

# ISRAEL

A HISTORY

## 5 THE YISHUV AS AN EMERGING STATE



Jewish society in Palestine during the Mandate period was organized and functioned without legal authority. Consequently, preserving Jewish autonomy required a system of agreements, compromises, goodwill, and a readiness to concede. Yet this was also a time of nation building, when the ability to mobilize individuals and the masses was vital to advancing the national agenda. Shaping a leadership's authority and ensuring that the public complied with it without coercion was the secret of forming the emerging state.

Article 4 of the Mandate instrument states: "An appropriate Jewish agency shall be recognized as a public body for the purpose of advising and cooperating with the Administration of Palestine in such economic, social and other matters as may affect the establishment of the Jewish national home and the interests of the Jewish population in Palestine. . . ." The Zionist Executive filled this role de facto. The Jewish Agency was established in 1929, with half of its members coming from the Zionist Executive. The other half consisted of Jewish magnates not identified as Zionists, but prepared to assist in building the national home. Weizmann hoped thereby to raise Jewish capital for building the country, but the Agency did not live up to these hopes. Right after the Agency was founded, the New York Stock Exchange crashed, and the wealthy were preoccupied with other matters. Thereafter, although the façade of a dual Jewish Agency Executive and Zionist Executive was maintained, the two were in fact one body and the chairman of the Zionist Executive also chaired the Jewish Agency Executive.

In the early 1920s the Zionist Organization was run as an organization of notables, without popular control. Weizmann was thus able to serve as its president without a political party behind him. For the same reason, a group with prestige but no public backing, headed by US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, leader of the American Zionists, caused an uproar at the 1920 Zionist convention by demanding that the guiding principles of the organization be changed and made strictly capitalist (the attempt failed). That oligarchic structure disappeared within a decade. Delegates to the 1931 Basel congress belonged to political blocs with clear leftist, rightist, and centrist characteristics. This shift resulted from the appearance in the Zionist movement of popular parties representing the masses. The most notable were the leftist bloc led by Mapai (an acronym for Workers Party of Eretz Yisrael) and the rightist bloc led by the Revisionists.

At the beginning of this period, the Zionist Organization was at the peak of its powers, garlanded with triumph since the Balfour Declaration. When the Zionist

Commission, representing the Zionist Executive, arrived in Palestine in 1918, representatives of the Yishuv requested membership on the commission, but Weizmann, who chaired it, refused. The executive, he asserted, represented the Jewish people, not the small, weak Yishuv. This relationship changed when Mapai gained leadership of the Zionist Organization in the 1930s, and the center of gravity of Zionist activity shifted from London to Jerusalem. The change was marked symbolically by replacing German with Hebrew as the spoken language of the Zionist Executive.

The Yishuv's autonomy was built around Knesset Yisrael (Jewish assembly), a body encompassing all the Jews of Palestine except for those who did not wish to belong. Its members elected an Assembly of Representatives, which in turn elected a National Committee from among its number. Knesset Yisrael was split between religious and secular, right and left, moderates and activists, and never became a prestigious and influential central institution. An example of these divisions and their destructive effect on the Knesset Yisrael's authority was the controversy over women's right to vote and be elected. Women voted in the elections to the Zionist Congress and were elected as delegates even before they were granted this right by Western legislatures. It was universally accepted in the new Yishuv that women had equal status with men, but this principle was unacceptable to the ultra-Orthodox and their Agudat Yisrael party; they were reluctant to participate in a body whose election process included women.

This issue was important, since if the ultra-Orthodox left Knesset Yisrael, the body would be unable to claim universal representation of the Jews of Palestine. What was more, before the arrival of the Third and Fourth Aliyot in the early 1920s, the old Yishuv had considerable demographic consequence. If the ultra-Orthodox left, the religious-Zionist Mizrahi party, in whose institutions women voted and were elected, was apt to find itself the sole representative of religion in Knesset Yisrael. In this situation it might feel compelled to adopt extreme positions on religious matters—perhaps even leave the Knesset—in order to avoid seeming less religious than the ultra-Orthodox. If the religious parties left, then the secular right and center would find themselves at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the left, and might consider leaving themselves. In this way the departure of a single party could create a chain reaction. The dynamics of a voluntary organization sustained by consensus require compromise among its members in order to maintain its overall framework. Therefore, in the first years of the Mandate, elections to the Assembly of Representatives were consistently postponed in the hope of reaching a compromise that would enable ultra-Orthodox participation without detracting from the principle of women's equality, which was considered a keystone of the new Yishuv.

