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The Inception of a Political Movement

Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Liberal Nationalist

The founders of the Herut movement, which forms the subject of this book were, in the pre-state period, leaders of a military underground called the *"Irgun Zvai Leumi."* The Irgun existed as a military organization from 1937 until the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Its dissolution followed a series of dramatic events that are discussed in another chapter. Immediately thereafter a group of Irgun commanders headed by Menachem Begin, the organization's commander-in-chief since 1943, organized themselves and set up a party called the "Herut movement."

The party's founders were united by the bond of their shared experience in the underground period. However, an understanding of their political thinking and political behavior requires the examination of an antecedent stage in their history. Most of them began their political activity in the Betar youth movement. It was in Betar that the political ideas and practices of Herut leaders were shaped. The Irgun also evolved in Betar. Ideas that originated in Betar were later transferred by its members to Herut. I will therefore not examine the Irgun in this book but rather concentrate, in the first chapters, on an analysis of Betar. This must begin with an examination of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the founder and leader of the Revisionist movement. Betar was affiliated with the Revisionist party, and both organizations were led by Jabotinsky until his death in 1940.

Much has been written about Jabotinsky, a controversial personality. The admiration he generated in some was equalled only by the antipathy, even the hatred, he aroused in others. These conflicting emotions are perceptible to this day in the attempts to assess his thinking and his activity as a Zionist leader.

The large number of speeches he delivered and his writings in the Jewish and general press enable Jabotinsky's partisans and detractors alike to deal with those aspects of his work that are consistent with their

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perception of the man. The bulk of his writing was journalistic: reactions, published in dailies and weeklies, to current events, rather than a systematic political doctrine. The accessibility of this material has tempted researchers to analyze it and not to deal with its author as the founder and leader of a political party and a youth movement.[1]

It is not my intention in this study to examine either Jabotinsky's doctrine or the entire scope of his activity as a political leader, a subject that merits a separate study. Yet it is impossible to discuss the Betar youth movement without considering Jabotinsky's cardinal role in shaping it, particularly in its early years.

Ze'ev Jabotinsky was born in Odessa in 1880 to an assimilated, middle-class Jewish family. He became a Zionist nationalist Jew following his return to Russia after some years of study in Europe, mainly in Italy. Jabotinsky, then in his early twenties, already espoused a liberal world view and worked as a journalist in the Russian Press.

In these first years in the Zionist movement he displayed his independent thinking. Although socialism was the dominant ideology among his Jewish and Zionist peers in Russia, Jabotinsky remained loyal to liberalism and spurned socialism. As a result, he found himself more closely aligned with an older generation of Zionist leaders who also had a liberal orientation. This probably accounts for the relatively young age at which he became a member of the Zionist Executive (the body that headed the World Zionist Organization—WZO—after World War I).

Many Zionists of Jabotinsky's generation, seeking to fuse the national idea with the socialism that was then making inroads among the Russian intelligentsia, adopted a socialist-Zionist outlook.[2] Jabotinsky, in contrast, was a devotee of liberalism and believed that liberalism and socialism were incompatible. An article he published in 1912 described an imaginary encounter between one of the leaders of the Italian national movement, Giuseppe Garibaldi, who headed a group of Italian freedom fighters in the second half of the ninteenth century, and socialist contemporaries of Jabotinsky. Garibaldi is described as operating in a society "full of nationalist fervor, pervaded by enmity toward foreigners, an atmosphere incessantly rife with the unbearable declamation of patriotic slogans." In that period of a national liberation struggle, Jabotinsky explained, all other ideals were forgotten and neglected. "One's whole strength was consumed solely by national questions and *amor patriae*," it was an atmosphere of "true chauvinism." Today's socialists would undoubtedly look on these people as "obscurantists and opponents of culture. They are deceivers leading astray the ignorant masses." Garibaldi and his comrades demanded that the masses expel the Germans

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instead of saying to them: All men are brothers. "They tell them to establish states instead of telling them to introduce democratic procedures in the states." They—Garibaldi and his friends—today's socialists would say, "are distancing the heart of youth from universal human ideals and inflaming their minds through the inordinate worship of the national past and the national tongue. They want all problems to be thrust aside, and the people to expend its best strength on building a gilded cage in which it can separate itself from its brethren who speak a foreign language."[3]

By means of this imaginary encounter between nineteenth-century nationalism and the universalist democratic socialism that engulfed Russia in the early twentieth century, Jabotinsky illustrated the unbridgeable gaps separating him from his fiercest opponents in the World Zionist Organization, the socialist-Zionists.

