The Life of Chaim Weizmann

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The Life of Chaim Weizmann

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[1] This biography was, in the first place, commissioned by the *Encyclopaedia Hebraica* of Jerusalem, and constitutes the English original of the Hebrew version in that work. The author would like to take this opportunity of thanking Mr Boris Guriel, Mr Harry Sacher, Mr Israel Sieff, Mr Leonard Stein, Mr Robert Weltsch and Mrs Vera Weizmann, to whom he submitted his original draft, for corrections and valuable suggestions.

CHAIM WEIZMANN was born, according to his own account, on 17 November[2] 1874 (8 Kislev 5635), in the small town of Motol in the district (*uezd*) of Kobrin in the Department (*guberniya*) of Grodno in western Russia, on the borders of the Kingdom of Poland, the third child of Oser, son of Chaim Weizmann (also known as Fialkov) from the village of Serniki, and of Rachel Leah, daughter of Michael Chemerinsky, a tenant of the Counts Skirmunt who kept an inn in Motol. Oser Weizmann was born into a Jewish family typical of the Russian Pale of Settlement in the nineteenth century. His own father Chaim was a man of small means, but, as was usual among the Jews of Eastern Europe, any child who showed the slightest capacity for Jewish learning was vigorously encouraged to pursue it. Educational possibilities were limited in the village of Serniki, and the neighbouring townlet of Motol offered somewhat wider opportunities. As was the custom at that time, the boy Oser Weizmann came with a recommendation to the relatively prosperous Chemerinsky. Soon after his arrival, his host's daughter, Rachel Leah, fell in love with him and the marriage was easily arranged, Oser being then sixteen years of age, his bride a little under fourteen. Fifteen children were born to them in the course of the following twenty-two years, of whom three died in infancy; the rest, for the most part, survived to old age. In order to earn a living, Oser Weizmann, after trying other forms of business, became what among the Yiddish-speaking Jews of those days was known as a 'transportierer' – that is to say, a timber merchant, responsible for assembling and **[18]** floating rafts of logs to and along the Vistula river to its mouth in Danzig, where it was sawn, and whence it was duly exported.

Despite his strictly orthodox upbringing, Oser Weizmann had been touched by the modernist tendencies then alive among the

[2] According to his British passport, 27 November. His Russian school-leaving certificate gives the date as 12 November 1873. In the nineteenth century the Russian calendar was twelve days behind the Western Gregorian calendar. [The remaining three days are a mystery.]

Russian and Polish Jews. Western enlightenment had begun to seep into the Russian empire in the eighteenth century; stimulated by a sense of backwardness vis-à-vis the West and by wounded national pride, it led to a sporadic and unbalanced, but spectacularly rapid, development of Russian culture, which by the middle of the nineteenth century had begun to penetrate even the large insulated enclave within which Eastern European Jews lived their traditional, semi-medieval lives. The liberal reforms instituted by Tsar Alexander II (1856–81) had raised the hopes of the Jews, as of other oppressed minorities in the empire, that the ancient obstacles which stood in the way of any modification of their social, economic and political condition might be crumbling at last.

The desire for democracy and national self-determination, especially among the subject nations in the Austrian empire, which culminated in the European revolutions of 1848–9, did much to bring home to individual Jews in the West the full anomaly of their own ambivalent status, and in due course this awareness affected the more sensitive and educated among the Russian Jews also. Men like Peretz Smolenskin, Yehuda Leib Gordon and others raised the banner of Jewish nationality. They boldly began to use Hebrew, hitherto confined to purely sacred purposes, as a vehicle for secular literature; they wrote poems, essays, pamphlets in which they called upon their brothers to break out of the frozen religious establishment which cramped their reason and petrified their feeling, yet to avoid the other even more humiliating and equally fatal extreme, the effort to shed their Jewish characteristics and forget themselves in the surrounding Russian culture, to achieve 'assimilation' to a foreign way of life by deliberately suppressing everything that was their own.

They called for a Jewish cultural renaissance by a deliberate policy of reviving the national language and national tradition, the sense of national and historical identity, in a spirit, though they may not have known it, similar to that which, earlier in the century, had animated patriotic historians and scholars in Germany, Italy, Bohemia, Hungary and other nationalities long ruled by men of alien language and culture.

Other Jewish writers went further still: Moshe Leib Lilienblum and Leon Pinsker had independently reached the conclusion that a Jewish national rebirth, without which the Jews were doomed to an ignoble decadence, could not take place without a territorial base. Pinsker said that the Jews were but the spectre of a murdered nation, haunting the living, caus[19]ing everywhere uneasiness, fear and hatred; it would not be laid until the homeless wanderers acquired a land of their own, whether it be in Palestine or elsewhere. Lilienblum preached that historical memories could not be altered; for good or ill, every man had but one set of parents and could not exchange them for better ones; Palestine was the land to which the Jews were attached by every fibre of their spiritual being; thither they must go to create an independent life upon a soil of their own.

THE BACKGROUND

These early nationalists had few converts among the Jews of Russia, but they had some. A thaw had finally set in in the great Jewish glacier of Eastern Europe. While the majority remained immovable and insulated in the ice of the ancient tradition, a minority had begun to drift off; some into assimilation or semi-assimilation, fed by liberal hopes of the growth of enlightenment, whereby the Jewish inhabitants of Russia would gradually be emancipated and treated as fellow citizens by the dominant nationality. Others put their hopes in socialism, which, by ending class war, would cure all forms of social injustice; and since the Jewish problem was but a pathological form of general social abnormality, it would automatically be solved in the revolutionary transformation of society; those who believed this tended to join or support clandestine revolutionary movements. Still others looked for a more immediate answer in immigration to America and other countries where Jews could live in freedom, dignity and peace. But there was a handful of men who, moved by the wave of national feeling then rising to a new height in Europe, obstinately believed in a Jewish culture and a Jewish national existence,

whether as an independent nation on a land of its own, or as a unit in a free federation of nationalities within a multinational empire. Finally, there were those – of necessity the majority – who did not think a great deal, but remained absorbed in the immediate problems of physical survival in a violently hostile world. There were, of course, many combinations and blends of all these attitudes and views.

Oser Weizmann was one of the few who inclined towards the nationalist solution. He read the 'forbidden' modern tracts written by the *maskilim*,[3] and educated his growing family in this spirit. The period was one of great cultural ferment among the Russian Jews. Poets, painters and musicians of original gifts, scholars and scientists, lawyers and historians, revolutionary socialists and national leaders grew up in this milieu – the names of Chaim Soutine and Boris Pasternak, Simon Dubnow and Chaim Nahman Bialik, Leon Trotsky and Julius Martov, Maxim Vinaver and Bernard Berenson, will **[20]** serve to indicate the variety of gifts and of social and cultural patterns.

It was in this rapidly altering, transitional phase – between the end of one tradition and the beginning of another – that Chaim Weizmann grew to manhood. He received an orthodox Jewish upbringing. At the age of three he was taken into his house by his maternal grandfather, Chemerinsky, who, so he recalled in his old age, told the child stories of the humiliations inflicted upon his own father and grandfather in the early part of the century by wild and tipsy Polish magnates. The boy was taught the rudiments of the Bible by a typical melamed[4] of the town, Zvi Bloch-Blumenfeld; he was followed by Shlomo Sokolovsky – the boy's teacher until he was sent to school in the neighbouring city of Pinsk. A letter by Weizmann is still preserved, written in 1885 (occasioned perhaps by the death in that year of Sir Moses Montefiore, the well-known Anglo-Jewish philanthropist, an oleograph of whose head was to

[3] A group of nineteenth-century writers in both Hebrew and Yiddish, engaged in spreading secular culture among the Jews of Russia and Poland.

[4] Teacher of sacred writings.

be seen in many houses in Eastern Europe), in which the eleven-year-old boy says that the kings and nations of the world are set upon the ruin of the Jewish nation; the Jews must not let themselves be destroyed; England alone may help them to return and rise again in their ancient land of Palestine.

Weizmann showed ability from the beginning. He did well at the *Realschule* in Pinsk. The science master of the school noticed the exceptionally intelligent and bright boy, took him under his wing, and induced him to specialise in chemistry. Oser Weizmann never achieved prosperity, and the boy added to his meagre means by giving private lessons to the children of the more prosperous Jews of the town. In return for board and lodging he taught the brothers Saul and Ovsei Luria, sons of the prosperous owner of a chemical factory in the city, and they and their friends and relations, Georg (Gad) Halpern, Isaac Naiditch, Judah Berges and others, became his lifelong friends and allies. He divided his time between his chemical and Hebrew studies, the latter under Shlomo Vilkomir in Pinsk and Abraham Motolyanski in Motol.

In 1895 his entire family moved to Pinsk. Three years before this, Weizmann matriculated; he obtained the highest marks in every subject, save drawing. His contemporaries at this time recall him as combining luminous intelligence and uncommon capacity for thorough and continuous work with a strength of character, vitality, gaiety and biting wit which gave him an easy ascendancy over his milieu. The natural course for a brilliant Jewish schoolboy was to try to enter a Russian university. Under the *numerus clausus* then in operation, few of the Jews who passed the required examinations were admitted: they were not to **[21]** exceed 10.5 per cent of the student body in the provincial Russian universities, or 3 per cent in the universities of Petersburg and Moscow.

National feeling was strong among Jewish students at this time. The great pogroms of 1881 which followed the assassination of Alexander II, and were a mere prelude to a general intensification of anti-Semitism both in official circles and in the popular press, greatly stiffened the resistance to russification on the part of the prouder and more sensitive among the educated Jews in the

empire. Mass emigration to America, the creation of agricultural settlements by the Hovevei Zion[5] in Palestine (later supported and augmented by Baron Edmond de Rothschild from Paris), clandestine revolutionary agitation, terrorist activity – all these were characteristic reactions of a national minority to the open repression practised by the Russian government. In later years Weizmann spoke with bitter feeling of his own experiences at the hands of the tsarist police. Whether from national pride, or because the natural sciences were far better taught in the West, he decided to go to Germany. The family was not well off, and he declined to take more than a minimum from his father. In 1892 he travelled on one of his father's rafts to East Prussia, stayed three nights in the city of Thorn, arrived in Darmstadt and enrolled as a student in the local Polytechnic. In order to supplement his means, he taught Russian in a Jewish school in the neighbouring town of Pfungstadt, kept by a Dr Barness. His memories of this establishment – a mixture, as it seemed to him, of pedantry, patriotic conformism and hypocrisy, permanently coloured his view of a certain section of German Jewry. The daily journeys between Pfungstadt and Darmstadt, followed by giving private lessons in the evenings, proved too exhausting. After two terms, in 1893 he moved to Berlin and continued as a biochemist in the Institute of Technology (Technische Hochschule) in Charlottenburg.