In April 1920 nonobservant Jews led by the Zionist left won the first elections

by a large majority—even though ultra-Orthodox men were allowed to vote at separate polling stations where each vote was counted as two (the second being for their wives, who did not vote). The result stunned the ultra-Orthodox, who swiftly announced that they were leaving. All attempts to reach agreement with them failed, and they remained outside Knesset Yisrael. The elections to the second Assembly of Representatives in 1925 were held in accordance with the electoral constitution that granted full equal rights to women, thus ending a protracted and onerous affair that brought no prestige to Knesset Yisrael and its institutions. In 1928 the British enacted the Communities Law, recognizing the authority of the Chief Rabbinate in all matters pertaining to Jewish religious life and personal status. This law also included the Knesset Yisrael constitution. Agudat Yisrael demanded from the authorities—and was granted—the right to establish a separate community that did not recognize the general institutions of the Yishuv.

The weakness exposed in these institutions representing Jewish autonomy had an impact on their status both inside the Yishuv and externally in the Yishuv's relations with the British. There was a shift of power and prestige from the general institutions to those representing specific groups: the Histadrut (General Federation of Jewish Workers), the political parties, and the Zionist Executive. These were the entities capable of mobilizing supporters, galvanizing the masses, and formulating a public agenda. Other important bodies were the municipalities and the local councils, which the government allowed to impose taxes, an authority not granted to Knesset Yisrael.

At the beginning of the Mandate period, there were three main blocs in the Yishuv: the left, the nonreligious center-right, and the religious blocs. With the withdrawal of the non-Zionist ultra-Orthodox from involvement in Yishuv life, only the Mizrachi party remained within the Zionist camp as an active but weak religious-Zionist entity. There were also separate ethnic organizations representing the Sephardim and the Yemenites, which split the power of the religious camp. However, nationalist ideology disapproved of such organizations, which were seen as representing particular interests, not the Zionist cause. For many years the stigma attached to ethnic organizations prevented the establishment of ethnic parties. The right-center bloc was divided into two power bases: the municipal authorities led by the Tel Aviv municipality and the Farmers Union representing the farmers from the old moshavot. The secular right had a liberal philosophy and a Zionist approach but no coherent worldview, organizational structure, or resolute leadership. The Farmers Union was plagued by conflicts of interest between the farmers from the prosperous plantation moshavot and those from the poorer Galilee moshavot. At the same time, the controversy over Jewish labor distanced the farmers from the liberal center and the intelligentsia,

which tended to accept the workers' position. Consequently there was little likelihood that any political entity would emerge to represent the center, which had considerable demographic and economic importance.

Beginning in 1919 a slow process evolved that led ultimately to unity among the workers; it was completed with the founding of Mapai in 1930. The first phase of this process was the 1919 unification of the majority of members of the Poalei Zion party from the Second Aliya period with those known as "nonpartisan" workers, mostly representing the agricultural workers' unions founded during that same period. The initiators and leaders of Ahdut Ha'avoda (Zionist-socialist labor union) were David Ben-Gurion, a Poalei Zion leader who spent the war period in exile in the United States, and Berl Katznelson, the leader of the nonpartisans. The union was formed under the banner of overall unity of the workers' camp, but it never materialized, because the Hapo'el Hatza'ir party refused to disband and join the new entity.

A principal motive of this unification was the desire to greet the new wave of immigration with a cohesive organization that could absorb the newcomers. In an immigrant country each new wave of immigrants constitutes a challenge for its predecessor, which has already formed patterns and norms of conduct and seeks to ensure that the new wave will assimilate into and not undermine it. This dynamic had already appeared on the eve of the Third Aliya, and Ahdut Ha'avoda was meant to meet the Third Aliya immigrants with the social and settlement doctrine of the Second Aliya and make certain that they accepted it. As these immigrants assimilated into Second Aliya ideology, they were also expected to give political backing to the new party, thus increasing its power in the Yishuv. It was for the same reason that Hapo'el Hatza'ir refused to disband: a rumor spread that groups of Tze'irei Zion (a Zionist populist youth organization) already established in Europe would soon come to Palestine in large numbers, join Hapo'el Hatza'ir, and increase its power.

