". But even here, Orthodoxy did not universally welcome the Zionists. For one thing, the ultra-Orthodox (which is still true today) regarded Zionism as gravely heretical; for Orthodoxy strictly maintains that the Jewish state will properly only reappear in Palestine when that state is established by the Messiah and the Temple is re-

built. Since the Messiah has clearly not arrived, these ultra-Orthodox resisted Zionism. Indeed, the only way that the bulk of Orthodoxy has become pro-Zionist has been to reinterpret the "Messiah" from a personal advent to a vague and cloudy "Messianic Age".

Furthermore, with the turn of the twentieth century, Zionism had to face stronger opponents in the battle for Jewish opinion in Eastern Europe: specifically, the Bundist movement, which wanted a Socialist Jewish State in Eastern Europe (e.g. in Vilna where the Jews formed a majority of the city); the Socialists, who were universalists who wanted a Socialist state not specifically Jewish; and the Anarchists, who wanted no state at all. Of these, the Bundists were the strongest until World War I. Furthermore, even within the Zionist movement, probably a majority simply wanted a Jewish colony (not necessarily a State) anywhere in the world that was not occupied; the insistence on Palestine as the Jewish land was a minority even within Zionism (the two groups soon split before World War I, with the non-Palestine forces forming the once-strong Jewish Territorialist Organization.)

Most Gentiles think of Zionism as mandated by Orthodox Judaism. What is little known is that most Zionists are atheists, including the Labor Party that has dominated Israeli politics since its inception, and including such leaders as David Ben Gurion and Golda Meir. Orthodox Judaism is influential in Israel because

the Mizrachi, the National Religious Party, exercises a balance-of-power role within the governing Labor coalition. The Labor party are socialists and atheists; and religion has played little or no role in the "right-wing" opposition, the Zionist Revisionist movement. What, then, has been the basis for the Zionism of all of these dominant groups? The answer is an ideology that can only be described as racist, as devoted to the ethnic entity of "the Jewish people" and its allegedly historic claim to the sacred soil of Palestine. Thus, Zionism, whether the socialist variety of the Labor Party or the corporatist mixed economy of the Revisionists, is close to the "blood and soil" nationalist mystique of the Nazi and fascist movements of the early twentieth century.

One of the reasons, by the way, for Zionist success is that, even from its beginnings as a small minority, and even in the course of tactical compromises, the Zionists always kept in mind the ultimate objective--even though they have been tactically split into the Revisionists, who have wanted to move toward that objective rapidly, and the Labor party, which has always been tactically more cautious. That ultimate objective is an exclusive Jewish-run state (either free of Arabs, or with Arabs in a subject role) to include all of maximal Biblical Palestine, on "both sides of the Jordan" (including much of current Jordan and Syria.)

Zionism won its first success from its seemingly unpromising beginning by elite influence from the top, in Britain and secondarily

in the United States. The British government, during World War I, was planning to peel off the Middle East from imperial Turkish rule. In accordance with the alleged Allied devotion to national self-determination, the British had promised the Arabs national independence in the Middle East; but at the same time, in the famous Balfour Declaration, it promised the Zionist movement to "look with favor" on a "national home" for the Jews in Palestine, supposedly without violating the rights of the indigenous Arabs. The Balfour Declaration, coupled with the British seizing Palestine as a League mandate after World War I, was the indispensable entering wedge for the Zionist takeover of Palestine. Why did the British do it? First, as a wedge for British imperial occupation of Palestine, and "protection" of the British-run Suez Canal. The Zionist leadership, headed by Theodore Herzl, explicitly sold Britain on Zionism as an indispensable ally of the British Empire in the Middle East. Secondly, because of the political influence wielded by wealthy and highly-placed pro-Zionist Jews in Great Britain, notably the powerful Rothschild family of international bankers; one of the leaders of Liberal Imperialism, for example, Sir William Harcourt, was married to a Rothschild. And, thirdly, because the British believed that American Jews were influential in American politics, and that the American Jews, who had tended to be pro-German because of their opposition to Czarist Russia, would now shift to become pro-British and persuade President Wilson to enter the war on the British side. It was known, for example, that one of Wilson's closest advisers was Louis Brandeis, who although of German descent, was pro-Zionist. Indeed, the Balfour Decla-

ration was influential in changing American Jewish opinion toward the warring parties in World War I.

Zionism had received its first leg up due to elite pressure and the motivations of British imperialism; it had still not conquered opinion among American Jews or Gentiles. Among American Jews, an indispensable instrument for the conquest of American Jewish opinion was the rise of a third force within the Jewish religion: Conservatism. The Conservatives wanted, in varying degrees, to discard much of Orthodox law and yet did not want to go all the way toward the de-Judaizing of Reform Judaism.