Berlin at this time was a nursery of future Zionist leaders, as, half a century before, it had been of the Russian liberal intelligentsia. Weizmann here found himself in the midst of a lively circle of Russian Jewish students, bent on resisting Jewish 'assimilationism' whether socialist or liberal. His friends included Leo Motzkin, Israel Isidor Elyashiv (who later wrote under the name of Baal Makhshoves), Victor Jacobson, Nahman Syrkin, Selig Soskin, Judah Leib Wilensky and other young intellectuals – Zionists

[5] The 'Lovers of Zion' movement constitutes the immediate prehistory of Zionism: it was inspired by an ideal of an autonomous Jewish culture rooted in a territorial centre in Palestine, and owed a good deal to Russian populism and Mazzinian nationalism.

before the term had come into existence. The dominant influence on these young men for some years **[22]** was the teaching of the most celebrated of all the ideologists of the Jewish national revival, Asher Ginsberg, who wrote under the name of Ahad Ha'am. This thinker, whose ideas were closely related to those of the 'Lovers of Zion', preached that the sporadic creation of small colonies in Palestine by town dwellers turned farmers, noble as their motives were, would prove of small account unless it sprang from, and gave concrete expression to, a spiritual regeneration which the invention of new institutions could not by itself create, a state of spirit which each individual must effect within himself. Unless the dry bones of traditional Judaism were covered with living flesh again, Judaism would not recover a sense of its past, of its place among the nations, and especially of the meaning and purpose of its unexampled martyrdom during the centuries of the Dispersion. The principal task – even more important than the return to the ancient homeland – was psychological self-emancipation, a new realisation of the values for the sake of which alone Jews had lived and died, of what alone constituted their unique contribution to human culture, of which the highest was the idea of justice. In a series of essays which made a profound impression on founders of modern Jewish nationalism, Ahad Ha'am stressed over and over again that colonisation or other forms of social and political action would prove abortive unless they were animated by a historically rooted, specifically Jewish vision of what men were and could and should be. This vision could be incarnated only in a spiritual centre built in Palestine, the only authentic soil in which Jewish culture could achieve a new birth.

In 1896 a Viennese journalist, Theodor Herzl, who had been correspondent of the *Neue Freie Presse* in Paris, burst upon a startled world his *Der Judenstaat* – a fiery pamphlet demanding the creation of a Jewish state by political action, and public recognition by the great powers of the claims and rights of the homeless Jewish nation. The Dreyfus case had destroyed a good many optimistic delusions about the condition and prospects of the Jews, and led to their radical reappraisal. The book was acclaimed and assailed

with equal passion: Herzl was looked up to as an inspired prophet and denounced as a mad and dangerous demagogue.

ZIONISM AND SCIENCE

The little Russo-Jewish colony in Berlin, of which Weizmann was a member, had in fact accepted Herzl's basic propositions before he had advanced them; they had a deeper understanding than Herzl himself of the Jewish cultural tradition and the part it must play in any political transformation for which he was calling. They were not as sceptical or as gradualist as Ahad Ha'am, who declared that one institution of higher learning in Palestine, **[23]** irradiating the Jewish Diaspora, was of greater value than ten agricultural settlements, but neither did they, like Herzl, believe in the possibility of creating a Jewish state or colony by the dramatic intervention of saviours from without – the Kaiser, or the Sultan, or the Prince of Wales or the British Parliament – or by drastic political acts, bold and spectacular diplomatic activity by Jewish 'notables' or groups or parties. They accused Herzl of a purely visionary faith in the possibility of a miraculous transformation overnight of the old, withered Jewish nation into a young and beautiful political state by the waving of a magic wand by emperors or millionaires. They insisted on the slow and painful but, as it seemed to them, indispensable process of education and cultural work. The fact that Herzl was an exotic figure, remote from the pious Jews of Eastern Europe, coming to them like a Messiah from another world, raised high above the heads of his followers, indeed his very appearance and voice and bearing, created a wave of exalted emotion amongst the Jewish masses. Despite their reservations, Weizmann and his friends, ironical and sophisticated as they were, welcomed Herzl's campaign and central ideas with enthusiasm. When in 1898 Weizmann migrated from Berlin to the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, he, like his Berlin friends, was a convinced Herzlian Zionist.

Weizmann did not attend the First Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897. He was at this time plunged in his chemical researches, and

had indeed made a valuable industrial discovery (for which he took out a patent that enabled him to continue with his work). But the main reason for his failure to go was most probably his poverty; his father is reported to have offered him his fare to Basle, but his own circumstances were such that his son could not bring himself to accept this sacrifice. In 1898 he attended the Second Zionist Congress as a delegate. In January 1899 he obtained his doctorate in Fribourg with two short chemical dissertations. He sold yet another invention to the great German chemical firm of Bayer, and felt financially a little more at ease. In 1901 he went to Geneva. where he became assistant to Professor Alfred Bystrzycki, then a demonstrator in Professor Carl Gräbe's laboratory.

His life was, as before, divided between science and Zionist activity. He was in constant correspondence with his friends Leo Motzkin, Shemaryahu Levin, Esther Shneerson, Berthold Feiwel, Martin Buber, Victor Jacobson, Abraham Idelson, Joshua Buchmil, Sophia Getzowa, Zvi Aberson and many others. He recognised Herzl as his leader, but had strong doubts about the possibility of achieving a Jewish state or autonomous region by a fiat 'from **[24]** above', by a political act of recognition solemnly entered into by the great powers, or by a charter on the lines of those of the East India or South Africa companies. He distrusted any political short cut which omitted or played down the need for a mass movement from below, and insisted on the need for the growth, necessarily gradual, of a widespread consciousness among the Jewish masses of their needs, and capacities for collective action, in the first place for practical work in creating an agricultural and industrial base in Palestine itself. Unless this was done the granting of constitutions or the establishment of a political entity would, in the view of Weizmann and his friends, remain mere empty shells, which would merely expose Jewish inability to make use of them, and so tragically demonstrate their unreadiness to establish an independent community.

Weizmann did not minimise the need for political action: but the tension between the essentially political Herzl (and later, for similar reasons, Jabotinsky), who believed in the primacy of action

on an international scale and the creation of public institutions for the Jewish people, as against those who emphasised the need to develop Jewish social, economic and cultural activities, especially of agriculture and education, as a base on which alone a political structure could be built – action for the people versus action by the people – remained a constant source of difference between Weizmann and the Herzlians. There were differences of temperament too. With their ironical, somewhat irreverent attitude, Weizmann and his friends tended to question the value of Herzl's passionate insistence on forms and ceremony in the conduct of the movement. Congresses conducted with appropriate solemnity and discipline, the lofty style in which Herzl spoke and addressed sovereigns and nations – these were his antidotes to the squalor and *Schlamperei*, the chaos, self-contempt and lack of dignity in Jewish life. Later Weizmann himself attached much importance to this, although at heart he remained incurably democratic, and addicted to informal methods and habits. Herzl to him remained always a man of dazzling genius, a prophet consumed by a vision, but a figure who bound his spell on his fellows from a distance, a civilised Westerner out of touch with the temper and outlook and feelings of the Jewish masses of which Weizmann all his life retained an instinctive understanding.

In 1901, at a meeting in Basle, before the Fifth Zionist Congress, he and his friends Zvi Aberson, Martin Buber, Berthold Feiwel, Leo Motskin and Jacob Kohan-Bernstein created the 'Democratic Fraction' within the Zionist movement. This was to be a 'loyal opposition'. Its members believed in responsiveness to the moods of the masses, emphasis on cultural, educational and colonising activity; they **[25]** were sceptical about the effectiveness of elites of dedicated leaders engaged in negotiating with European statesmen high over the heads of the people itself; they believed in empiricism, disbelieved in general principles and final solutions, distrusted all forms of rigidity and fanaticism, and wished to keep equally clear of rabbinical traditionalism on the one hand, and of purely secular and Western political forms on the other.

Since this was his general approach, it is not, perhaps, surprising that Weizmann, like Ahad Ha'am, conceived a profound admiration for England, as the home of slowly growing constitutional liberties, of respect for tradition and precedent, of capacity for practical action, of adaptability, moderation and instinctive realism, as against the metaphysical Romanticism of the Germans, or the addiction to absolute principles and abstract ideas of the French.

OUTLOOK AND VALUES

Weizmann's outlook became formed early in his life, and its fundamentals never seriously altered. For him Judaism was not solely a religion or a culture or a race, but a nation; a unique compound of common civilisation and common historical memories, in which the religious and the secular were inextricably interwoven, of common language, outlook and racial kinship, which it was misleading to classify in terms of criteria intended to fit modern, territorially defined nations. He believed in Jewish nationhood all the more easily because the Jewish community from which he himself sprang was, by historical circumstance, geographically welded together into a culturally and ethnically distinct group, inhabiting a more or less continuous area in Western and Southern Russia, in which it formed a self-conscious national minority, forcibly made aware of its sharp differences from the surrounding Russian and Polish populations. He believed, moreover, that to deny this fact – to believe, as some highly intelligent Western Jews were inclined to do, that the Jews were or could collectively become entirely and utterly German, French, English, different from their fellow citizens only in religious belief, as Protestants, say differed from Catholics, or Quakers from Anglicans – was a profound and fatal illusion which the non-Jewish society did not entertain, and from which, from time to time, it brutally awoke the Jews by treating them as a foreign body, whether with conscious toleration born of liberal principles, or with indifference, or with fear or hatred (to which, as

Pinsker had pointed out, nationally self-conscious, civilised nations were even more prone than less self-conscious, barbarous ones) that took the form of persecution and occasional massacre.

Zionism for Weizmann, as for Herzl, meant the need for a conscious effort on the part of the Jews to become aware of their situation and act accordingly, that is to say, cease to **[26]** struggle against their historically conditioned national personality (which was not, in itself, either superior or inferior to any other), but was what it was and not another thing; for unless they were allowed to live and think as Jews in the only conditions in which this was possible – as a free nation settled on its own territory – they would continue to poison their own lives and those of others, as all those must who live a conscious or unconscious lie.

He accepted the fact that some dramatic act was needed to make an impact upon both Jews and Gentiles sufficient to set up the process of emancipation. Herzl, in his view, partly because he was brought up outside traditional Judaism and did not therefore appreciate the violent psychological resistance to his ideas that the spiritual 'alienation' of the Jews would generate, alone possessed the burning, single-minded vision, unhampered by too much worldly realism, to administer the required shock, capable of rousing the people from the fantasies that it took for reality or even happiness. At the same time, this act was not itself enough: unless the Jewish nation, or a large portion of it, understood the causes of its predicament, the plethora of ineffective remedies that were constantly offered it from all quarters – Messianic faith, self-protective separatism, the march of enlightenment, socialism revolutionary or evolutionary, liberal internationalism, assimilation and so forth, would continue to distract it.

He did not, like the Marxists, believe that revolutionary transformation of social or economic conditions, even if it was feasible, would of itself solve the Jewish question. He thought this too crude an approach to a problem that was at least as much psychological and historical as sociological or economic. He was not an irrationalist. In his scientific activity, as in life, he believed in the power of reason, knowledge, understanding, judgement,

practice founded on observation and good sense; but with Ahad Ha'am he believed that a nation can be led only along its own historical path of development, in line with the outlook and values which spring from its own unique tradition, ways of life, sacred books and historical experience. In this respect his views were close to those of the leaders of other oppressed national groups in Europe, especially to the ideas and temper of those democratic nationalists who had fought for Italian, Polish and Southern Slav liberty in the nineteenth century.