However, the people of the Third Aliya, received by two parties competing for their support, chose instead to form their own social organizations such as Gedud Ha'avoda and Hashomer Hatza'ir. Thus it is no surprise that the Third Aliya organizations constituted the driving force in forming a joint entity that would represent all the workers' parties and have the role of assisting in immigrant absorption and creating labor settlement. December 1920 saw the founding of the General Federation of Jewish Workers in the Land of Israel (known as the Histadrut), which had two main arms: the constructive arm, assigned to building the country through settlement, cooperatives, and contract work, and the professional arm, representing the workers in relation to the employers.

The constructive arm, unique among labor organizations worldwide, reflected its perceived central role in realizing Zionism. The professional arm was similar

to other workers' organizations elsewhere, but had additional functions deriving from the special situation in Palestine. In a country with no mechanisms to absorb new immigrants, where there were no relatives to help them through the initial period, the Histadrut played a leading role in helping newcomers settle in. Histadrut membership provided new immigrants with access to the Histadrut employment exchange, which divided workdays between old-timers and newcomers. Members received medical help from the Histadrut sick fund. Workers' kitchens in the main cities served inexpensive cooked meals to the young single people without home or family. At the Histadrut cultural centers workers could read a newspaper or book and enjoy the company of other young people—a remedy for loneliness, especially of those who had immigrated on their own and were not part of an organized group. Settlement was considered a privilege, and the Histadrut made sure that no group of pioneers got to jump the line. It gave hope for the future. In the cities it built workers' housing, and even a school system and cultural institutions. The relationship between the Histadrut and its members was based on the members' dependence on the system, internalization of its values, and the political backing they gave it in return.

By contrast with a right and center lacking any clear political consciousness, the left consolidated around an ideology that used socialist imagery. Philosopher and biblical scholar Yechezkel Kaufmann contended that the Jewish-Palestinian left was unlike the European left. Although it spoke in socialist slogans, it acted like a pioneer engaged in building the country—that is, it fulfilled a national mission. The workers established the Jewish working class, the vital foundation for building a lasting Jewish society. In order to do so they took in new immigrants, even though the latter competed with veteran workers; they fought for Jewish labor to ensure that the minimal conditions required for a Jewish worker to integrate into the country existed; and they went to settle in places where private capital refused to go. Thus the workers' organization was vital to absorb immigrants and to expand the Jewish hold on the country. The labor movement, Kaufmann writes, “fulfills a national mission with its organization, with its aspiration to communal forms of settlement, in its war for decent working conditions, in its war for Jewish labor, and also—in its strikes, despite all the wild weeds growing here.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the use of socialist symbols by the labor movement led to increased tension in relations between left and right in Palestine—what Kaufmann called “a psychological class war.” The Histadrut used these symbols and the clashes between left and right to consolidate its followers and to help build broad ideological and social solidarity. During the period when the Yishuv had no legal mechanism for enlisting members, enthusiasm, political loyalty, and identification with the movement became the most important mobilization tools. The

Histadrut knew how to turn its members' economic and social dependence into a first-class recruitment tool for Zionist and political tasks alike. City workers provided the masses who took part in political rallies and other events that called for casual participation, while the kibbutz members offered an endless supply of activists ready to enlist for long-term missions. From the kibbutzim came emissaries to the Hechalutz movement in the Diaspora, Haganah activists, volunteers to carry out illegal immigration actions, and so forth.