His denigration of socialism became still more acute after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The revolution, he believed, was a disaster for humanity but most of all for the Jewish people.[4] He did not abandon his liberalism when he became a Zionist, and even though he admitted that nationalism as he understood it was not entirely compatible with the liberal idea, he tried hard to find a common denominator between the collective national idea and the concept of individual rights, which was at the core of liberalism. This contradiction between the two viewpoints he espoused distressed him all his life. Every so often he sought ways to bridge the two concepts. Thus, for example, in one of the first articles he wrote after becoming a Zionist, he argued that the purpose of national existence was the creation of a distinctive spiritual nationality. To this end a nation needed a state in which it would constitute an overwhelming majority, since only separateness and insularity would enable it to forge a distinctive system of values. But once that culture had emerged, the nation "will not set it aside for itself but will bring it to the joint international community for the general good." In other words, the distinctive culture of a people is created for the benefit of all humankind.[5] This was clearly an attempt to bridge the gap between his nationalism and his liberal-universal world view.

One element in the liberal world view, which he wished to preserve above all else, was rationalism. For many years he rejected the mystical, romantic version of nationalism and defined himself as a rational nationalist. The policy he preached was the outgrowth of a sober appraisal of the international reality. To survive in this reality, he explained, every nation must constantly defend itself against its neighbors. In relations between nations the rule was *homo homini lupus*. Hence, his conclusion

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"that isolation, distrust, a stand of 'being on watch' always, stern treatment at all times is the only means to hold one's own in this wolfish confrontation."[6]

Despite his best efforts, however, Jabotinsky was unsuccessful in reconciling this aggressive nationalism with a liberal outlook. When he first embarked on the liberal road, he coined the phrase: "In the beginning God created the individual." After adopting the extreme version of the nationalist outlook, he pronounced that: "In the beginning God created the nation." Pursuing his attempts to resolve the contradiction between these two conflicting slogans, he stated in his autobiography, written in the 1930s, that the two were not mutually contradictory because man's natural aspiration to serve the nation comes of his own volition. It is a voluntary act impelled by inner conviction and therefore does not contradict the belief in the centrality, desire, and aspirations of the individual, which is a fundamental tenet of liberal thought.[7] Jabotinsky accepted this argument in the years when he was influenced by the radical-right doctrine that spread rapidly through Europe in the inter-war period. His argument was consistent with the notion of these circles that true freedom is inner freedom and that the superiority of the nation is merely an expression of inner awareness of self-realization.[8]

No immanent internal contradiction exists between nationalism and liberalism. Liberal nationalism was a feasible concept. John Plamenatz contends that illiberal nationalism is more characteristic of eastern Europe than of western European countries. The Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires that ruled in eastern Europe until the termination of World War I were composed of many nationalities.

When the process of industrialization and urbanization began in these regions in the mid-nineteenth century, the dominant nations were able to control the governmental bureaucracies that were at the center of this activity, and, through them, broad areas of life. Other national groups found it difficult to achieve positions of influence in these organizations and in some cases were completely excluded. These developments affected mainly the intelligentsia, and it was the intelligentsia that became the standard bearer of modern nationalism. Cultural nationlism—an attempt to advance the culture of their people and adapt it to modern life—was a frequent recourse in these groups. Since these were for the most part peasant communities, lacking a developed language suitable for modern urban-industrial life, a prodigious effort was involved. Particularly difficult, Plamenatz says, was the desperate attempt by the intelligentsia from these national minorities to emulate the cultures of the dominant nations while simultaneously spotlighting their

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own cultural distinctiveness in competition with those cultures. The tension created by this contradiction was what pushed many of them into illiberal nationalism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia.[9] The result, says another researcher, was the emergence of an ethnic nationalism in eastern Europe, as contrasted with a nationalism in western Europe that identified nationality with citizenship in the state and not with ethnic origin.[10] Within a generation or two, Poles, who immigrated even to Germany, were full-fledged Germans. Whereas Germans in Poland remained members of the German nation, an ethnic minority among the dominant Polish nation, and were excluded from influence bearing positions in the administration and the governmental bureaucracy.

This illiberal nationalism was linked to a deep sense of national inferiority, resulting from a constant comparison with the dominant nationality whose culture was emulated. This can be seen in Jabotinsky and other Zionists, too. The difference was that socialist and humanist values adopted by many Zionists curbed and moderated the illiberal element in their ethnic nationalism. The humanistic and unversalistic element in their world view drew them close to the Western European Enlightenment, which was the source of humanistic and rationalist nationalism. Futhermore, many of the Zionists in the socialist-progressive camp were still immersed in Jewish culture and tradition, and were therefore spared in part the difficult process of emulating the dominant culture attempted by the intelligentsia of ethnic peasant communities that lacked a rich cultural tradition comparable to that of the Jewish group. Jabotinsky, though, came from an assimilationist background and was cut off from this tradition. Ultimately he was attracted by the aggressive and emotional nationalism of the radical right.