Switzerland at this time contained a good many students from the Russian empire unable or unwilling to be educated in the universities of the tsarist regime. The majority of these were Jews, to whom the doors of Russian universities were all but closed. The leaders of the young Russian Social Democratic party – men like Plekhanov, Lenin, Helphand – and particularly of its Jewish Bundist **[27]** section, looked for recruits among the radical Russian Jewish students in Western universities. So too did the Zionists. Fierce disputes broke out between these rival fishers of souls, both in private and in public. There is good evidence that Weizmann was involved in a public debate with the most brilliant of all the Russian socialists, Plekhanov; it is less likely that he met either Lenin or Trotsky. His principal opponents were the Jewish socialists of the Bund, Vladimir Medem and others, who had opposed Herzl and with whom Weizmann came into conflict in Geneva, Berne and elsewhere. All his energies at this time went into the creation of groups of Zionist students and their sympathisers in Switzerland, Germany and neighbouring lands. Herzl was the inspired leader, seeking interviews with the Kaiser and the Sultan, making superhuman efforts to obtain internationally recognised rights for the Jews to create a national home in the Turkish province of Palestine. Weizmann and his friends were mainly concerned with creating cadres of young men who would speak in their own language to Jews everywhere, but particularly in Eastern Europe, whence the immigrants would surely come.

In 1903 public recognition at last came to the Zionist movement. The British Foreign Office, whose head was Lord Lansdowne,[6] made a tentative approach to the Zionist leaders in England with regard to the Jewish colonisation of the Uasin Gishu plateau, a portion of the East African Protectorate, 5,000 square miles in extent. This proposal, the initiative for which came from the British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, was, for the Zionists, a cardinal event. It was the first time that the Jews had been recognised as a national entity by a great sovereign state – indeed, the most powerful in the Western world. Earlier efforts to obtain a territory – in British Cyprus, or in El-Arish in the Sinai Peninsula, to which the Turks could offer less resistance – had come to nothing.

The Zionist movement was upset and excited. The proposed territory, commonly, if incorrectly, referred to as Uganda,[7] was not Palestine; but it was a concrete offer. A great debate broke out at the Zionist Congress. Herzl was inclined to accept the proposal as at any rate the first stage in the great Return. Others, for the most part Russian Zionists, were dead against this scheme: Zionism without Zion had no meaning for them. It was to be brought back to Zion that Jews prayed thrice daily. It was only Jerusalem that could create and justify the vast uprooting that the new life involved. At first Weizmann vacillated; his father, himself a delegate to the Congress, voted for accepting Mr Chamberlain's offer; the Russian delegation, like the others, was divided. In the end Weizmann came down decisively on the side of the anti-Ugandists: it must be Zion or nothing. Herzl **[28]** had not originally specified the territory in which the state was to be founded. Palestine was the goal: but perhaps East Africa would provide the beginning of statehood – a *Nachtasyl*,[8] as Nordau had called it – on the road to Zion. When the delegates from Kishinev,

[6] [Henry Charles Keith Petty-Fitzmaurice, 5th Marquess of Lansdowne (1845–1927).]

[7] [It is part of modern Kenya.]

[8] ['Night shelter'.]

where in the previous year the worst of all Jewish pogroms had broken out, voted against Uganda, Herzl realised what Zionism meant to most of his European followers: 'These people have ropes round their necks, and yet they refuse!' he said. He understood the point of view of Menachem Ussishkin and the other intransigents who wanted no temporary solutions nor the slightest deviation from the road that led to Palestine alone, and ceased to press for the acceptance of the miraculous British offer.

SYNTHETIC ZIONISM

In 1904 Herzl died. The movement chose as its head his follower, David Wolffsohn, a Cologne banker of Russian origin, an honourable and devoted but somewhat colourless figure. Weizmann and his followers had, since 1899, turned their attention towards such unpolitical tasks as the organisation of a bank to finance colonisation into Palestine; propaganda and education, principally among young Russian Jewish intellectuals; and, more particularly (since 1902), to the foundation of a Jewish university, to act as a national centre of Jewish culture, learning and education. Weizmann wished to create it in Jerusalem; but was prepared to compromise and set it up elsewhere, if the Turkish authorities proved too obdurately hostile.

In 1906 he married Vera Chatzman, a medical student from Rostov on the Don, whom he had met in Geneva, and with whom he had shared his hopes and anxieties since 1901. His work as a biochemist occupied most of his time. In Geneva the prospect of academic advancement seemed dim. When a post in the University of Manchester fell vacant, he applied for and was appointed to it. He was attracted by the prospect of life in England. His anglophile feeling became a central strand in his life and was destined to play a major part in his triumphs and defeats. His wife took a second medical examination in England in order to qualify to practise as a health officer of the Manchester municipality. At the time of his arrival in England he was thirty years old.

For the next ten years he was to be a prominent, but not central, figure in the Zionist movement. He was out of sympathy with the faithful Herzlians who still dominated it: he did not belittle the importance of public diplomacy; but he believed that practical work in Palestine and the education of the Jews in the Diaspora mattered more. He found some degree of moral compensation for his political frustration, then and in later years, in the laboratory: scientific papers **[29]** flowed from his pen in a steady stream. In Manchester he met and deeply influenced young men with Zionist inclinations who were destined to play a part in Zionist history – Simon Marks, Israel Sieff, Harry Sacher (then on the staff of the *Manchester Guardian*), and their friends and allies in London, notably Leon Simon, Samuel Landman and Leonard Stein, with whom he was to collaborate fruitfully in later years.

The aftermath of the abortive Russian revolution of 1905 led to a new wave of pogroms in Russia which sent several thousand new Jewish immigrants to Palestine. Weizmann continued on his middle path: political pressure must continue, but unless it was backed by a constant effort of colonisation, it would not avail. 'If the governments give us a Charter today,' he argued at the Eighth Congress, held in the Hague in 1907, 'it will be a scrap of paper; not so, if we work in Palestine: then it will be written and indissolubly cemented with sweat and blood.'[9] This doctrine – the chemical mixture of 'political' and 'practical' Zionism – came to be called 'synthetic Zionism'. Not all his friends accepted it. Motzkin aligned himself with the more purely political followers of Wolffsohn. Hot debates broke out between the factions.

In the same year, shortly after the birth of his eldest son Benjamin,[10] Weizmann visited Palestine for the first time, and returned more convinced than ever of the importance of practical work as against purely diplomatic pressure upon the governments of Europe. These governments did not respond; the Turks proved

[9] 'A Synthetic Zionist Policy', in Paul Goodman (ed.), *Chaim Weizmann: A Tribute on His Seventieth Birthday* (London, 1945), 147–8 at 148.

[10] His second son, Michael, was born in 1915.

deaf to all Zionist blandishments; hopes revived after the Young Turk revolution; but the successors of Abdul Hamid proved even more suspicious and unwelcoming than the old tyrant. The British government seemed to have lost interest in Zionist aspirations; neither Germany (despite Herzl's flirtation with Kaiser Wilhelm II) nor France had shown real interest.

The years before the first World War remained an arid chapter in the history of Zionism. Many were discouraged. The mockery of the orthodox Jews to whom Zionism was a blasphemous attempt to forestall the Messiah, and the hostility of the cultivated and prosperous liberal Jews of the West, who looked on Zionism as a dangerous attempt to fire the Jews with an artificially fanned chauvinism likely to compromise their relations with their fellow citizens of other faiths, harassed the Zionist movement on both flanks. By 1911 the sheer impotence of Zionist diplomacy finally won the 'practicals' a majority at the Tenth Zionist Congress. In this year Wolffsohn resigned from his office, which was **[30]** put in the hands of a Commission headed by Professor Otto Warburg. This seemed to mark a détente between the two trends within Zionism. The powerful philanthropic Jewish bodies – the Anglo-Jewish Association, the Jewish Board of Deputies in England, the French *Alliance israélite*, the *Centralverein* of the German Jews, the most influential American committees – shied violently from political Zionism.

In 1913 Weizmann was involved in a characteristic conflict with the *Hilfsverein* (of the German Jews)[11] which had materially helped in the foundation and organisation of the new Jewish Technical School, in Haifa, which it financed. Led by Paul Nathan, the *Verein* wanted the language of instruction in 'technical' subjects to be German: partly, perhaps, in order to strengthen German influence in the Middle East as against that of the French *Alliance*. Weizmann and his friends conceded that Hebrew did not as yet possess a technical vocabulary adequate for the natural sciences – therefore German might, in the beginning, have to be used – but maintained

[11] [*Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden* (Relief Organisation of German Jews).]

that to give German a status equal to that of Hebrew as the language of instruction would be fatal to the central purpose of the entire movement: the revival of Judaism as a modern civilisation. A culture could flourish only through the medium of its own language; for thoughts and feelings and words are inextricably interwoven, and all languages but Hebrew were to some degree foreign importations, vehicles and symptoms of imitation and assimilation – the deadly enemies of Jewish survival. Among the leading Jews only Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Paris, defying the opinions of most of the rest of his family, showed no hostility to Zionism, and quietly and effectively continued to found and support colonies in Palestine. In later years he is said to have remarked that without him political Zionism might never have been born; but that without Zionism his work would have been dead.

Weizmann continued, under Professor William Perkin the younger, with his chemical work in Manchester and duly became University Reader in biochemistry. He felt that he deserved a higher post, but when the professorship fell vacant he was passed over. Late in 1905 he met the British Prime Minister, Mr A. J. Balfour, in Manchester, and expounded Zionism to him. Balfour, a connoisseur of individuals and ideas, was impressed by the man even more than by his theses: at the time he thought the latter no more than interesting. Weizmann remembered the meeting in later years. The influence of his ideas upon English Zionists was not great; such prominent figures as Joseph Cowen and Leopold Greenberg (editor of the London *Jewish Chronicle*) were not impressed by Weizmann's central themes: that **[31]** the Hebrew University, as he declared in Vienna in 1913, was to be the Jewish 'dreadnought', more powerful than the fortunes of the millionaires; or that to have industrial and agricultural workers in Palestine 'is for us the law and the prophets'. Elites of intellectuals and technical experts, he said over and over again, would not create a Jewish national home.

In 1914 Wolffsohn died. The Zionist movement still had no President. Weizmann was now forty or forty-one years of age. His

position in the Zionist movement was not a commanding one. He was a member of the Larger Actions Committee, a member and later president of the Standing Committee of the Congress, an acute and prominent critic of the Zionist establishment, and no more. The outbreak of the First World War transformed the situation.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

When hostilities broke out, the Zionist Executive, located in Berlin, decided to send Nahum Sokolov to England: Weizmann was evidently not considered senior enough to take charge of the movement there. Occasionally Yechiel Chlenov visited London from Moscow for the same purpose. Nevertheless Weizmann, who felt at home in England and was encouraged by his friend and mentor Ahad Ha'am, decided to exploit the new situation independently. The English Zionists of whom he saw most were Joseph Cowen, Herbert Bentwich, Moses Gaster (the Haham of the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish Congregation), Harry Sacher, James de Rothschild, Leon Simon, Shmuel Tolkowsky. The gifted, energetic and eloquent Vladimir Jabotinsky had also arrived in London, intent on forming a Jewish legion to fight on the Allied side; he was an intimate friend of Weizmann and for a time they shared a flat in Chelsea in London.