In 1925 a new party, the Revisionists, led by Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, appeared on the political scene. Jabotinsky had resigned from the Zionist Executive in 1923 following political differences with Weizmann. Jabotinsky believed that public pressure could force Britain to establish a "colonization regime" in Palestine, meaning a regime that would actively help build the national home by creating appropriate economic and political conditions. Weizmann, at the helm of the Zionist Executive, thought the most the Zionists could achieve was to prevent a policy that would arrest the development of the national home. Jabotinsky's activist views were in line with the perceptions of Ahdut Ha'avoda at the time. But agricultural labor settlement depended on Zionist Executive funds, so even though the workers' rhetoric was belligerent, their policy was moderate, and they opposed Jabotinsky on each concrete issue that came up. For his part Jabotinsky understood the workers' dependence on the Zionist Executive. In a letter to Oscar Grusenberg, a noted Jewish attorney who suggested that Jabotinsky base his movement on the workers' support, he described the young people turning to the workers' group as "intelligent youth seeking self-improvement through simplicity, that is, the best [colonizing] material in the world." Still, he added, since they were economically dependent on the people holding the purse strings, they would not cooperate with someone like himself, who sought to undermine the existing order in the Zionist movement. "As builders they are worthy of respect and distinction—but as a political factor they are our 'Black Hundred' [referring to an ultra-reactionary movement in Russia]."<sup>2</sup>

Jabotinsky therefore oriented his party toward the Jewish middle class in Poland, representing nationalist Jewish youth. In contrast to the left's socialist rhetoric and symbols, Jabotinsky adopted symbols that extolled the nation and demanded the subordination of class interests to the national interest. In the debate that had gone on since the Fourth Aliya on whether the country should be built with private or national capital, Jabotinsky sided with private capital. In opposition to the workers, who claimed that they exclusively were the nation's pioneers—which is how most of the Zionist public perceived them—Jabotinsky presented the petite bourgeoisie as another claimant to the crown of implementers of Zionism. He demanded that the workers abstain from striking and accept mandatory arbitration and a neutral employment exchange (belonging neither to

employers nor employees) and that the employers avoid shutdowns and employ Jewish labor. He contended that wages should be determined by economic capacity. In the absence of binding social legislation, these demands amounted to concessions by the workers.

Jabotinsky was a brilliant orator with fiery rhetoric and a keen sense of political drama. He knew how to shape catchy slogans. The “Iron Wall” was the battalion he sought to establish under British aegis that would block Arab nationalism from preventing Jews from building the country. His slogan “One Banner” or “Monism,” as opposed to *sha‘atnez*, “an incongruous mixture,” advocated a wholly nationalist worldview, instead of the workers’ combination of nationalism and socialism. “Yes, break it!” supported breaking Histadrut strikes. These phrases were all designed to consolidate his bloc, whose youth movement, Betar (an acronym of *Brit Yosef Trumpeldor*, Joseph Trumpeldor covenant), had been founded in Eastern Europe and was influenced by Polish right-wing nationalism.

Jabotinsky’s heart was not in his movement’s social and economic ideology, but he embraced it out of the political need to define his party vis-à-vis the workers, and also because the conventional discourse of the era required it. But his heart *was* in his political doctrine. Jabotinsky raised the banner of the Jewish state and believed it was achievable by fighting in the arena of European public opinion in general, and that of Britain in particular. At the 1931 Zionist Congress, shortly after publication of the MacDonald Letter, he demanded that the congress declare that the final goal of Zionism was a Jewish state. At that time such a declaration was considered both provocative and unnecessary. When the congress rejected it he defiantly tore up his delegate’s card and strode out of the hall. From that point he set out to take the Revisionists out of the Zionist Organization, a break that took place in 1935.

The Revisionists were one of two forces representing the masses at that congress. The other was Mapai, formed in 1930 by a merger of *Ahdut Ha‘avoda* and *Hapo‘el Hatza‘ir*. The workers had greater electoral strength at the congress, but the difference between them and the Revisionists was not significant, since other centrist and right-wing parties supported the Revisionists, making them the leading party of the right-wing bloc. From now on the Revisionists and the labor movement competed for hegemony over the Zionist Organization. This competition took place mainly in Poland, where the two movements fought for the hearts and minds of the Jewish masses, who were led by economic hardship and the rise of antisemitism to join the Zionist movement by the thousands. At the same time, the struggle between the two movements in Palestine shook the Zionist consensus and exposed the weaknesses of the voluntary society in the face of resolute ideological minorities.