The intellectual appeal of the radical-right ideas, which influenced him in the 1920s, is, I believe, also related to his political standing in the Zionist national movement at this time. It was in this period that he decided to head a Zionist party in opposition to the Zionist leadership, which he considered excessively moderate and compromising. He wanted a proud and aggressive nationalism.

Jabotinsky and the Radical Right

From the time he became a Zionist, Jabotinsky devoted his public activity to Zionist propagandizing—"agitation," as it was then called—as a speaker who criss-crossed Europe and in numerous articles in the Jewish Press. He excelled at both. He was a gifted and dazzling orator, and had a clear and lucid prose style in many languages. He gained fame as a

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Zionist leader during World War I when he convinced the British government to set up Jewish army units as part of the British forces who took part in the conquest of Palestine. His attempts to maintain these units in Palestine after the war failed, but his activity in this regard made his name known throughout the Jewish world and helped get him appointed to the Zionist Executive after the war. Although he held a central position on the Executive, his differences with the majority led to his resignation in 1923.

Many of the disagreements between Jabotinsky and others on the Executive revolved around the relations between the WZO and the British government, which was given a Mandate by the League of Nations to help the Jews establish their own state in Palestine. Jabotinsky urged Zionists to pressure London to declare its support for the establishment of a Jewish state. Such pressures could prove fruitful, Jabotinsky believed, if Zionist propagandists like himself mobilized the support of English and world public opinion. With this goal in mind, he also demanded that the Zionist Executive explicitly define its objective as the establishment of an independent Jewish state.

These tactics were rejected by the majority. They countered that as long as the Jewish community in Palestine was small in number—there were then about 100,000 Jews in Palestine—preference should go to settling the country. Every new settlement, every Jewish school, and every Jewish-owned factory was a step on the road to the goal. Therefore the majority refused to issue proclamations that were liable to generate tension and contentiousness with the Arab majority in Palestine and England itself.They did not accept Jabotinsky's activist tactics. They advocated quiet diplomacy, with the brunt of the efforts devoted to getting Jews to come to Palestine and ensuring their absorption.

Jabotinsky sought international recognition for Jewish sovereignty in Palestine.He believed this was attainable by enlisting the support of sympathetic liberal public opinion in Britain and by convincing leading figures that the establishment of a Jewish state would serve British interests.

When the British government decided unilaterally in 1922 to sever the territory of Palestine east of the Jordan River from the rest of Palestine and transform it into an Arab emirate under Prince Abdullah, Jabotinsky wanted to protest by mobilizing Jewish and world public opinion. However, other Zionist leaders were apprehensive about straining relations with Britain beyond the breaking point while they still needed its help in settling Palestine.

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Following his resignation from the Zionist Executive, Jabotinsky pursued his public activity, publishing articles in the Jewish press and appearing before Jewish audiences to vent his dissident views. Zionists who supported his activist ideas asked him to establish and head a Zionist party based on these principles. Among his supporters were liberal nationalist Zionists with whom he had ties dating back to pre-revolutionary Russia, along with a number of well-known personalities in the Zionist movement and the Jewish public in central Europe. These included Richard Lichtheim, a reputable German Zionist leader, and Robert Stricker, a member of the Austrian Senate. Jabotinsky's ideas also gained the ardent backing of a group of high school students in Riga, Latvia, who wanted to set up a youth movement grounded on these principles.

A new Zionist party, the Revisionist Party, headed by Jabotinsky, was organized shortly before the Zionist Congress of 1925. The party's late formation was apparently one of the reasons for its limited success in the elections against the veteran and established Zionist parties. But it was in this period, when the party was being organized, that Jabotinsky fell under the sway of a new political and intellectual movement with growing influence in Europe.

This movement, known as the radical right, was comprised of a large number of groups, organizations, and parties. What they all had in common was an awareness that they constituted a political and conceptual current in conflict with the socialist and communist left, on the one hand, and the conservative, liberal bourgeoisie, on the other hand. Thus, some of them dubbed themselves the Third Europe or the New Europe. The German Nazis and the Italian Fascists were only two of a large number of organizations associated with this ideological and political movement. In later years, they attracted far more attention because they attained power in their countries and came close to world domination. But there were many other groups, and there is no doubt that the Nazis in Germany were a particulary extreme group in this camp. Some leaders of the radical right in Europe considered them an aberration, especially after they transformed Germany into a country seeking to impose the German race throughout Europe.