In the autumn of 1914, at the house of a common Manchester friend, Mrs Eckhard, Weizmann met C. P. Scott, the editor of the great Liberal journal the *Manchester Guardian*. Scott was a man of great political influence, a friend and adviser of cabinet ministers, and in particular of David Lloyd George. The chance meeting with Scott proved a turning point in the history of the Zionist movement. Scott became a convert to Zionism and brought Weizmann and his ideas to the notice of prominent British politicians: in particular, Herbert Samuel and Lloyd George. Herbert Samuel, at that time head of the Local Government Board in Asquith's Liberal administration, and then, in succession, Postmaster General and Home Secretary in the same government,

needed no convincing. He had quite independently, conceived a warm sympathy for Zionism. Weizmann was greatly astonished to find a firm advocate of the idea of a full-fledged Jewish state in the British Cabinet – a man, moreover, who by origin and upbringing belonged to the Anglo-Jewish elite, which was in general **[32]** far from friendly to Zionism.

Once the Turks had entered the war on the German side, the question of the disposal of the Ottoman empire became a matter of cardinal interest to the British government. Early in the war Samuel addressed a memorandum to the Cabinet, advocating, as one of the Allied war aims, the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine – the term was loosely used – after the defeat of the Turkish empire. The Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, records that he was somewhat surprised by so romantic a proposal from the 'well-ordered and methodical brain of Herbert Samuel', and later remarked that evidently, as Disraeli had observed, 'All is race.'[12] He remained unimpressed, and critical of the idea.

Weizmann, mindful of his interview with Balfour ten years before, asked the Jewish philosopher Professor Samuel Alexander to reintroduce him to Balfour, and wrote to sound him out on Zionist aspirations. Balfour, not then in the Government, responded courteously: he said that Weizmann needed no introduction, since he remembered the earlier meeting, but did not commit himself. The proposal was, however, well received by the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey; Lloyd George approved from the beginning, on strategic as well as sentimental grounds. Samuel's proposal was consequently not discarded, and engaged the intermittent attention of various British statesmen and officials during the first years of the war. At one point Grey sounded out the Russian and French Foreign Ministers along the lines of Samuel's memorandum; the Russians showed no interest; the French before 1917 remained equally non-committal. The indefatigable champion of the idea in the British cabinet was

[12] [*Tancred* (London, [1927]), 153; *Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography* (London, 1852), 331.]

Herbert Samuel throughout. Hope revived in Zionist circles that England was once more to be the champion of the Jewish cause – the sponsor of that public act to the promotion of which Herzl had sacrificed his life.

On the outbreak of war, Weizmann, in response to a Government circular, offered his discoveries in the field of fermentation to the British scientific authorities. He obtained no response. In 1915, when the prospects of war seemed dark for the Western allies, Weizmann's work was brought to the attention of the British Government scientists by C. P. Scott and others. He was asked by Mr Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, whether he could provide a process that would yield acetone, a solvent needed for producing naval munitions. He successfully accomplished this task. His work with the Admiralty laboratories took him away from Manchester to London. It absorbed his entire time, with the result that he resigned his university post and a new phase in his life began.

His scientific achievement brought Weizmann to the notice of British government circles; and although his official position in the Zionist movement was still relatively subordinate, the singular force **[33]** of his personality, and his ability to charm and impress eminent Englishmen, whose outlook and style of life he found deeply attractive, helped to advance him to the foremost place in the ranks of Zionists in England. He had indeed no serious rivals there: Sokolov spent a good deal of time in France and Italy, countries with which he had a somewhat greater affinity; Chlenov, Ussishkin and the other founding fathers of the movement found it difficult to leave Russia. The German Zionists stayed in their own country or in neutral states. Victor Jacobson was in distant Constantinople. The rise of England as the leading partner in the war-time alliance automatically lifted the relatively obscure Zionists of that country to a leading position, and Weizmann dominated them all by his political and diplomatic gifts and natural capacity for leadership. Lloyd George recalls that when he was asked what honour he desired as a reward for his scientific service to his adopted country, Weizmann replied that he wanted nothing for

himself, only a country for his people. The story is probably apocryphal, and if the Balfour Declaration had no direct connection with Weizmann's scientific services, the mood in which the British offer was conceived clearly was to a large degree determined by Weizmann's personal position in the eyes of more than one British statesman.

TOWARDS THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

Late in 1916 Asquith resigned, Lloyd George became Premier and Balfour Foreign Secretary: both had been strongly attracted by Zionist ideas; and in the meanwhile other forces were also at work. The desire to induce America to enter the war on their side was a major pre-occupation of the Western allies. American opinion on the war was divided, and among the pro-Germans and isolationists were to be counted prominent Jews; some among them were of German origin and emotionally inclined to German culture, others came from Russia and Poland, with bitter memories of Russian persecution, and were repelled by any form of alliance with the odious tsarist regime. The support, or at any rate the neutralisation, of American Jewish opinion was deemed of importance in Allied circles. The Russian Ambassador in Washington reported to his government that his French and British colleagues kept drawing his attention to the bad effect that the Russian treatment of her minorities was producing in America. The French government sent Victor Basch, a Jewish savant with Zionist sympathies, to attract American Jewish support. The notion that the American Jews might prove valuable allies and that the British Zionists could engage their sympathies through their alliance with American Zionists, and especially with the influential Justice Brandeis, began to gain support in British political circles. Sir Mark Sykes, who had in December 1916 been appointed one of the **[34]** Under Secretaries of the British Cabinet, had sought information about Zionism from Herbert Samuel's friend the Haham Moses Gaster. He met Weizmann at Gaster's house (possibly through the offices

of a London Armenian called James Malcolm, who later claimed to have effected the encounter).

Sykes, a fervent and romantic Roman Catholic and an expert on the Middle East, who had recently concluded the secret agreement with the French about the post-war division of ex-Turkish territory (known as the Sykes–Picot Agreement), became fascinated by Zionism, and one of its ardent advocates before the Cabinet; Weizmann and Sokolov, whom he had met in Gaster's house, became his friends and allies. Lloyd George and Balfour were favourable, the Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Lord Robert Cecil, had been earlier converted by Weizmann; so, by now, were Milner and Amery, into whose liberal imperialist dream (not altogether shared by Balfour) the prospect of a settlement of loyal Anglophile Jews at a strategic point of the route to India wholly fitted.

Rumours, by no means without foundation, that the Germans might forestall the Allies by arranging for a similar offer to be made to the Jews by the Turks acted as an added stimulus to action. It was rumoured that the British Jews were against this proposal; feelers were put out among their leaders. For the most part, they were not unfriendly. One of the most prominent, Lord Rothschild, declared himself to be, like his younger brother Charles, a Zionist. His relative, James de Rothschild, an army officer, son of the Baron Edmond, had long been a supporter. Samuel, of course, supported the scheme vigorously, although, loyal to Asquith, he had resigned from the government.

But Zionism had violent enemies among the British Jews. Mr Edwin Montagu, soon to be Secretary for India, was outraged by the very idea of a Jewish nationality. It seemed to him to cast doubts on the right of Jews to consider themselves full Englishmen; 'You are being misled by a foreigner,' he told Lloyd George. Similar views were held by Claude Montefiore and other prominent members of the Anglo-Jewish establishment. There was hostility in corresponding circles in France. The idea was canvassed widely enough to stimulate a letter in *The Times* in the early summer of 1917, signed by D. L. Alexander and Claude Montefiore, the

chairmen of the Conjoint Foreign Committee of the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association, expressing hostility to the idea of a national Jewish entity in Palestine, on the grounds that it might involve the Jews in antagonism with the Arab natives of Palestine, and create the problem of divided allegiance for loyal Jews in the countries of which they are citizens. The principal figure behind this protest was Lucien Wolf, an old enemy of **[35]** Zionism. A reply to this letter appeared over the signature of Lord Rothschild; and although the original remonstrance may have affected the ultimate wording of the British Government's proposal (known as the Balfour Declaration), it was not sufficient to kill it.

The draft of the proposal to invite the Jews to create a national home in Palestine went through many versions, and led to much conflict within and without the Jewish community. An almost equally controversial issue was that of the Jewish Legion: supported by Jabotinsky and Weizmann, it frightened not only anti-Zionist Jews, but Zionist leaders who feared its effect on the Jews of Turkey and Palestine and the Central Powers. There was much dispute and recrimination in the English Zionist Federation. Head of English Zionism as he had become, and at the height of his powers, with ever-growing reputation and prestige, Weizmann felt that he was not obtaining the support that he deserved. He encountered, too, repeated obstacles in his work as an Admiralty scientist; he felt excessively frustrated; early in 1917 he wrote to Sokolov resigning his official post as the head of the English Zionist Federation. He thereupon received a letter from Ahad Ha'am telling him that he did not owe his unique position of moral and political leadership to formal election by any body of men; that there was therefore no one to whom he could properly resign; events, his own genius, but above all the historic goals and claims of the Jewish nation laid upon him a task and an obligation given to no other man in modern times; it was morally inconceivable that he seek to leave his post.

Weizmann remained. He was the unchallenged leader of the movement; he marshalled his forces, Jewish and Gentile, against

the Jewish anti-Zionists; was consulted at every turn by British politicians and officials who had begun to draft the document which was to become the Declaration, and worked diligently to give undivided rule over Palestine to England alone, since he feared divided rule such as was contemplated by the Sykes–Picot Agreement. Balfour was deeply impressed by the arguments of Brandeis during his visit to America, and he and Robert Cecil remained Weizmann's firmest allies within the British Cabinet; C. P. Scott was a tower of strength in the larger political world outside.

Another factor may also have played a part in forcing a decision. In the autumn of 1917 the situation in Russia, both political and military, was, from the point of the Western Alliance, deteriorating rapidly. A move likely to increase sympathy for the Allies not only among American Jews, but among the five million Jews in the Russian empire, was deemed valuable in London. Exchanges of drafts between Zionist leaders and the Cabinet draftsmen took place. Edwin Montagu, who had rejoined the Cabinet, fought hard against this **[36]** policy, in part because as Secretary for India he feared its effect upon the Muslims under British rule.

In the midst of these concerns Weizmann was suddenly sent on an abortive sea voyage. In 1917 the elder Henry Morgenthau, who had recently ceased to be US Ambassador in Turkey, conceived a plan for inducing the Turks to make a separate peace. Since his scheme involved the possibility of Jewish settlement in Palestine, Weizmann was sent to Gibraltar by the British government to confer with Morgenthau and Professor Felix Frankfurter as American representatives. The meeting in Gibraltar came to nothing; the Turks remained in the war, and the identification of Zionism with the Allied cause inevitably made the position of Palestinian and Turkish Jews perilous and at times tragic.