The source of the Zionist Organization’s power was its authority to represent



the movement with the Mandatory authorities, for example by helping select immigrants in the “workers” category every six months in the “schedule.” The Mandatory government laid down the rules, but it was the “Palestine Offices” in each European country that drew up the lists of immigrants. These offices were staffed by representatives of organizations and parties according to their relative representation at the Zionist Congress. Until the early 1930s the issue of selecting immigrants was not acute since there were few candidates, but when the Jews’ travails increased and immigration pressure heightened, so did the claims of political discrimination in the selection process.

The right to choose immigrants gave the Jewish Agency Executive great power, but this power had limits, because the Agency could be circumvented. If the Agency acted arbitrarily, the Yishuv employers could approach the Mandatory government directly with requests for immigration certificates. In 1933 Jabotinsky attempted to do this by reaching an agreement with an employers’ organization of farmers, “Hanoteah” (the planter). Hanoteah was to apply to the Mandatory government for immigration certificates and grant them to members of Betar. (Betar’s Order No. 60 directed its members not to apply to the Palestine Offices for certificates, but to await certificates from Hanoteah.) That same year a Farmers Union representative submitted a request to the Mandatory government for certificates for workers that the union would select: not fiery young socialists, but family men, modest farmers from the Carpathians. In this way the farmers and the Revisionists sought to undermine the Agency’s exclusivity in selecting immigrants in the workers category, contending that all the human material coming to Palestine was cut from the same socialist cloth. Since half of the immigrants in this category were graduates of the Hechalutz training farms who identified with the left, it was true that socialists were given priority. These attempts to circumvent the Zionist Organization did not succeed, since they wound up bringing in very small numbers of immigrants, but they raised interparty hatred to new heights.

The Revisionists continued to fight the Jewish Agency’s authority by boycotting the Zionist funds and by getting hundreds of thousands of Jews to sign a petition calling on the British government to change its policy in Palestine. The petition impinged upon the Jewish Agency’s monopoly in administering Zionist policy. In Palestine the Revisionists focused on undermining the Histadrut’s power. Recognizing its authority as a source of power among workers and employers alike, they challenged its claim to be the sole representative of the workers and to allocate work. Their actions included breaking Histadrut-organized strikes by putting Betar workers into strikebound workplaces. They claimed that the strikes were organized in order to enforce “organized labor”—that is, to

create a Histadrut monopoly, not for a legitimate purpose such as achieving better working conditions or advancing Jewish labor.

In the first half of the 1930s, tension between left and right, farmers and workers, peaked and spilled over into street violence. These events can only be understood in the context of what was happening in Europe during those years: the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany, the repression of the left, and the rise of fascism in other European countries. The latent civil war in the Yishuv, and the terms by which each side referred to the other, was a local reflection of the European right and left and their bloody struggles. Tension in the Yishuv and outbursts of street violence threatened to destroy internal solidarity. In June 1933 the head of the Jewish Agency Political Department, Chaim Arlosoroff, was murdered on the Tel Aviv beach. Arlosoroff was a brilliant young man whom the Revisionists had attacked virulently because of his work negotiating the Transfer Agreement with Nazi Germany. Members of Betar were suspected in his murder. The temperature in the street soared to new heights, with Betar and its supporters claiming a “blood libel” while the left viewed them as the murderers.

In 1934, to prevent the situation from deteriorating, an attempt was made to reach an agreement between Ben-Gurion, who had replaced Arlosoroff on the Jewish Agency Executive, and Jabotinsky. Surprisingly the two leaders found a common language and spiritual closeness. But the agreement was rejected by a Histadrut referendum. It seems that the rank and file had internalized the mutual hate propaganda more than had the leaders. Still this episode marked the beginnings of moderation in the struggle in the Palestinian street. The 1935 Zionist Congress in Lucerne was held under the slogan “Peace in the Yishuv,” and a process of conciliation ensued, first between Mapai and the Mizrachi religious-Zionist party (a “historic alliance” that held firm until 1977) and later between the Zionist Executive and the farmers. Mapai had to concede some of its power in return for the support of the farmers and their sympathizers—an example of a concession made for the sake of consolidating a consensus. When the Arab Revolt broke out and the economic crisis began, hurting the farmers, both sides sought common ground. In the years that followed, political disputes in the Yishuv did not go away, but the attempts to bypass the Zionist Organization and go directly to the Mandatory government ceased. The Revisionists’ secession from the Zionist Organization and founding of the New Zionist Organization (NZO) gave the workers’ movement dominance in the Zionist Organization but also perpetuated a pattern of secession.