All these movements shared an opposition to the status quo in their countries and a disposition toward extreme nationalism. The nationaloutlook assumed a different content in each nation, related to its own distinctive history and culture. Since each of the movements was also struggling against the prevailing establishment in

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its country, each of them possessed its own special coloring as an opposition element. Every nationalism is unique. Therefore, as Richard Hamilton notes, in contrast to socialists who espouse a universal world view and who could be incorporated in a single international organization under the slogan, Workers of all countries, unite; it is inconceivable for nationalist movements to come together under the slogan, Nationalists of the world, unite.[11]

Each of these nationalist movements believed in the superiority of its nation and underscored the difference and conflicts of interest between their nation and others; this was felt most strongly in countries that suffered from unstable relations with their neighbors. A central problem in most of these movements concerned the borders of their country, resulting from historical developments, mainly in eastern Europe where different nations were geographically intermixed. Many radical-right movements aspired to change their state borders so as to incorporate all the members of their nation in their own nation-state. For many of them, the border issue preoccupied them to the point of obsession.

Another element uniting all the movements was their activism, which is better characterized as an orientation than as an ideology. They were convinced that it was within their power to change the course of their people's history and its standing in the world, if only they willed it. This activism and its attendant ambition were what first appealed to Jabotinsky—now the leader of an opposition party in the World Zionist Organization.

In his first years of opposition, Jabotinsky defined himself as Theodor Herzl's successor. Like Herzl—the founder of the World Zionist Organization—he believed that the goal must be international recognition of the Jewish people's right to an independent state, and that this should be secured even before the Jews constituted the majority in Palestine. Like Herzl, he was convinced that the Jews' exodus from Europe and the creation of a Jewish state were consistent with the self-interest of every nation-state harboring a Jewish minority. This self-interest could be explained to liberal and enlightened opinion in Europe. To succeed in such campaign, Jabotinsky argued, Zionism must pursue a more assertive policy. Over the years he became increasingly impatient with the cautious policy of the Zionist Executive, and came to adopt viewpoints of the activist radical right. He accepted the principle that the national idea was the one single and exclusive idea. All efforts must be devoted to political activity aimed at achieving the national idea. Economic and cultural interests that did not directly serve this objective

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would have to wait until it was realized.[12] This was a central idea of the radical right.[13] But what were the national goals?

All movements of the radical right posited the uplifting of national pride as their primary purpose. Germany's defeat in World War I and Italy's failure to reap the fruits of its allies' victory, and the insecurity of many of the states created in Europe after the war, nourished this need to ameliorate wounded national pride. Even during the severe economic crisis that afflicted Germany in the years from 1929–1933, Nazi propaganda continued to focus chiefly not on the crisis itself but on the injury done by the victorious powers and the German establishment to the honor of Germany in the aftermath of World War I. While the economic crisis helped the Nazis gain growing support among the electorate, Hitler's promises even during the period of the crisis dealt mainly with German national honor that had been trampled by the Treaty of Versailles and the behavior of the victorious powers.[14]

The Revisionist Party also held the defense of national honor to be a supreme value. "Jabotinsky's Jewish state . . . was intended to exalt Jewish honor," Kalman Katznelson, one of the party's intellectuals, wrote, "to reduce the gap between the Jews and the other civilized peoples, and thus to advance the equality of rights which Jews saw as the be-all and end-all." Jabotinsky's Jewish state was to be the central showpiece for the Gentiles: "You said we were incapable of establishing a state, yet here before your eyes is a truly magnificent Jewish State."[15]

Jabotinsky believed that to regain the esteem of Gentiles, Jews must alter their way of life. This was a major educational task of the youth movement he created. A central educational principle of Betar was the value he called *"hadar"* (a Hebrew word signifying, in this context, "grace" and "decorum"). Jabotinsky elucidated this concept in *Ra'ayon Betar* (The Idea of Betar) published by the Betar High Commission in 1934. *Hadar,* Jabotinsky wrote, is comprised of many actions in everyday life which, while perhaps individually unimportant, taken together constitute the very content of one's life. "Eat noiselessly and slowly," Jabotinsky wrote, "do not protrude your elbows at meals, do not sip your soup loudly . . . walking upstairs at night, do not talk—you awaken the neighbors . . . in the streets give right of way to a lady, to an elderly person," and so on and so forth. Particulary illuminating is his assessment the results of such behavior by Jews might have: "Were all Jews to act properly, the anti-Semites probably would hate us anyhow but it would be a hate mixed with respect, and our situation in the world would have been quite different than it is."[16] This argument exemplifies Plamenatz's description of the tension that gripped the intelligentsia of