Meanwhile developments in the Zionist world rose to a climax. On 2 November 1917 a letter was finally published, addressed by Mr Balfour, as Foreign Secretary, to Lord Rothschild, declaring that 'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish

people.'[13] This cardinal act was universally regarded, though its architects were many, as a personal triumph for Weizmann. From that moment his position among the Jews, in virtue of the regard evidently paid him by the rulers and people of Great Britain, itself became dominant. It was to him that Sir Mark Sykes, emerging from the Cabinet meeting which had finally adopted the Balfour Declaration (a document largely drafted by Milner) announced the momentous news. His name became indissolubly linked with this, the greatest event in Jewish history since the destruction of Judaea. Hundreds of thousands of leaflets proclaiming the Declaration were showered upon the Jews in Germany, Austria-Hungary and, above all, Russia. Weizmann had formally welcomed the Revolution that had broken out in Russia in March in the same year, explaining that it was not to persecution alone that Zionism looked for its chief stimulus, for it was a positive movement, and did not seek to thrive on injustice. The Bolshevik Revolution occurred five days after the publication of the Balfour Declaration; but the majority of the Jews in Russia who came to hear of it were, understandably, more deeply moved by the former event. Weizmann's mother, attending **[37]** a Zionist meeting in Russia, received an ovation, and was blessed as one who had given birth to the Emancipator.

FOUNDATIONS

Weizmann's position had risen to a new height, and he accepted the power and prestige which he had gained as his birthright. In a sense, his role was anomalous. What Ahad Ha'am had said in the letter mentioned above was true enough: Weizmann had risen to his pre-eminent position through no act of democratic selection.

[13] The relevant text runs as follows: 'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.'

Some among the other leaders, who had naturally looked upon themselves as the duly appointed heads of the movement, looked with incredulity, not unmixed with a certain indignation, on Weizmann's new and undisputed status. He was not even a member of the Zionist executive. But his position, largely owing to his personal qualities, had become unassailable. He had become clearly the greatest figure in the public life of the Jews since the death of Herzl, and was recognised as such by Zionists and non-Zionists, Jews and Gentiles, from the day on which he boldly linked the fortunes of the movement with British policy.

In 1918 he headed the Zionist Commission sent to Palestine, then being conquered by Field Marshal Allenby's troops, to advise on the future settlement, and effect the liaison between the Jews of Palestine and the British authorities. Before he left he was received by King George V, and came armed with high hopes. He had an affecting meeting with his old friend Jabotinsky in Cairo, and then, flanked by Majors James de Rothschild and William Ormsby Gore as British Liaison Officers, and with some of his old Manchester friends[14] as members of his Commission, he arrived in Palestine to be met with scepticism and suspicion sometimes amounting to hostility on the part of powerful figures among the British military representatives.

The conqueror of Palestine, Allenby, was himself not unsympathetic. The Jews in Palestine, after suffering indignities and persecution at the hands of the Turks, were nervous and bewildered. The Arab and Christian communities were uncertain and suspicious. On British advice Weizmann made his way to the other side of the Jordan to meet the Emir Feisal, one of the leaders of the Arab revolt, son of the sharif Hussein of Mecca, to whom the British had made promises of Arab independence. The Emir met him with gifts in the desert, and in his camp near Akaba assured him of his sympathy. In a letter written in January 1919, when they met in London, Feisal expressed the wish that Jews and Arabs should cooperate in the development of Palestine and of the Arab

[14] As well as representatives of other Allied Powers.

states. He was later quoted in the press as expressing the opposite sentiments. Later still, in a letter sent to Professor Frankfurt during the Versailles Conference, he returned to his original position: Jewish settlement, he [38] declared, was an expression of national need, as the Arab movement also was, and not one of foreign colonisation or imperialism; he would respect and welcome it; as in the letter to Weizmann, he rested his pledge on the one condition that the pledges given him and his father by the Western powers were fully honoured. He was himself driven from the throne of Syria; his father and brother were expelled by Ibn Saud from Mecca and the Hedjaz; and although he became King of Iraq, he thenceforward regarded the original agreement, and therefore, presumably also its pro-Zionist corollary, as having been rendered void by the treachery of the West. But all that still lay in the future.

In 1918, before the end of hostilities, Weizmann solemnly laid the foundation stone of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 'in order that the Jewish soul which had been hovering between heaven and earth might here find an earthly habitation', and so the words of the prophets might be fulfilled. The fate of the university henceforth became one of his deepest concerns: its career was a source of alternate pride and anxiety to him until the day of his death.

He remained sober in the midst of triumph. In May 1917 he had said; 'States must be built up slowly, gradually, systematically and patiently. We, therefore, say that […] the way to achieve [the creation of a Jewish Commonwealth] lies through a series of intermediary stages.' In an hour of joy and exultation in the entire Jewish world he dwelt on the difficult days to come. He said over and over again that only the people's own labour, slow, dedicated, organised, painful, not the inspiration of a moment, would create the framework of the Jewish national existence. The soil must be conquered by careful and agonising effort; an unbelievable opportunity had been offered, and if the Jews of the world did not rise to it the responsibility and shame would be theirs alone.

There were dissentient voices. The veteran Max Nordau demanded mass immigration. He thought that for the Jews it was

now or never; if they did not pour in in their hundreds of thousands, they would never again be offered the chance of fulfilment for their national needs. Jabotinsky, too, thought along similar lines. Weizmann did not think such forced marches feasible, and he said so. From this moment the rift between him and those who demanded drastic political action and a swifter and more violent tempo, originally opened by the differences between his *Erfüllungspolitik*[15] and the 'maximalism' of Herzl and his followers, began to widen. But Zionism was still united by the powerful opposition to it within Jewish ranks.

In 1919 the Zionist Organization was invited to present its case to the Peace Conference at Versailles before the Committee of Ten, composed for the most part of the Foreign Secre**[39]**taries of the victorious Allies. Weizmann, Sokolov and Ussishkin spoke briefly before the Committee. A representative of the French Jews, Professor Sylvain Lévi, an eminent orientalist, also spoke, and echoed the fears of the anti-Zionists, including the British Jews represented in Paris by Lucien Wolf. Lévi spoke of Arab hostility, the dangers of divided allegiance among the Jews, and added a new point of his own about the possible effect of mass immigration into the Middle East by persons infected by the virus of revolutionary ideas from Eastern Europe.

Weizmann could hardly contain himself: Lévi's words seemed to him a desecration. But the American representatives, Wilson, Lansing, House, remained no less favourable to Zionism than their British counterparts, who, by now, included Smuts as well as Lloyd George, Balfour and Milner. Lansing asked him what he meant by 'National Home'; he replied that it was hoped to 'build up gradually a nationality which would be as Jewish as the French nation was French, and the British nation British'. (This was later echoed by both Samuel and Balfour.)

The Zionists won their case. Weizmann was duly congratulated by Balfour, and declined to accept Lévi's proffered hand, calling him a traitor to the Jewish cause. Lucien Wolf, in his turn,

[15] ['Appeasement'.]

attempted to warn the allied negotiators, in particular Lloyd George, through his secretary Philip Kerr (later Lord Lothian) of the dangers of Zionism, but with little effect. The Mandate for Palestine, given by the League of Nations (in accordance with Zionist hopes and wishes) to Great Britain, incorporated significant portions of the original Balfour Declaration. The Jewish National Home, and the special status of the Zionist Organization in connection with it, had been recognised by 'public law'. Herzl's dream had to that degree been fulfilled. True, the Mandate did not speak of Jewish 'rights' to Palestine, only of 'historical connection'. This was a phrase probably inserted by Lord Curzon, who succeeded Balfour as British Foreign Secretary; for (so Weizmann used to relate) he pointed out to him that while rights can be claimed, a connection cannot. 'The temperature of this Office has dropped considerably,' Weizmann recollected saying, 'since the time of your predecessor.'

Weizmann was now in undisputed control of the Zionist movement. He was the commander-in-chief in a war on two fronts: against opposition and indifference among the Jews, and against opponents among gentiles, principally in Britain and Palestine. His attitude towards the former remained unbending. He had said in an essay published during the war that 'the efforts of the emancipated Jew to assimilate himself to his surroundings […] deceive nobody but himself'. From this he never moved, and he mocked and reviled those who disagreed. As for the latter, he had not long to wait. By 1920 **[40]** Arab riots had broken out in Jerusalem. In 1921 Jabotinsky was arrested in Jaffa and placed in Acre prison. The local British administration could scarcely be described as cooperative or sympathetic, despite the appointment of Sir Herbert Samuel as First British High Commissioner.

INVENTOR AND BUILDER

At the Zionist Conference held in that year, differences between Weizmann and his allies began to take concrete form. Justice Louis Brandeis, the most eminent of the American Zionists, believed in

the necessity for organised economic action to create a solid foundation for Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine. He wanted a body vested with plenary powers for at any rate three years, backed by private, principally American, Jewish capital, capable of planning systematically, in order to avoid confusion and conflict. In the political field he opposed centralisation: the national Zionist bodies were to form a loose federation, each autonomous in its own country; there was to be no world Zionist executive in supreme authority.

Weizmann rejected both these policies. Despite his empiricism, his grasp of day-to-day material needs, his freedom from utopianism, he saw in these proposals a danger to the central principle of Zionism. The Jewish commonwealth must be built by the concerted efforts of the entire people; too much emphasis on private capital as against the public funds created by the Zionists, the Keren Kayemeth and the Keren Hayesod; too great a diminution in the power and status of the body representative of the national interest of the Jewish people – the Zionist Organization – and the great design would decline into philanthropy, mere economic activity, and lose its democratic nature and political ideal. His constant emphasis on the importance of the pioneers – *Chalutziut* – sprang not merely from the natural tendency towards populism by which most Russian Zionists were affected to some degree, but from the belief that a community that is planned for by an elite of experts, however dedicated and efficient, cannot grow organically. He believed that a nation must build itself, with all the errors and confusions that this may entail: things cannot, he maintained, be arranged from above; peoples cannot be developed like business enterprises or even colonies by the fiat of remote authorities elsewhere. Personal factors also played their part: Weizmann was not too tolerant of other leaders, and Brandeis was a great force; but more important was the genuine difference of principle and approach.

Weizmann's constant pleas for more cultural autonomy and more education did not spring from any explicit system of values in which intellectual interests dominated over others. He was not

greatly interested in general ideas, nor, for all his love of music, **[41]** in artistic activity as such. He was essentially not a theorist but an inventor and builder; he used opportunities as they came. But he possessed singular insight into the nature and value of intellectual and artistic creation, and an instinctive understanding of what makes societies and nations, in particular of the interplay between human and technological factors; and in virtue of this he became a statesman and negotiator of rare genius.

Moreover, despite his understanding and admiration for the West, in which he had made his home, he remained to the end a native member of the Eastern European Jewish community, a Jew among Jews, who understood the Jewish masses, and in his own person thought, felt and suffered as they did, and knew out of his own experience what enhanced and what cramped their lives; and this alone gave him an incomparable advantage as a popular leader.