But if one wants to discard the Orthodox view that all Talmudic laws were Divine commandments, and yet not go all the way to Ethical Culture, what rationale could possibly be developed for a middle-of-the road Conservatism? The answer was developed by an intellectual wing of Conservatism called Reconstructionism, headed by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan. The Reconstructionists held that much of Jewish rite and ritual, including Hebrew, should be retained, not because it was divine law, but because it was the tradition of "the Jewish people". This emphasis on "Jewish peoplehood" rooted religion, not in divine law of the Orthodox nor in the universal ethics of Reform, but in ethnic tribalism. This, of course, fit in neatly to Zionism, and provided a basic religious backstop to the Zionist ideology.

Reconstructionism, and the broader emphasis on "the Jewish people", grew ever stronger among American Jews in the 1930's, and

fit the attitudes of the great wave of Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants that had come to the U.S. in the two decades before World War I. Barely out of the ghetto, still subject to the trauma of immigration, and battling their way up from subsistence income levels (in contrast to the far higher income level of the older German-American Jews), the newer East European Jews, meeting attitudes of aesthetic hostility not only from Gentiles but also from German-American Jews (who, for example, invented the famous epithet "kike" to apply to Russo-Polish Jews), were not willing to give up Jewish cultural traditions and did not yet feel secure enough in secular American life to become assimilationists into American society and culture. Hence, Conservatism, and the emphasis on cleaving to the cultural and religious traditions of "the Jewish people", appealed far more to these newer immigrants.

Still, the major influence leading to the total triumph of Zionism over Jewish and Gentile American opinion was, of course, Adolf Hitler, who "objectively" was the greatest friend that Zionism ever had. (So much so, that, in one of the wildest "conspiracy theories" on record, the British Journalist Douglas Reed, once correspondent for the London Times, came to the conclusion that Adolf Hitler was a conscious and dedicated agent of the world Zionist conspiracy, out to wreck Germany.) Hitler's persecution of the Jews, although at least initially in the framework of an old tradition in Europe, served two Zionist purposes: it awakened old fears of persecution among American Jews, and rallied them far more behind Jewish peoplehood and Palestine for the Jews; and

also made American Gentiles incapable of thinking, much less doing, anything that could be construed as "anti-Semitic".

Within Jewish and also among Gentile opinion, the Zionists could now pose as a humanitarian movement, born as a humanitarian response to saving the Jews of Europe and providing them with a haven from Nazi persecution. In fact, however, the Zionists put enormous pressure upon the Australian government to reject a plan that it had previously begun to accept, offered by the last remnant of Jewish Territorialism, for a non-state, Jewish colony in northern Australia (Kimberley), despite the fact that many European Jews could have been saved thereby. For the Zionists were only interested in the Jewish refugees insofar as they could and would go to Palestine and build up pressure upon Great Britain for a Jewish State in Palestine. Indeed, feeling their oats during World War II, the World Zionist Organization, in their famous Biltmore Program in 1943 (adopted in convention at the Hotel Biltmore in New York) threw off their moderate mask on behalf of only a Jewish "home" in Palestine--which could be interpreted as a mere non-State homeland for refugees and immigrants) discarding such moderates as the British chemist Chaim Weizmann--and frankly adopted the Revisionist call for a Jewish-run State in Palestine.

Within the United States, it was now important for the Zionists to identify themselves with Jews and Judaism for American Gentiles, so that the equation of anti-Zionism = anti-Semitism (and hence implicitly pro-Nazism) could be generally adopted by Gentiles. Hence,

dissident American Jewish opinion had to be either silenced or deprived of media channels. Important in this process was a radical shift within Reform Judaism, which since World War II has been Conservatized, readopting much of the older Jewish ritual and, with it, the peoplehood concept along with ardent pro-Zionism. The pieces all fit together. We have the common spectacle, for example, of Reform or atheist Jews, who had grown up in the thirties, moving to the suburbs, and sending their children to Jewish Sunday Schools and themselves joining Conservative Jewish temples or else Conservatized Reform temples. Jewish religious textbooks and literature were uniformly rewritten to become pro-Zionist and thereby identify the Jewish religion, whether Orthodox, Conservative, or Reformed, closely with Zionism and later with Israel. But the important point is that "classical" Reform is no more, and is now indistinguishable from Conservatism. (It is no accident that the last of the anti-Zionist rabbis, Dr. Elmer Berger, is also among the last of the ultra-classical Reform rabbis.) The highly influential American Jewish Committee, the stronghold of wealthy and intellectual Reform Jews, first shifted from an anti-Zionist to a "non-Zionist" position during World War II, and then became frankly pro-Zionist (pace its highly influential monthly periodical, Commentary.) Indeed, the small but leading anti-Zionist organization, the American Council for Judaism (Rabbi Elmer Berger, executive director) was born during the war in despair at the growing Zionization of the American Jewish Committee.