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national minority groups in eastern Europe. It bespeaks the emulation and desire for integration into the majority civilization and the belief that in this manner the Jews would be recognized as civilized people. This aspiration united many leaders of the Jewish intelligentsia in eastern Europe. On the other hand, there was Jabotinsky's repeated demand that the Jews develop a distinctive culture and value-system and not emulate alien ideas of personages such as "Marx, Lenin, Gandhi, tomorrow perhaps Mussolini," as he wrote in 1934.[17] When Abba Achimeir, a member of the Revisionist Party, began publishing a column in the official party paper called "From the Notebook of a Fascist," what especially irked Jabotinsky was more Achimeir's use of a term culled "from alien worlds"[18] and not so much the extreme positions he advanced. The effort to preserve the Jews' cultural distinctiveness found unexpected expression in 1935 when Jabotinsky presented a new constitution for his organization after leaving the WZO and setting up the New Zionist Organization (NZO). One of the regulations required members to observe the Sabbath and study the tenets of the Jewish faith. This demand surprised many of his followers—like him, secular Jews. In later years, when his opponents cited this approach as proof of his political opportunism, his disciples retorted in his defense that it was a legitimate political act stemming from his desire to satisfy the requests of a religious faction that had been set up in the NZO and of other religious groups whose support he required.[19] It is difficult to accept this interpretation. Its weakness is pronounced when Jabotinsky's approach is found to parallel the adoption of religious values by secular leaders in other parties of the radical right.[20]

Like many of the leaders of these movements, Jabotinsky also arrived at the conclusion—which many of his associates did not share—that nationalism and religion were two world views that had in common support for tradition in the face of ideas that preached progress and change. Modern nationalism sprang up as an expression of the aspiration to conserve venerable traditions against those who wanted to break with them and to maintain social frameworks that curbed the impulse to social change. Radical-right nationalism was the refuge of many who feared such change. Futhermore, in the contest against universal and humanist socialism, which advocated equality and social justice, nationalism lacked a comparable moral dimension. Jabotinsky, like other leaders of the radical right, reached the conclusion that without this kind of moral dimension the national idea would be hard pressed to compete with the socialist idea, particularly among more idealistic youth. Speaking at the NZO's founding convention in 1935, after explaining that he

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had become convinced that it was wrong to separate state and religion, he added that the religious idea should be adopted in order to ensure that youth was not swept up "in the whirlpool of infinite influences that seize the youth of our day and poison them." To this end it was also important "that in the arena place be made for its fighters and in the pulpit for its preachers."[21]

In 1939 his consciousness of religion's importance as a positive educational factor among youth was reinforced. In a message to Betar published in the movement's paper in Poland in March of that year, Jabotinsky wrote that Betar's first task was to establish an army. Yet because the contemporary era was marked by religious wars, it was impossible to believe in the rifle without faith, and to that end a social doctrine was required. However, "there is no need to invent it because it already exists in the Biblical and Talmudic tradition"—all that remains is to systematize it, and this is what Betar was now called upon to do.[22] Against the socialist idea he pitted not liberalism but Judaism, since the two, nationalism and religion, were mutually complementary. Religion, too, produced Jewish distinctiveness and pride in the Jewish tradition.

Nonetheless, a perusal of Jabotinsky's writings on social and economic questions reveals that they were hardly grounded in the Jewish faith. An interesting example is a series of articles written in 1927–28 on the socioeconomic structure of the future Jewish state. Harmonious relations must prevail between workers and employers, Jabotinsky writes, who will be guided by the principle that the national interest supersedes every class or sectoral interest. This kind of harmony in labor relations can be guaranteed by compulsory arbitration. The state will compel arbitration through an institution geared to supervise worker-employer relations. A minimum wage will be set, but the institution responsible for arbitration will be empowered to raise wages when employers' profits increase and to lower them when profits decline. In this way the state will not only maintain a correct balance between the two groups in the economy for the good of the national interest, which strives for continuous economic activity in industry, but also avert the danger of factories closing and resultant unemployment.

A reader of Jabotinsky's articles may well come away with the impression that they show original thought. There is nothing in them to indicate that these social and economic viewpoints were actually a copy of the corporatist ideas of the Italian Fascists, which were adopted by many radical-right groups. Like them, Jabotinsky, too, adduced this economic plan as an alternative to socialist ideas. The claim of the socialists, Jabotinsky explained on another occasion, was that they

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wanted to change the whole structure of the economy. However, what should be striven for is not a change of the economic regime but only the elimination of poverty, and the way to achieve this was through corporatism.[23]

Similarly, most radical-right movements did not wish to change their countries' economic and social structure. We should not be misled by the revolutionary rhetoric, say students of Italy's Fascist regime. Even those who spoke of social revolution were not revolutionaries. As a result, when they attained power they did not change the existing structure and did not even raise up a new elite to replace the previous one. Thus, Renzo de Felice explains, when they lost the war and in its wake lost power, they simply disappeared and not a trace remained of them or their government.[24] The Revisionists and their successors in Israel, too, were not a revolutionary force and made absolutely no attempt to change the country's socioeconomic structure. One should not expect a leadership preoccupied with one theme exclusively—nationalism—to deliberately set about changing the status quo in the social and economic domains. Such changes may ensue, but only as an unanticipated result of political decisions.