He was a deeply impressive public speaker and a most fascinating talker, but not, like Nordau or Jabotinsky, a spellbinding orator; and tended, at times, to grow distant and self-absorbed. In politics he suffered neither fools nor equals gladly. He believed in his own judgement, he was bold, independent and, at times, deeply disdainful. Yet he remained a man of the people to the end, and was felt to be such by them – not a convert to their cause, nor a figure from another world who had stretched his hand to help the brothers from whom he was emotionally or socially remote.

In 1920 a Zionist Conference was held in London. It had revealed a widening gap between his position and the social and economic doctrines of the American decentralisers. At the American Zionist Convention held in Cleveland in the early summer of 1921 these differences led to an open breach. Brandeis, Frankfurter, Stephen Wise, Mack, Nathan Straus and others resigned. He was supported by a group of American Zionists led by Louis Lipsky, who defended him at the first post-war Zionist Congress, held in Carlsbad in September 1921, where the 'American' position was argued by Julius Simon and Nehemia de Lieme. 'Evidently there is no bridge between Pinsk and Washing-

ton,' Weizmann had remarked some months before at a meeting held during his first American visit. He found it difficult to share the direction of affairs with others: Brandeis thought him overbearing, and politically ruthless. He had, during his American tour, established links both with the American Jewish masses and with some of the financial leaders of American Jewry, over the heads of the Brandeisists. This stood him in good stead when he created the expanded Jewish Agency in 1929.

The Hebrew University had always been the apple of Weizmann's eye. He tried to attract to it the greatest intellectual luminaries **[42]** among the Jews of the world. Einstein came, but left after a relatively short stay. Weizmann's relationship with Einstein, despite their deep mutual admiration for each other, remained ambivalent. Weizmann was inclined to regard Einstein as an unpractical idealist inclined to utopian attitudes in politics. Einstein, in his turn, looked on Weizmann as too much of a *Realpolitiker*, and was irritated by his failure to press for reforms in the University away from what he regarded as an undesirable American collegiate pattern. Nevertheless they remained allies and friends to the end of their lives. In particular, Einstein supported Weizmann's efforts to attract men of first-rate scientific ability to Palestine.

There were periods in Weizmann's life when the pressure of public work caused him to abandon his scientific work. But he returned to it whenever he could, and sought and obtained much solace in it, particularly when obstacles made political activity difficult. He belonged to the optimistic tradition of the Enlightenment in his belief that the application of scientific method to life was both inevitable and desirable, and threw the full weight of his authority and expertise behind the various industrial enterprises which rested on the application of scientific technology – Rutenberg's electric station, the Potash works on the Dead Sea, experiments in his beloved settlements. It was under his inspiration that his old Manchester friends, the Sieff–Marks family, endowed a scientific institute in Rehovot, in Palestine, that was opened in 1934. This later grew into the Institute that bears Weizmann's own

name; he attracted first-rate scientists to it, and personally guided it with characteristic breadth of vision. In it he spent what were, in his own view, the most satisfactory and productive months and years of his life. Nine years before, the Hebrew University in its new building on Mount Scopus was formally inaugurated by Lord Balfour, and Weizmann, as its first President, delivered an inaugural address. He did not, from the first, see eye to eye with its first head, the Chancellor, Dr Judah L. Magnes, from whose political and academic views he strongly dissented; their differences grew greater with time.

THREE FRONTS

In 1921 he became President of the World Zionist Organization. His main work now lay in negotiation and administration. He had to conduct operations on three troubled fronts, Jewish, British and Arab. In the Zionist world, he occupied his customary central position; to the right of him stood Jabotinsky and his followers. Violently opposed to the decision made at the Cairo Conference in 1921 whereby Transjordan was removed from the original territory of Palestine, and by the subsequent White Paper issued a year later by Mr Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, which laid down that Jewish immigration must be determined by 'economic absorptive **[43]** capacity' and other limiting factors, the 'Revisionists' wanted, with the example of Ireland and colonial territories in mind, an out-and-out assault upon the mandatory power, using every weapon of political pressure and resistance open to a minority.

Weizmann believed this policy to be futile. He placed his faith from the beginning in the British connection, both on grounds of sentiment and because he believed in the community of Zionist and British interests. To his opponents on the extreme nationalist right this seemed a policy of weak compromise tantamount to treason. He had staked his political career on close collaboration with the British administration and remained faithful to this ideal for over twenty years. Weizmann was pragmatic and flexible in his

means and methods, but his ends never altered: he remained unswerving in his pursuit of a free, self-governing Jewish commonwealth, preferably under British auspices, in Palestine.

To the left of him he had opponents who pressed for a greater degree of immediate socialism in the Jewish settlement, criticised the 'capitalist' methods of colonisation and the Government's immigration regulations, which discriminated in favour of richer immigrants, resented what seemed to them undue interference by the British mandatory government, the Zionist Organization and private economic agencies in the social and economic life of the Jewish colonies, and demanded a greater degree both of socialism and of autonomy. Both sides accused Weizmann of Anglomania, and in particular of a tendency to appease and yield to his British friends. Weizmann was not a socialist: he professed no economic doctrine and declared himself unskilled in such matters; by temperament he was inclined towards democratic and semi-socialist institutions. However autocratic he could at times be, he distrusted plutocracy, philanthropic paternalism, oligarchy and other forms of elitism. He saw the building up of Jewish Palestine as a collective effort carried through principally by agricultural and industrial workers in an egalitarian society. Equality and fraternity had deeply penetrated the life of common suffering in the Pale of Settlement, whence most of the early immigrants, and he himself, had come; he recoiled against the hierarchies of the Western world as strongly as the immigrants themselves. He felt some distaste for the Rothschild colonies with their tradition of patronage, although he recognised their unique historic services. He insisted on diverting Zionist funds to *moshavim*[16] and *kvutsoth*[17] even though he was not convinced that they were economically viable, and was often told that it was more rational to **[44]** support a greater degree of private enterprise. He loved best his visits to the settlements – Nahalal, say, or Ein Harod – his rapport with the settlers was intimate and happy, happier than his relations with some of the

[16] Settlements with individually owned land.

[17] Collective settlements.

representatives of economic corporations from America or England. The colonists and members of kibbutzim were among his most faithful admirers. His heart was with Eastern Europe and the poor, his brain with the superior resources and standards of Western capital and skill.

As for the Arabs, he was, perhaps, over-optimistic about the possibility of peaceful and harmonious relations with them. He insisted from the start that they must not be exploited. The Jews had come to live a national life, not to oppress others or create an Arab proletariat; he placed his hopes in the vast rise in the level of social and economic life which Jewish immigration would be bound to bring to the Arabs of Palestine; he underestimated the countervailing force of Arab nationalism, fed by a mounting resentment of the influx of foreigners who came to settle 'as of right and not on sufferance'. Consequently he had no discernible Arab policy – a fact which his opponents were not slow to point out.

As for the occupying power, his anglophile feeling seemed to the more critical among his followers to blind him to the British Colonial officials' frequent distaste for the Jews, and their moral doubts about their own task under the Mandate. For all his anger, with its shortcomings, Weizmann made the British connection the basis of his entire policy. When, in the end, he became convinced that he had been betrayed by Britain, this was the deepest wound, and, indeed, the central tragedy, of his life. It was with the British that his principal business lay. Patiently and persistently, during the 1920s, he pressed the Colonial Office for more and more certificates for immigrants, and for land which the Jewish National Fund did not itself have the resources to purchase. He was condemned to perpetual frustration. Since the first flush of wartime enthusiasm, successive British governments inclined to considering the Zionist adventure a piece of romantic folly which was costing the British Government far too dear in the terms of Arab goodwill. The Foreign Office, especially, came to regard the promises to the Jews as morally indefensible and politically embarrassing. It is doubtful whether others could have obtained more from a

government and officials steeped in this outlook. About this opinions will probably always differ.

Weizmann's relations with successive High Commissioners naturally varied greatly: even when he was most critical of his policies, he retained much respect and admiration for the first Jewish governor of Palestine since Nehemiah – Sir Herbert Samuel. This feeling was fully **[45]** reciprocated and grew stronger with the years. He was, however, happiest in his relations with the three soldiers among the High Commissioners: Lord Plumer, Sir Arthur Wauchope and Sir Alan Cunningham. He found men of simple, resolute and open nature easiest to deal with.

The scale of both financial contributions and immigration provided by the Jewish world in the mid-1920s fell far short of Zionist expectations, and the economic situation in the Jewish settlement often grew critical. For these reasons, and also because he had always conceived of the entire enterprise as one undertaken by the entire Jewish people, and not merely by a party within it, Weizmann worked fervently for an expansion of the Zionist Organization to cover as great a sector of Jewry as possible. The greatest blow to these hopes was the disappearance of the great Russian Jewish community of more than three millions behind the Soviet Curtain. Mass immigration from the West had never seemed to Weizmann a concrete prospect.

In 1929 his wish was at last partially fulfilled. An expanded Jewish Agency was formed, against criticism by both the right and the left wings of the Zionist movement, with the adhesion of Louis Marshall and Felix Warburg in the United States, and other non-Zionist sympathisers in many lands, who were to form 50 per cent of the central body with which the British government formally dealt in all matters concerning the Jewish national home. Weizmann became the head of the new organisation. He had now attained to the highest formal position in the Jewish world, a modern exilarch, *rosh hagolah*, leading his people back to their ancient home. His figure inspired profound respect and interest throughout the world. He had, after the war, established his headquarters in London; his gifted wife and he entertained widely.

His circle of acquaintances grew large and varied: it included some of the most eminent, remarkable and influential figures in British social and public life. To some of his old followers he seemed altogether too grand, remote and inaccessible. These were years of peace, and slow, gradual, difficult, unspectacular achievement. His influence in government circles rose and fell, but was never negligible. There was no doubt of his unique status and reputation; although he represented a relatively small group of human beings, and little financial power, the force of his personality was such that he created an illusion, to which the leaders of the Western world willingly succumbed, of representing not only a people but a state, of being the prime minister of a government in exile. It was not as a suppliant but as an equal that he spoke for a great historical nation; he was a figure of formidable powers whose proposals were not to be ignored.

[46] The great array of Jewish solidarity for which Weizmann had worked in a single-minded fashion frightened and enraged the Arabs. The first result of the creation of the Jewish Agency was the outbreak of violent anti-Jewish riots in Palestine. Jews were massacred in Safed, Hebron and elsewhere, and a Commission presided over by a British Colonial Judge – Sir John Shaw – was sent out to investigate. In November 1930, the Colonial Secretary of the British Labour Government, Sidney Webb (by then Lord Passfield), issued a White Paper in the name of the British Government, which, as on previous occasions, deplored the Arab riots, but, tracing their cause to the natural reaction of the Arabs before the dangers of Jewish immigration, called for its curtailment, and a tighter supervision of Jewish activities.