While in the 1920s the focal point of tension had been the debate on the role of private versus public capital in building the country, in the first half of the 1930s the contentious issue was what type of immigrants were best for building the

country, and who should select them. This issue touched upon the question of Jewish labor and labor relations in the Yishuv. At the same time, there was a debate over the Zionist Organization's political methods. Should it try to confront the British or simply do the best it could under the Mandatory government? All these issues were linked to the question of whether or not majority authority would be accepted. Each time the farmers, the Revisionists, or the ultra-Orthodox found themselves at a disadvantage in relation to the majority, they sought ways to circumvent it. In the absence of constitutional rule the majority was forced to compromise with the minority if it wished to maintain the integrity of the framework. Thus, for instance, while the Mandatory Municipalities Order gave residents the right to vote without a property requirement, Mapai agreed to a certain requirement in the moshavot, in order to keep the peace. It also accepted the establishment of national employment exchanges that ensured equal division of work among all workers, including those who were not Histadrut members. The crises of the late 1930s, which highlighted the need for national discipline, worked in favor of Zionist Executive authority. However, every time the executive wanted to present a united front either to the authorities or to world public opinion—for example, during testimony before the UNSCOP committee—it was compelled to make concessions to the Agudat Yisrael party, or to the farmers, to avoid breaking unity.

In the second half of the 1930s, the debates over national authority shifted to security issues. Nineteen twenty had seen the establishment of the Haganah, a civil militia, whose operation was transferred to the Histadrut after its founding. Until 1936 the Haganah was unimportant, as reflected in the meager resources allocated to it in the Zionist budget. In 1931 a section of the Haganah known as Irgun B (organization B) broke away, contending that the Haganah was not sufficiently activist. Irgun B membership came mainly from the right. After the outbreak of the Arab Revolt, the Haganah reached an agreement with Irgun B, most of whose members returned to the Haganah. However, a minority of them, members of Betar, founded Etzel (an acronym for *Irgun Tzva'i Leumi*, national military organization, which in English was shortened to Irgun), which recognized only Jabotinsky's authority. In the fall of 1937 the Etzel broke the policy of restraint upheld by the Haganah in accordance with Zionist Executive instructions. This policy stated that Jews would not commit terrorist acts in response to Arab terror. In this way the Zionist Executive sought to ensure Mandatory government support in quelling the Arab Revolt, and even for developing a Jewish defense force.

The issue of the monopoly over the use of force was now the focal point of tension between the Yishuv and those known as “the secessionists.” In the Mandate's last decade this became one of the thorniest issues in majority-minority relations. The Etzel and later Lehi (an acronym for *Lohamei Herut Yisrael*, fighters

for the freedom of Israel, or as they were known in English, the Stern Gang), led by Avraham Stern and founded in 1940 by an extremist Etzel splinter group, were underground organizations beyond the control of a civil body. They considered themselves a fighting vanguard carrying on their shoulders the liberation of the nation, and answered to themselves alone. Following Jabotinsky's death in 1940 they even refused to accept Revisionist movement authority. These underground organizations' independent activities both undermined Zionist Executive authority and damaged it politically. The executive attempted to isolate the underground organizations from their right-wing supporters by agreeing to set up a "national command" in which the left relinquished its majority status and shared leadership on a par with the other Yishuv groups. In return the right-wing groups agreed to the national command in place of the existing fragmented regional structure of the Haganah. Moshe Sneh of the General Zionists party, who had only recently escaped from Poland to Palestine, was appointed head of the national command. But all attempts at creating a framework that would also be binding on the underground organizations (who were supposed to be represented by the rightists in the national command) failed. So did attempts by the Haganah, and by the Haganah together with the Mandate authorities, to suppress the organizations. The Jewish Agency Executive did not succeed in gaining a monopoly over the use of force by Jews until the establishment of the state.