If any doubts remain as to the source of inspiration of Jabotinsky's ideas, the series of articles mentioned contain an additional proposal regarding the future state's political structure. The parliament will be bicameral, Jabotinsky says. One chamber will consist of a parliament of professions. The associations of employers and laborers will elect their representatives, and in matters of labor relations this will be the determining institution. No mathematical counting of heads will thus be necessary, and the representation will be compatible "with the true task which these [heads] fulfill . . . in the country's collective experience."[25] "I abhor the class idea," Jabotinsky declared on another occasion, in terms that evoke the style and not just the content of the radical right.[26]

Under the influence of radical-right ideas, he deviated even from the rational bases of his political thought. Thus, he proclaimed at the party's 1930 convention in Prague that Revisionists were differentiated from other Zionists by more than ideological outlook. Revisionists were "a soulful race possessing a clear mentality, and that mentality cannot be transmitted to those not intrinsically raised in it." Therefore, it was pointless to try to convince a Zionist audience that had a different frame of mind. Instead, the party would do better to seek out people from "its own special race."[27] This emphasis on mentality and not on ideas also has its origins in the thought of the European radical right, influenced by the mass psychology of Gustave Le Bon. Inspired by his writings,

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certain leaders hoped to win the support of the masses not through rational persuasion but by enflaming their passions.

But Jabotinsky also aspired to change the mentality of the Jews. He ascribed considerable importance to effecting such a change in the Jewish people, to dispose them to fight for the nation's rights. Tilling the soil in Palestine, building houses, learning the Hebrew language, and studying its literature—all Zionist tenets—would not lead to the establishment of a Jewish state. What was important was the readiness to fight, and to that end a "psychology of gunshots, a longing for gunshots" had to be created, and the people's healthy instincts had to be developed.[28] Since the nation's future depended on its desire to fight, and since this stance could be expected only in young people, who were ready to sacrifice their lives for their nation, it followed that the future of the nation lay in the hands of its youth. "Long live Jewish youth!" Jabotinsky declared at a festive gathering to mark his fiftieth birthday—again, a sentiment expressed in a style characteristic of the radical right.[29] Readiness for war, though not war itself, was in Jabotinsky's view essential for a people aspiring to national independence. Not the strength of the troops but their willingness to fight was of the essence. This readiness would help achieve the goal through political means under the political leader.

Jabotinsky the Leader

Following some vacillations, Jabotinsky defined his role and authority as a leader in a manner identical with the heads of other radical-right movements. In such movements, the leader possessed an exalted status and exercised absolute authority over followers who were expected to obey his orders without question.

The first to expect this kind of total leadership were the rank and file themselves. Even parties of the radical right that did not formally accept the idea of the leader's centrality tended to exalt him and view him as the pinnacle of the hierarchy, with all others duty bound to abide by his word. These organizations, too, accepted the idea that the leader is the source of the organization's authority and ideology.[30] This is the most significant elitist element in radical-right organizations.

The leader's standing, Noel O'Sullivan explains, is based on the assumption that he understands intuitively the true will of the masses and is able to articulate it, "even if the people themselves are too confused or too stupid to be able to recognize their 'real' will in the decrees in which the leader formulates it." This outlook derives from the

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nationalist orientation of such organizations. In contrast to socialism, which formulates its goals with reference to rational models of a classless future society; nationalism is a doctrine incapable of adducing a rational basis for its goals.[31]

The leader's centrality in these parties also has a structural explanation. It results from the disinclination of nationalist parties to represent the interests of any particular groups in the population. Unlike other parties, which represent interests of groups, sectors or social classes, radical-right parties contend that they stand for the whole nation. Parties of this kind, whose world view is confined to the national idea, spurn the bureaucratic party structure, which is based on rational goals that the party organization is supposed to fulfill. Many of them find it difficult to define such goals. The absence in these parties of a consistent and logical ideology, of sectorial interests and of a bureaucratic structure, make the leader a far more central figure than he is in parties possessing an ideology and a bureaucratic organization. In such organizations the leader is empowered to articulate the goals: he expresses the will of the whole nation, incarnates the will of the masses, and is expected to lead them.

As the founder and leader of the party, it is not surprising that Jabotinsky devoted considerable thought to the problem of leadership and how to exercise his authority. For a long time he did not accept the radical right's ideas on this subject. The attitude toward the leader as "God's chosen" was, he believed, a "malignant disease" that was spreading throughout Europe. The idea that someone else should decide for you with regard to the fundamentals of morality and politics conflicted with the principle of freedom of choice. This kind of "leaderism" was a flight from the freedom that underlay the liberal idea.[32] So frequently and so vehemently did Jabotinsky reiterate his opposition to the idea of the omnipotent leader that one wonders what motivated him to do so.