Weizmann's entire policy was founded upon the feasibility of fruitful cooperation with British governments sympathetic to Zionist aims. The White Paper administered a severe blow to Jewish hopes, and was regarded by Jews and their friends everywhere as an act of injustice. It compromised Weizmann's entire position, and he felt obliged to resign from the presidency of the Agency. A volume of protest broke out not only from Jewish organisations but from Conservative, Liberal and, in part, also

Labour benches in Parliament, and outside it. A letter signed by some of the most prominent names in British public life appeared in *The Times*. The Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, bowed before the storm and sent a letter to Weizmann in which he interpreted the White Paper in a somewhat more pro-Zionist sense. Although the position was half saved for the moment, Weizmann never again felt the political ground firm beneath his feet.

A year later, at the Seventeenth Congress in Basle, he was defeated by the combination of parties predominantly of the right. He symbolised the now discredited British connection. British behaviour strengthened the hand of the intransigent right wing, which demanded more drastic anti-British tactics. Nor had he made himself more popular by being quoted in a newspaper interview as neither understanding nor sympathising with the demand for a Jewish majority in Palestine. Whether or not his position has been accurately represented, he was clear that the immediate prospect of increasing the trickle of Jewish immigration did not seem bright: he was inclining towards a temporary solution based on a claim to political parity with the Arab majority.

Nahum Sokolov was elected President of the Jewish Agency, and until 1935 Weizmann was out of office. He did not sit with folded hands. He returned to his laboratory, which had always served him as a source of moral strength. He devoted himself to the building and organisation of the scientific institute in Rehovot **[47]** which the generosity of the Sieff–Marks family had made possible. He begged eminent German Jewish scientists to leave their country, over which Hitler's shadow daily grew darker, and come to Palestine; some were persuaded; the great chemist Fritz Haber died in Basle while on the way to Rehovot. At the same time he continued to work in the Zionist movement. He undertook fund-raising journeys for Zionist agencies in South Africa, the United States and elsewhere; he took a vigorous part in the affairs of the central Zionist Bank – the Jewish Colonial Trust founded by Herzl as an English company, which was facing an acute financial crisis during the great worldwide economic slump. He

was invited and accepted the Zionist Executive's invitation to help in the urgent tasks created by the new and frightful predicament of the German Jews caused by Hitler's rise to power in Germany, and threw himself into the work of rescuing refugees. He spoke and wrote; his unseen presence hovered over all Zionist action; Sokolov is said to have remarked that he was a mere umbrella-stand on which Weizmann had chosen to hang his hat. In 1935 in Lucerne, at the Nineteenth Congress, he was returned to power. It was plain to all that he was irreplaceable, his authority in the Jewish and Gentile world unexampled. He was the greatest Jew in public life in modern times and his continuance as a private individual had become too much of an anomaly.

THE FUTURE OF PALESTINE

Britain had behaved generously in giving asylum in the United Kingdom to the refugees from Germany. Its Palestine policy was another matter. It had become evident to most observers that, in the rising tension between Germany and the Western world, the Arabs had politically far more than the Jews to offer to either side, and that, in consequence, their favours were likely to be solicited by the Western allies at the expense of the Jewish settlement, which, like a foundling, was proving more and more unwelcome to its adoptive British parent.

Weizmann slowly came to realise that the Mandatory experiment was set on a self-defeating course. As a result of Hitler's persecution and the growing fears in Central Europe, Jewish immigration into Palestine had risen by leaps and bounds: economic absorptive capacity had proved far more elastic than the British administration and its experts had anticipated. In 1936 widespread Arab riots broke out, this time not merely against the Jews but also against the mandatory power, and developed into a species of guerrilla warfare. A Commission under Lord Peel was sent out to investigate and make fresh recommendations about the future of Palestine. Weizmann appeared before it in Jerusalem, and his testimony, both in form and content, is one of the most

impressive documents, both intellectually and morally, ever submitted on behalf of a nation. It contained a survey and an analysis of unsur[49]passed authority and force dealing with the past, present and future position of the Jews in the world, historical, social, economic and political; it formed the basis of thinking on this tormented topic for many years to come. Its prophecies were largely fulfilled.

The Commission's report, itself a state paper of the first order, and probably, to this day, the best account of British policy and action in Palestine, advocated partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab self-governing entities, although this was hedged in with important reservations. Weizmann tentatively accepted this plan, with his own reservations, as the lesser of two evils. He thought that the Mandate had outlived its usefulness; that British authority both in London and in Palestine had plainly proved unequal to its task. It was a painful conclusion for a man who had cast his lot with Britain, and had paid dearly for his open admiration and love for British qualities. But, having reached it, he set himself to persuade the Agency and Congress to accept partition.

A storm rose in both the Jewish and the Arab worlds. The Zionist Congress, after passionate debates, accepted the solution in principle, although with radical qualifications. The Arabs rejected it outright. The British House of Commons voted for it by a majority, but the Government slowly and remorselessly sabotaged it, by collecting the inevitably adverse opinions of the Arab states, and by sending out a Commission to advise on the new frontiers, and accepting its conclusions – that in fact no satisfactory frontier could ever be drawn. Weizmann lived through agonising months. He had accepted the Solomonic judgement with anguish, on the ground that any viable Jewish self-governing territory, however small and insecure, was preferable to the alternative, which was perdition. He was attacked from the left and the right as a traitor, an appeaser, a British agent.

In America particularly, partition was denounced by leaders of Jewish opinion as the sacrifice of economic viability and prospects of large-scale immigration to the mirage of political independence

in an absurdly small area and one too difficult to defend – a retrogressive step in a world of growing economic interdependence, the sacrifice of a vision of a wider world, free from fiercely protected natural frontiers, to an anachronistic and narrowly political nationalistic ideal. For Weizmann the entire future of the Jewish people was at stake at this moment. It seemed to him clear that if they did not seize the opportunity of national independence now, the chance might not come again within the calculable future.

The political situation in Europe rapidly grew darker. Italy had conquered Abyssinia, the civil war in Spain had ended in a Fascist victory, the Germans occupied Austria and began to threaten the Czechs. **[49]** The Palestine Arabs continued to harass the mandatory power and the Jewish settlements. The Jews formed a semi-legal defence corps of which the Hagana, originally formed in 1920, had been the illegal beginning; to some degree it cooperated with the British forces. Towards the end of 1938 came the final denouement. The false hopes engendered by the Munich Agreement faded rapidly. With the prospect of war with Germany looming, the British Government, seeking to secure its Middle Eastern base, finally decided to yield to Arab demands. A veiled but ominous statement implying this was issued in 1938. This was followed by the St James's Palace Conference, attended by Weizmann together with Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders, in which the Jews were pressed by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, and the Colonial Secretary, Mr Malcolm Macdonald, to give up their dream of either a majority or an autonomous establishment, let alone a state, in Palestine.

In 1939 a British White Paper was published which imposed severe restrictions upon the transfer of land to the Jews, and made all prospect of Jewish immigration after five years dependent on Arab goodwill, which was clearly not likely to occur in any foreseeable period. No one doubted that the British Government had executed a complete volte-face: it was intended to liquidate the Zionist experiment for good.

The path for Weizmann was now clear. He rejected with dignity and force the death sentence pronounced on the Zionist

movement, accused the British Government of turning Palestine from a home into a deathtrap for the Jews, and prepared to fight. The Zionist Congress held in the late summer of 1939, during the last weeks before the outbreak of hostilities, haunted the memories of those who had been present. Delegates, as they spoke, were conscious that they might soon be cut off from each other, no one could tell when, perhaps never to meet again in this world; those from Eastern Europe knew that they were returning to probable torture and death. Weizmann, according to all accounts, towered over the meeting as the father of his people – its misfortunes were directly reflected in his personal agony. In September 1939 Hitler invaded Poland; Great Britain and France declared war upon Germany. Weizmann immediately promised the Allies all possible aid by the Jewish population in Palestine. A new phase had begun.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

In the early months of the war Weizmann again offered his scientific services to the country of which he had now long been a citizen. This time he found little response in official circles. He was appointed honorary chemical adviser to the Ministry of Supply, but this led to nothing. He reflected gloomily about the suspicious and negative official attitude in 1939–40, as contrasted with the more **[50]** imaginative response in the First World War. He pressed for the formation of special Jewish, and in particular Palestinian, units in the war against Germany. The government departments, in particular the Foreign, Colonial and War Offices, were, above all, anxious never again to be, or seem to be, under any obligation to Zionists or their friends. Nor was there support from the leaders of the armed forces. Zionist hope was now centred upon neutral America, where the openly pro-Arab policy of the British Government was condemned by large sections of public opinion as part and parcel of the general policy of appeasement, culminating in the Munich agreement of October 1938. Weizmann's second son, Michael, had joined the British Royal Air Force on the day after Mr Chamberlain's triumphal return from Munich, and was

now a pilot. Weizmann beat in vain upon the doors of government departments to secure admission into Palestine for Jews trapped in the still unconquered countries of Eastern Europe, fully realising that the most probable alternative was extermination. Those who suspected him of softness with British officials could now be matched with those who thought that the fierce words he addressed to the Foreign and War Offices, in which he virtually called them accomplices of Hitler, went too far.

With the German invasion of the Lowlands and France in the summer of 1940, Weizmann renewed his pleas that Palestinian Jews be allowed to fight as an autonomous unit. His wish was not realised until Mr Churchill, whose Zionist sympathies had never been in doubt, finally authorised the formation of this body in 1944. Weizmann remained in London during the bombing of the Blitz, and received a more sympathetic hearing from the new Churchill administration than from its predecessor. In February 1942 his son Michael was declared missing by the Air Ministry. Neither Weizmann nor his wife Vera ever wholly recovered from this loss. In 1941 Weizmann went to New York; for the United States had by then plainly become the centre of gravity of the free world. In London Zionists were being treated as, at best, highly embarrassing allies; in Washington minds seemed to Weizmann more open about the organisation of the new post-war world. He rapidly became the centre of political activity within American Zionism. Old friends among British officials and politicians were not all unsympathetic. He saved at least one group of Jewish refugees from extermination by a personal intervention: but in general he could do little to modify the immigration policy of the British Government and its High Commissioner in Palestine, which led to the death and suicide of boatloads of Jewish victims of Nazism escaping from central Europe.

He fared better in his approaches to eminent Americans. The American Government had declined all responsibility for **[51]** Palestine, and could afford a more detached view. The sympathetic attitude towards Zionist aims displayed by such American statesmen as the Vice-President, Henry Wallace, the Under-

Secretary of State, Sumner Welles, the Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau (who was a Jew), and indeed President Roosevelt himself – as well as officials, journalists and leaders of opinion in every walk of life, owed a good deal to the extraordinary fascination exercised by Weizmann upon almost all uncommitted personalities with whom he came into contact. He continued with his scientific work, in which Britain had displayed no interest. He duly took out an American patent for discovering a new process for the production of synthetic rubber. He hoped, perhaps, to repeat the 'miracle' of the First World War, and use the value to the United States of his scientific contribution as a means of enhancing his status, an asset to be used in favour of his cause. His patents brought him royalties which made him financially independent, and this gave him that complete freedom of action which characterised his entire public life. His continued fame as a chemist added to his laurels in American eyes.