We might pause to inquire at the almost total failure of the anti-Zionist ACJ to make its voice heard, and thereby to inform Gentile opinion of another, anti-Zionist current within American Jewry. In addition to the fact of its small size, the ACJ consisted of wealthy Jews almost all of German descent, and therefore out of touch with the overwhelming majority of American Jews from Eastern Europe. (Indeed, Rabbi Berger recently informed me sadly that the dominant motivation of the ACJ was not so much opposition to Zionism as dislike of Russo-Polish Jews.) Secondly, in contrast to the firebrand and determined radicalism of the Zionists, the ACJ was timid and temporizing; indeed, it consistently refused to criticize the state of Israel, confining itself to trying to save the Jewish religion (almost exclusively Reform religion) from a Zionizing influence. In other words, the ACJ was exclusively confined to separating itself from Zionists in America rather than criticizing Zionism as a whole or the actions of the state of Israel. These conflicts within the ACJ came to a head in the war of 1967, when Rabbi Berger was ousted from the ACJ for daring to criticize Israel's aggressive role in that war. Since then, the ACJ has sunk into innocuous desuetude, while Rabbi Berger toils unknown in the anti-Zionist vineyard in his one-man American Jewish Alternatives to Zionism. Another strategic problem the ACJ had in reaching East European-American Jews was in its continuing insistence that Judaism "is only a religion" and not a peoplehood; but since most Jews realize that twentieth century Jewish movements, Zionism and Conservatism in particular, are ethnic or racially oriented rather than

"purely religious", there was an inherent breakdown in communication. For the ACJ failed to tackle the "peoplehood" concept head-on, or to criticize it for being in existence but wrongly tribal, reactionary or whatever. In short, it is not a moral criticism of an existing fact to incorrectly persist in denying its very existence.

Having conquered Jewish opinion within the U.S., controlling American Gentile opinion became much easier. But here we have to consider specifics; for how did the total control come about? In the first place, there is the factor that Leonard Liggiio has recently emphasized: American Gentile guilt at the Hitler persecutions. The guilt, played upon for all its worth by the Zionists, has not, however, been adequately analyzed by other than Professor Liggiio. Generally, analysts have confined it to the guilt felt by Americans in not intervening earlier to crush Hitler. Since isolationism, especially in relation to World War II, has been given an extremely bad press among the public and among scholars (the latter until very recently, and still dominant), then such a guilt, although not felt at the time, becomes retrospectively plausible. But there is another, more subliminal, factor in American guilt that has a far better objective basis: namely, the immigration restrictions placed on Eastern and Southern European immigration after World War I, and which continued in force through World War II. These immigration restrictions, though bolstered of course by AFL desire to curb immigration to raise wage rates at home, was predominantly racist and anti-Semitic, propelled by a racist ideology adopted by most

social scientists during the first two or three decades of the twentieth century. The U.S. government and public opinion, down through and after World War II, could pose as ardently pro-Semitic by turning the spotlight on the evil deeds of Hitler and on Zionist aspirations in Palestine, while still continuing to keep European Jews out of the land which most of them desired and still desire to enter--the United States--the traditional open homeland for the oppressed of all nations. By acceding to the identification of Zionism with Semitism, the U.S. government could continue to be anti-Semitic in fact by keeping immigration restrictions in force. How much of a role this immigration factor played in the U.S. needs more detailed historical inquiry.

Turning from the generalized and rather vague factor of Gentile guilt, what are the specific mechanisms of Zionist control and domination over American public opinion? First, there is the obvious but important point that Jewish votes are important in American elections, particularly in such key large states as New York, Illinois, and California. Considering that Jewish opinion is now virtually all ardently pro-Zionist, and that the proportion of eligible Jewish voters who actually vote is unusually high for ethnic groups, this certainly plays a significant role for American politicians. We might ask, for example, where is the Arab vote, if we should be inclined to wonder why, say, Ford and Carter are desperately trying to out Zionize each other in their TV debates?

But there is far more to all-out Zionist control than voting

influence; after all, Catholic voters, though more numerous, are not nearly as influential in American politics even on issues where they tend to be united, e.g. on the abortion question. This brings us to the "Brown thesis". First, do the Jews own and/or control the media? This is a purely empirical question and therefore should be able to be considered on its own merits and without ideological bias. The answer is: first, that the two most influential newspapers in the country -- the New York Times and the Washington Post-- are Jewish-owned (and, also, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch), and also Newsweek and (at least formerly) the U.S. News and World Report. Secondly, the three major TV networks: CBS, NBC, and ABC, are all Jewish-owned. Thirdly, we must consider the high proportion of Jews, far beyond their proportion of the population, in the media as reporters and commentators, and also in influential academic posts, particularly in Ivy League colleges, in social science departments, in influential intellectual magazines, in think-tanks, and indeed among intellectuals in general, and therefore among opinion-moulders. (Indeed, the only article to discuss the Brown thesis, in New York Magazine, went beyond Brown to pinpoint an enormous number of influential Jews in the media and in opinion-moulding occupations.) But, finally, on the media, and particularly the press, while it is true that most newspapers are Gentile-owned, there is the enormously influential role of newspaper advertisers. In most newspapers, the major advertisers are department stores, and most department stores and clothing stores throughout the country are