One explanation is that many of his supporters in the Revisionist Party yearned for an all-poweful leader and saw Jabotinsky as the exalted leader whom they would follow. For years he rebuffed such expectations. At the party's convention in early 1932, when one of the delegates urged explicitly that Jabotinsky become dictator of the party, Jabotinsky rejected the idea in a sharply worded speech. But the speech seems to have made no impression whatsoever on the audience. At the council meeting that followed the convention, all those present rose when he entered the hall, a widespread custom in parties of the radical right but one that was certainly alien to other Zionist parties.[33] The

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admiration of the rank and file for their leader also found expression in the 1930 convention: when Meir Grossman, the party's secretary-general, made some remarks critical of the leader, the audience interrupted with outcries and would not let him continue. Only the intervention of Jabotinsky himself allowed Grossman to complete his speech.[34]

Although Jabotinsky seemed to reject his supporters' demands that he assume the role of an autocratic leader in the party, a gradual change was perceptible in his stand. Since 1929, growing differences had arisen with his close associates on the party executive over his proposal to secede from the WZO and establish a new Zionist organization. Initially he yeilded to the will of those who opposed the idea, even taking pride in it. If he were a leader "in the blind sense," he wrote, the party would have long since embarked on a different course. True, in that article he also maintained that the Revisionist Party Executive should resign because it opposed an idea accepted by the party majority. Nonetheless, he gave in to the majority on the executive.[35] He believed that through influence and persuasion he would eventually obtain their support. It was a method that had worked on previous occasions, but this time the executive was obdurate.[36]

Jabotinsky soon found himself at an impasse. He could not rely on ideological principles to bolster his standing, as leaders in other parties could in similar situations, because his party lacked a cohesive ideology. Nor could he enlist the support of the party machinery: no such apparatus existed, and the little that did exist was controlled by the secretary-general Meir Grossman.

In this situation, Jabotinsky began to behave increasingly like an autocratic leader. When members of the Party Executive tried to form a coalition with other Zionist parties against the Zionist Executive—a move that would undoubtedly have strengthened his party—Jabotinsky made himself inaccessible in order to foil the attempt. Grossman subsequently explained that this coalition did not appeal to Jabotinsky because he aspired to be a single leader and did not want his freedom of maneuver impeded by coalition partners.[37] A more serious episode is related by Jabotinsky's biographer and former assistent, Joseph Schechtmann. In August 1931, Jabotinsky published articles in the party paper to which he added the signature of his colleagues on the leadership without their agreement and even without their knowledge. When Schechtmann complained that his name, too, had appeared beneath one of his articles, Jabotinsky asked him with astonishment what he had found improper in an article written by him.[38]

But it was not until March 1932 that Jabotinsky took action that made

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him the party's absolute leader. Following yet another party council meeting in which he failed to convince his colleagues to leave the WZO, he astonished everyone by announcing to the press that he had dismissed the party Executive. Immediately he appointed a new Executive comprising people who accepted his opinions and did not question his leadership. He then declared that a referendum would be held in the party.

The need to hold a referendum after seizing power in the party stemmed from a desire to present his move as a democratic act. Like many leaders in the radical right of those days, Jabotinsky insisted he was a democratic leader, and what could be more democratic than a referendum? Thus, he wrote to a veteran party member:

> One can indeed argue about whether the method of the *putsch* is a good one; but it cannot be denied that I fought for the right of the majority, namely, for the basic principle of democracy. And if tomorrow I receive one vote less than my colleague, without any sense of insult I will join the ranks of the simple soldiers. You cannot believe that in my old age I will abandon the principles on which we were raised and that I will be dragged after the title of leader which I despise to the point of nausea.[39]

However, the referendum did not ask for a decision on the controversial issue that had split the Revisionist Party executive. Instead, party members were asked to support or reject the statement that "until the Sixth Convention of the party [scheduled for about a year and a half after the referendum] all the operational tasks of the entire Revisionist movement will be placed in the hands of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, president of the Union of Revisionist Zionists." The intention, Schechtmann explains, was to sidestep a discussion of the substantive issue, since the decision meant that Jabotinsky would direct the election campaign for the World Zionist Congress scheduled to convene within a year.[40] In effect, he asked the party to express its confidence in him as leader without reference to the issue in dispute.

Use of a referendum to consolidate autocratic leadership is characteristic of the radical right. It is one of the populist elements favored by this political camp. Leaders are thus enabled to present themselves as doing the will of the people whom they represent. At the same time, they do not make the people privy to their decisions. It is not viewpoints and opinions that are up for decision but the degree of the leader's personal

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popularity. Jabotinsky's behavior recalled that of Jozef Pilsudski who, a few years before Jabotinsky's *putsch,* forced the elected government of Poland to resign with the help of the army. He then insisted that this had been a democratic act because he had enjoyed majority backing. Pursuing this logic, he demanded, after seizing power, that lawful elections be held for president, and placed himself in candidacy. He took this course even though he had no intention of becoming president but only to prove that the majority was with him.[41] Mussolini also created unrest in the country with the help of his people until the intimidated parliamentary majority chose him as prime minister. He then held elections in which he exploited his standing as premier. Jabotinsky did exactly the same thing, staffing the party posts with his own followers, and with their help and the active help of Betar, assuring himself of an overwhelming majority in the referendum. His opponents, who realized what the result would be, boycotted the poll. Thus, Jabotinsky became a single leader in the style of the radical right.