The use of force was a gray area in Jewish Agency Executive affairs. The executive was entrusted with dealing with the Mandatory government and as such was obliged to scrupulously observe the law. It was inconceivable that such a body would engage in any kind of underground activity. Therefore the Haganah was not officially connected with the Zionist Executive; it was initially run by the Histadrut and later by the national command. In fact, however, from the early 1930s on, after Mapai joined the Jewish Agency Executive, and particularly after Ben-Gurion joined it in 1933, an equivocal situation prevailed: the Jewish Agency Executive was ostensibly not involved, but in reality the Haganah accepted its authority. Within Mapai a small circle of people had no official roles in the Zionist Executive but were entrusted with instructing and directing the paramilitary body. The most important of them were Berl Katznelson and Eliahu Golomb. At times of military cooperation with the authorities, such as during the Arab Revolt and the first two years of the World War, the ambiguity resolved somewhat, although the Haganah never relinquished its independence and separate structure. During periods of conflict and unrest, such as after the publication of the 1939 White Paper and after the World War, the Haganah went deeper underground. Nevertheless the authorities were well aware of its connection with the Jewish Agency Executive. It was not by chance that during the British military operation on "Black Sabbath" (formally Operation Agatha) in June 1946, the

government apprehended all the Histadrut leaders and members of the Zionist Executive that it managed to lay hands on.

Another gray area of Zionist Executive activity was illegal immigration, which had begun with the Hechalutz organization in Poland. Long waits before Jews could emigrate gave the members the idea of bringing illegal immigrant ships to Palestine without the authorities' knowledge. This idea was adopted by the Betar movement, whose punishment for Jabotinsky's scheme of bypassing the Jewish Agency Executive to get immigration certificates was loss of the right to certificates. Betar organized several illegal immigrant ships during the 1930s and up until 1941. It also used tourism to the 1935 Maccabiah Games as a cover for illegal immigration; many people who came to Palestine as tourists remained there illegally.

The Jewish Agency Executive took a dim view of these operations, which encroached on the only authority it had—the selection of immigrants in the workers category—and made immigration less selective, especially since more than half of the immigration slots were not under the executive's control in any case. Worse, the authorities deducted the number of illegal immigrants from the immigration quota, further impinging on the executive's authority. After 1938, however, when the Mandatory government began applying the political criterion to limit immigration, Ben-Gurion stopped opposing illegal immigration and began to support it. At the Twenty-first Zionist Congress in Geneva, Berl Katznelson delivered a speech supporting illegal immigration, which Ben-Gurion praised. From then on the Zionist Executive openly espoused both legal and illegal immigration. After the World War illegal immigration became one of the Zionist Executive's major tools in its struggle against Britain's restrictions on Jewish immigration.

This strategic ambiguity in Zionist Executive policy, between scrupulously observing Mandatory law and ignoring it when a critical national interest was in the balance, was accepted by the majority of the Yishuv, but not by all. Some groups believed that this policy was detrimental to the movement's integrity and gave a stamp of approval to actions that undermined its authority. However, the Zionist Executive, led by Ben-Gurion, succeeded in creating a national consensus. Although this consensus was challenged by forces from right and left alike, it comprised the emotional, psychological, and organizational foundations that made it possible to mobilize most of the public institutions, organizations, and groups of the Yishuv for the struggle for independence. An ethos of acceptance of Jewish Agency authority was created, which became the norm, so that the few who deviated from it were seen as damaging national unity. One expression of the acceptance of this norm was the taint of censure attached to the label *secessionist*. In the final decade of the Mandate, the vast majority of the Yishuv identified

with the struggle for a Jewish state, even though a large part of it had come to Palestine only a few years earlier, and without a clear Zionist ideology. For most this was a passive form of identification. Only select groups enlisted as activists. Yet this general identification with nationalist objectives was the adhesive that enabled an immigrant society to cohere into the kernel of an emerging state.

#### NOTES

1. Yechezkel Kaufmann, "Milkhemet hama'amadot beYisrael" (The Class War in Israel), in *Bechavlei hazman* (In the Bonds of Time), Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1936, p. 162
2. Ze'ev Jabotinsky to Oscar Grusenberg, 12.II.1925. *Letters*, Tel Aviv: Amichai (n.d.), pp. 72–73.

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