As the victories of the West began to point towards the end of hostilities, Weizmann began once more to travel from America to England and back again, in a continuous effort to keep Zionist claims alive before the future peacemakers. Despite varying degrees of suspicion or hostility in the foreign ministries of all the major allies, the old partition scheme recommended by the Peel Commission came to life again in the British Cabinet. The prospect of Jewish autonomy in Palestine was touched upon during the talks between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin at Yalta. The Arab rulers remained adamant in opposition: King Ibn Saud of the Hedjaz warned Roosevelt that he would forcibly resist a pro-Zionist solution of the Palestine problem. There were American Jews, too, who feared a Jewish state as being likely to affect their own status, but they were not nearly as influential as their British predecessors had been in 1917.

At a Zionist conference in New York the so-called 'Biltmore Resolution' was passed, on 11 April 1942, openly demanding for the first time the creation of a Jewish commonwealth in the whole of Palestine. This became part of the official programme of the

movement. The initiative for it came from David Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian delegation. Weizmann did not oppose it; he had indeed written of a Jewish state as a world need in an article published in a New York periodical earlier that year; nevertheless the possibility of a self-governing Jewish dominion within the British Commonwealth still occupied his mind.

The opposition to the Biltmore programme took the form of schemes, **[52]** promoted largely by left-wing and other groups in Palestine and America, for a binational state of Jews and Arabs, an idea which had originally been discussed in 1931. In the meanwhile the war, which hampered travel and communication, led to some weakening of contact between Weizmann and the Jews in Palestine. The growth during the war of underground and terrorist Jewish groups determined on violent resistance to British policy scarcely impinged on the consciousness of Weizmann, then busily engaged in discussions with British statesmen about the future constitution of Palestine.

In 1945 the British Minister of State in the Middle East, Lord Moyne, was assassinated in Cairo by members of the Stern group in Palestine. Weizmann returned to London and found that Churchill's attitude had, as a result, stiffened against Zionist demands. The British Cabinet abandoned conversations about partition, and set itself to suppress rebellion in Palestine. Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, had, some time before this, been instrumental in creating the League of Arab States, whose antagonism to Jewish hopes was unconcealed. President Roosevelt's attitude remained ambiguous until his death in 1945.

POST-WAR STRUGGLES

In the summer of that year, in the first election after the end of the European war, the British Conservative Government fell, and the Labour Party under Major Attlee came into power. Ernest Bevin became Foreign Secretary and pledged himself to solve the Palestine problem. His antagonism to Zionist demands increased steadily. Weizmann found little common ground between himself

and either Bevin or the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, who thought the original British Mandate an egregious error. The pro-Zionist election pledges of the Labour Conference had evidently had little effect. Many schemes were discussed: division of Palestine into cantons, trusteeship and partition plans, an independent Arab state with guarantees to the Jewish minority – all of which displayed a marked anti-Zionist bias. Meanwhile the American President, Harry Truman, was pressing for permission for at least one hundred thousand survivors from the Nazi concentration camps to enter Palestine.

The Arabs threatened renewed revolt. An Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry was sent out to investigate the situation. Weizmann delivered one of his most memorable addresses before it. After some disagreement among its members, the Commission recommended a wider measure of immigration than any British Government was prepared to accept. Mr Bevin was becoming progressively more irritated by Jewish pressure, especially in the USA. Illegal immigration of Jews into Palestine began to assume large propositions. Bevin's treatment of Jewish concentration camp victims on board an 'illegal' ship named *Exodus*, who were compelled by him to return to the refugee camp in Germany from **[53]** which they had come, advertised, so it seemed to some, his growing anti-Semitism. Illegal immigration increased by leaps and bounds. Whatever the official attitude of the Jewish Agency, the sympathy with this movement of Weizmann and most other Jewish leaders far beyond the bounds of Zionism, and throughout liberated Europe as well as wide circles in the USA, was mounting rapidly. Resistance to British rule in Palestine on the part of dissident Jewish groups in Palestine grew in violence; the occupying authorities attempted equally strong repressive measures. Weizmann, who had during the greater portion of his political life believed in the British association, and had indeed hoped that the Jewish community in Palestine would develop institutions, and a social and political temper, not dissimilar to British democracy, grew profoundly disillusioned and embittered. Even the friends of Zionism in England began to say to him that

she could not be expected to take on obligations beyond her now greatly reduced powers; its opponents denounced the iniquity of placing the Arabs under Jewish rule in any form.

In 1946 the first post-war Zionist Congress assembled in Basle, and the British connection, with which Weizmann's name had been indissolubly identified, was the fundamental issue before it. He had, though without enthusiasm, and in order to avoid a final rupture, advocated acceptance by the Jewish agency of the invitation issued by the British Government to a conference in London in 1947. This proposal was refused by the Congress, largely by the votes of the Palestinian representatives, led by David Ben-Gurion, who regarded the entire policy based on cooperation with England as discredited and hopeless. Some of his former supporters now tended to look upon Weizmann as a statesman who had been great and effective in his day and rendered major services to the movement, but had become hopelessly bemused by his thirty years of work with the British, and was no longer aware of the new realities, either in Palestine itself or in the power relationships which had arisen after the war. Weizmann returned to London, once again defeated as a champion of the 'Anglo-centric' point of view, although he had in fact, no illusions left about the attitude of the British Government.

Notwithstanding the vote of the Congress, a conference with the British authorities did take place in London, but without Weizmann, and duly led to a total impasse. The Foreign Secretary decided, in the face of growing Jewish violence, to refer the entire issue to the United Nations, whence all authority for British trusteeship in Palestine was in principle derived. The United Nations appointed a Commission of Inquiry (UNSCOP), which visited Palestine in 1947, and before which Weizmann, then back in his home in Rehovot, gave evidence. **[54]** The effect of Weizmann's measured words on the Commission was, as always, profound. The Swedish chairman of the Commission, Dr Emil Sandström, like his predecessors, had no doubt that Weizmann stood head and shoulders above everyone concerned in the affair. To the painful surprise of the British Government, the Commis-

sion recommended partition: the setting up of an independent Jewish state in a part of Palestine as the only way out of a hopeless deadlock.

In theory Weizmann was now a private citizen occupied in scientific research at the Institute situated near his home in Rehovot. Even before his defeat at the Congress in 1946, the anti-British military activities authorised by the Executive in Palestine had been conducted largely without his knowledge, and when he, as head of the Jewish Agency, complained about this to his colleagues, it became clear that his advancing years and his reputation as an anglophile and a moderate, and perhaps other differences also, had decided his colleagues to withhold the details of military resistance from him. Nor did the British authorities, on their side, ever look upon him as among their enemies. When most of the members of the Zionist Executive in Palestine were arrested by the British authorities, Weizmann denounced this act of the High Commissioner with bitter scorn. His final political links with England had been snapped. He occupied no official position in the Jewish Agency. Nevertheless, when the future of the Jewish establishment once again formally entered into the area of international discussion, no one in the Jewish world doubted that Weizmann alone must represent his people before the nations.

His health had long been undermined: he was growing blind, suffered from a chronic infection of the lung and a bad heart, and had been in ill health for many months. He had no doubt about his course of action. He established his headquarters in New York, and in effect headed the Jewish delegation in the great United Nations debate in the autumn of 1947 which decided the future of Palestine. In November two-thirds of the representatives of the United Nations voted in favour of the establishment of a Jewish state in a part of Palestine. This decision, and, in particular, the fact that the United States Government retreated from its last-minute attempt to substitute a trusteeship scheme for partition of Palestine into independent Jewish and Arab states, owed a great deal to Weizmann's personal interventions with President Truman, who had conceived great sympathy and admiration for the Jewish

leader. He enjoyed similar consideration from M. Léon Blum in France, and produced an indelible impression upon other members of the United Nations Organization who met him at this time.

He was naturally concerned with the frontiers of the future state. The US State Department wished to detach the Southern **[55]** Negev from the prospective Jewish territory, and this plan was put forward by the American representative to the United Nations. In the course of an interview with President Truman at a crucial moment, Weizmann succeeded in convincing the President that King Solomon's port on the Red Sea was indispensable to the new Jewish state if it was to preserve its communications with the Indian Ocean and the Pacific against a possible Arab blockade of the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Jewish ports. The USA successfully resisted the plan to bisect the Negev, which became an integral part of Israel.

JEWISH STATEHOOD

Since 1946 Weizmann had identified himself wholeheartedly with claims to full Jewish statehood in Palestine. When, after the slow departure some six months later of the British authorities (whose government had not given their approval to the UN decision), the desirability of proclaiming an independent Jewish state of Israel was debated in Palestine, he sent messages to Ben-Gurion pressing for its creation. The declaration of independence by the state of Israel on 14 May 1948 was the fulfilment of his ardent wish. The state had been created in the face of a great deal of opposition and warning by interested and disinterested powers; it was viewed with much nervous anxiety by many friends of Zionism and some Jewish leaders in Palestine, who thought that the new state would be crushed by the numerically vastly superior Arab armies. American policy in the United Nations vacillated under the influence of many pressures: the Department of State largely shared the view of the British Foreign Office. President Truman, whose regard for Weizmann's personality and integrity was

consistently high, decided to recognise the state immediately on its foundation. This personal act on the part of the President was a moral and political asset of incalculable worth for the new state; Weizmann's decisive part in securing it is not open to doubt.

One of the first acts of the Government of the new state of Israel, headed by David Ben-Gurion, was to offer the Presidency of the state to Weizmann. His right to it was unquestioned. It was a position of high symbolic significance. Weizmann's acceptance of it was signalised by the new flag that was hoisted over his hotel in New York, but it carried with it no real power. His views did not command general assent in the government of the state which he had, by universal consent, done more than any other human being to render possible. He returned to Rehovot and his Institute, and his house there became his official residence. He was old and his health was failing, but his eyes had seen the fulfilment of the dream of which he had written to his teacher as a boy more than sixty years before.

In 1948 Israel was invaded by the Arab armies and was obliged to **[56]** fight for its life. Weizmann had no doubt of the outcome. After the war had been won there was universal recognition of Weizmann's supreme achievement in recreating his nation. In his own country he was revered as the father of his people, a myth in his own lifetime. He performed his official functions as head of the state, and spent a great deal of time in scientific work. He was physically almost exhausted. He travelled abroad in an effort to recover his health, but it grew progressively worse. He received foreign ambassadors and other eminent foreign visitors; he heard reports from his ministers, of whom he was at times sharply critical, saw and wrote to old friends, revised and added to earlier drafts of his memoirs, took continuous interest in affairs of state but little direct part in decisions of policy. Towards the end he grew almost totally blind. He died on 9 November 1952 (21 Cheshvan 5713), survived by his eldest son Benjamin, and by his wife Vera (1881–1966), with whose existence his own had been most intimately linked. Their deep and happy love, and the complete

respect and trust which they felt for one another, was the foundation of both their lives.

He was buried in the grounds of his house in Rehovot. His grave, like that of Herzl, is at present a place of national pilgrimage in Israel.

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