Jabotinsky, like Jozef Pilsudski, had become an autocratic leader who exploited a formal democratic procedure as the basis to legitimitize his leadership. The literature terms this kind of leadership "Bonapartism," after Louis Bonaparte, who was elected emperor of France for life in a referendum.

In his efforts to show himself a democratic leader, Jabotinsky returned to the leadership issue time after time. Sometimes he claimed not to be a leader at all. "Those elected," he wrote in 1934, "are merely the dischargers of the program. We the masses will follow them and head them not because they are leaders but expressly because they are our servants. If of your own free will you have chosen a group of people and commanded them to work for you, you are obliged to assist them—or remove them."[42]

This is a transparent attempt to cast a different color over the putsch he carried out in the party. Similar claims—that they were not leaders but merely servants of the masses—were voiced by many figures of the radical right in Europe. But declarations were one thing and actions another. In 1932 Jabotinsky became the one-man ruler of the Revisionist Party, which continued to hold elections to its conventions, in which Jabotinsky was consistently re-elected party leader. Even his disciples admitted that after the *putsch* a new relationship was created between the leader and the other party members, "unlike other leaders of Zionism."[43] Many party members who had an independent standing in Jewish and general society left the party, including Richard Lichtheim, Robert Stricker, Meir Grossman, Ya'akov Klinov, and others. Jabotinsky

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was left not with colleagues and associates but with followers who revered him. It was from among these admirers that he selected the party's office holders, who reported directly to him on their activity.[44] Yohanan Bader, at that time a Betar activist in Poland, relates that all contacts with party headquarters in Paris were with Jabotinsky alone, to the point where he began to doubt that there was anyone else at the party headquarters.[45]

It is not suprising that around the same time that Jabotinsky consolidated his absolute leadership, he also began to express publicly doubts about whether a democratic regime was the most desirable form of government or was even attainable. True, Jabotinsky had been raised in the belief that a regime built on a universal franchise and the responsibility of government toward the electorate was the proper and best form of administration, and was convinced for many years that it merited support. But now—the article was written in 1934—the defects of democracy could no longer be ignored. The Jews, indeed, who still had no state of their own, need not be in the vanguard on this issue. But he had reached the conclusion not to recoil from a revision of his faith in the democratic system.[46]

In this period, however, particularly after Hitler's assumption of power, the European political situation began to undergo rapid change. Two political camps began to emerge: a liberal-democratic camp, and an anti-democratic, anti-liberal camp. The latter also espoused anti-Semitism as a central tenet. It was difficult for Jabotinsky to identify with the anti-democratic camp, but evidently such doubts and uncertainties were not shared by the younger generation in Betar.

His decision in 1931 to coopt the Betar youth movement into the Revisionist Party, place himself at the head of the movement, and imbue it with more overt radical-right coloring, was taken when the influence of this camp on his thinking was at its height. The Betar movement, as it was formed in those years, was the clearest organizational and ideological expression of this influence.

The radical right had two types of organizations, which at times were actually two wings of the same organization. The role of the party organization was to mobilize the masses to devote themselves to the national idea, oppose the establishment, and magnify the name of the leader. The second organization was quasi-military in nature, and through it violent means could be employed to destroy the status quo and seize power in the state. Both modes of taking power, the democratic and the violent, were legitimate in the eyes of the majority of the radical right movements. The Revisionist movement was the party organization

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charged with the task of mobilizing the support of the masses for the leader and his views. Its central role was to enable the leader to appear externally as being empowered to speak in the name of the masses. "Without Jabotinsky," Katznelson wrote, "it [the Revisionist Party] had nothing."[47] Pilsudksi's political organization, which he set up after the *putsch*, was similar. Its whole task was to drum up support for the leader and ensure that his backers were elected to the parliament.[48] Other radical-right movements set up alongside this open organization a second organization with a military or semi-military character. This second organization was capable of seizing a propitious moment and taking power by undemocratic means. The Betar youth movement was comparable to this kind of military organization. Even though it was established as a youth movement, it soon became, thanks to its military structure, the dominant organization in the Revisionist movement itself. Because it was in this organization that the future leaders of Herut underwent their political socialization and initial political experience, the next two chapters will be devoted to Betar.

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