Jewish-owned. Which makes the advertisers, not dominant in every aspect of newspaper editorial policy, but having a veto power on issues that move them deeply, specifically Zionism and Israel. (Thus, Harry Elmer Barnes, a highly influential intellectual and Scripps-Howard columnist in the 1930's, was literally driven out of his widely read column in 1940 because of the pressure of Jewish advertisers in New York, in opposition to Barnes' isolationism on World War II--and even though the owner Roy Howard was himself sympathetic to Barnes's isolationist views.)

But, finally, there is the rebuttal raised by the New York article in examining Jewish ownership, influence, and personnel in the media: namely, so what? New York pointed out that all Jews per se are not engaged in a conspiracy, that their views on various political subjects are not identical, so that Brown might have been factually correct about Jews and the media, but that the Brown empirical generalization is irrelevant. But there is a fatal flaw to the New York rebuttal, on this particular theme: namely, that while Jewish intellectuals and media people indeed differ on many if not most topics, that they are as one in being pro-Zionist and dedicated to the State of Israel. So that there need be no secret conspiracy for these Jewish influences and personnel to act spontaneously and virtually as one in defending and promoting Zionism.

There is a final problem in examining Zionist success in dominating American political and public opinion: namely, how is

it that the Old Right, the pre-1955 right wing, which was solidly anti-Zionist and even slightly anti-Semitic around the edges, has been replaced by a New Right which is perhaps the most ardently pro-Zionist and pro-Israeli influence in American Gentile life? There are several elements entering into an explanation of this radical shift. In the first place, as under the influence of National Review, Bill Buckley, and ex-Communists and ex-Trotskyite theoreticians, the right-wing was moved from isolationism to global interventionism the shift on Zionism was a corollary, since the isolationists had always collided with pro-World War II interventionist Jewish public opinion. So that a shift on Zionism and Israel was partly a subset of the broader shift on the Right from isolationism to intervention. Secondly, while the Old Right contained virtually no Jewish intellectuals, the New Right was dominated by such ex-Communist and Leftist theoreticians as Frank Meyer, Eugene Lyons, Will Herberg, Willi Schlamm, etc. Thirdly, in recent decades, the mass base of American Jews have become more conservative, particularly on social questions and blacks, and have thus coalesced with much of New Right opinion. There has also been the recent conservatizing of such influential Jewish intellectuals as Irving Kristol, highly influential editor of Public Interest, and of the Commentary group, including Nathan Glazer and Norman Podhoretz. Allied to this is a fourth point, which brought about a coalescence of the New Right with American Jewry--the shift of the Zionist movement from alliance with Russia, to an anti-Soviet and anti-Communist position. Where-

as the Soviet Union had been pro-Zionist up to and including the UN vote to establish the state of Israel in 1948, it later split with Zionism, driven by its universalist Marxian creed as well as its desire for political influence with the Arab nations of the Middle East. As a corollary, and fifthly, the increasing shift of Israel from being friendly to Russia to a client state of American influence in the Middle East, meant that the New Right, driven by its dominant concern for the American Empire and opposition to world Communism, would inevitably become friendly to Israel and to Zionism.

Sixthly, in its National Review-led drive for political power and respectability within American politics, the New Right felt it had to cast off severely any ties with right-wing anti-Semites. Part of the purge of unrespectables conducted by National Review: whether of anti-Semites, Birchers, or other deviationists, therefore logically included the adoption of a strong pro-Zionist position. Some of the anti-Semites on the Right have even managed to adopt a pro-Zionist outlook in the unspoken hope that American Jews would follow the Zionist program of the "ingathering of the exiles", of all world Jews to emigrate to Palestine, and thereby peacefully rid America of its Jewish population.

Finally, without placing undue emphasis on this point, we should at least mention the little-publicized fact that the Buckley

family has long had substantial oil holdings in Israel as at least a partial explanation of the long-standing Buckley role in moving right-wing opinion in a Zionist direction.

Looking at the Zionist phenomenon overall, we must emphasize the importance to its success of a group, which though beginning as a minority in a Jewish as well as Gentile world ranging from indifferent to hostile, succeeded by functioning as a determined, radical group always keeping its long-range objective in view. The Zionist success story is a testimonial to a group, which though long a minority, always knew what it wanted and always pursued its goal, being able to triumph over a majority, which though opposed, was inchoate, confused, divided, and not really sure of its aims or even why it was opposed to Zionism.