

The Spark: Zionism, Socialism, and Governmental Paternalism

Origins

From the very start, modern Zionism could not be classified as a grassroots movement. Unlike the waves of mass Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States, which were relatively spontaneous movements of indigent people taking fate into their own hands without any guiding philosophy, the Zionist movement was initiated and led from on high: Eastern intellectuals and writers (Pinsker and Smolenskin); Western journalists, scientists, and philanthropists (Herzl, Weizmann, and Rothschild). Thus was established the pattern for nation building in the new-old state from the start.

This is not to suggest that the early Zionist pioneers were forced to emigrate to Palestine. One must distinguish between the original pioneering urge, which was quite voluntaristic, and the way matters developed for them once in the Promised Land. Zionist *khalutziut* (pioneering) had within it two components—the free choice decision to go to *Eretz Yisrael*, and a tremendous amount of self-sacrifice after one's arrival in Palestine in order to further the collective Zionist good. While the first element was highly individualistic, such individualism generally ceased at the port of entry; the specific type and degree of self-sacrifice was more often than not decided from above—be it by the patronal Baron de Rothschild during the First Aliyah, or the shirtsleeved socialist apparatchiks of the third and subsequent periods of mass immigration.

The Second Aliyah (1904–1913) set the general approach in institutional concrete. Virtually all these early pioneers came from the hotbed of revolutionary socialist Russia and Eastern Europe—Ben-Gurion, Ben-Zvi, Katznelson—with an ideological zeal and fervent belief in the need for centralized control and direction that only the formerly powerless can muster. In the social, economic, and especial-

ly political *tabula rasa* that was Palestine, they proceeded to evolve a system of top-to-bottom paternalism, which would be the hallmark of the entire pre-State *yishuv* period and the first two decades of the post-State era as well.

This is not to suggest that these Zionist founding fathers were interested in power for its own sake. Not only did they truly believe in the rightness and efficacy of this top-to-bottom approach, but to a large extent the circumstances in Palestine warranted—perhaps even demanded—it. On the one hand, the early Zionist pioneers were almost universally without substantial personal economic resources (very few European Jews with means would even consider leaving their cultured home for the primitivity of Ottoman Palestine). On the other hand, unlike the situation in the American West, there weren't even any indigenous natural resources in Palestine to work with either. As a result, there wasn't much choice for the early Zionist leadership but to husband and maximally exploit whatever came to hand—through an organized and collective effort.

These two factors, socialist ideology and circumstantial need, provided a powerful justification for Zionist paternalism. What set the early Zionist pioneers apart from other national founders was their ability to perceive that such an approach could not be dependent solely on their heroic efforts and national visionary will. Rather, they set out early on to institutionalize Zionist paternalism through a host of organizations within and outside the *yishuv*.

Developing Institutions to Institutionalize Development

The most obvious and ultimately most effective such institution was the political party. Obvious, because the party was the central means of mass mobilization in the socialist revolutionary tradition. Having been socialized within this hotbed of European political action during their youthful years, the pioneer settlers accepted as axiomatic the need to establish a political party.

But what sort of party? Here, too, their earlier revolutionary experience suggested that to be fully successful it would not only have to involve itself in simple vote gathering but in ideological indoctrination as well. Classic Marxist theory viewed politics as but one element of a larger economic totality. In order to establish a just society, it would not suffice to merely wield the levers of political power; rather, no less than complete socioeconomic remodeling and a concomitant remaking of the Jew was called for. Put simply, the "normalization of the Jewish economic profile"—away from the overem-

phasis on commerce, finance, and intellectual pursuits, and towards agricultural and industrial manual labor—was the order of the day.

How was this to be accomplished? The Zionist political party would have to become a “full-service” institution, not only offering political leadership but a full range of economic, social, and political services as well. Ironically enough, the historical source for such a full-service approach was none other than the local Jewish communal governments in the Diaspora. The *shtetl* in Poland, for example not only etymologically meant “little state” but conducted itself like one—providing and/or establishing virtually all the local Jews’ social, economic, cultural, and political needs and institutions: taxes, wage and price regulations, courts, schools, synagogues, welfare funds, sickhouses, etc. (Elazar 1981, 23–63).

Origins notwithstanding, the Zionist parties were but the first step along this old/new road in the Jews’ new/old home. By predating the first official Jewish communal government in the *yishuv* by a decade or so (not to mention the State of Israel by close to fifty years), it was the early socialist political parties that set the tone for what was expected of the powers-that-be—whether party, government, or labor federation. Once it came into being, the government could hardly do less for the Zionist public than the political parties were attempting. In any event, as the socialist camp came to dominate the communal government from the start of the British Mandatory period, it made little difference which specific organ of rule was actually providing the services. The critical point was that the Palestine Zionist public, no less than the Jewish leadership, took it for granted that such political/governmental services would run the gamut.

Aiding the Second Aliyah leaders were the immigrants who came in the Third Aliyah of the 1920s. Many of these were politically capable (and highly educated) socialists from middle class backgrounds who found themselves outside the Bolshevik Revolution when it turned against Zionism in 1922. Upon their arrival in Palestine they didn’t seek laborer jobs, but rather hooked into the Labor party (Ahdut Ha’avodah and Ha’shomer Ha’tza’ir, at the time) or Histadrut labor federation positions. Yonathan Shapira aptly describes this symbiotic relationship and its consequences:

The veterans needed a party apparatus and the newcomers were willing and able to build it. The newcomers, at the same time, were willing to follow the lead of the older leaders. Their arrival as refugees from Soviet Russia may have contributed to their deference to the veteran leaders.... These two groups—the top

leaders at the helm of the party and the Histadrut, and the apparatus builders—in cooperation managed to organize and direct the masses (Shapira 1986, 183–184).

To be sure, strong central government was a real necessity not only given the economic exigencies of the period but also due to the tenuous political circumstances in which the nascent Zionist movement found itself. Notwithstanding the early sympathetic stance of His Majesty's government as embodied in the 1917 Balfour Declaration, it became clear soon thereafter that the Jewish State would not be born in the normal and "inevitable" course of events. British Middle East interests, coupled with (and sympathetic to) violent Arab antipathy to Zionism, meant that the Zionist authorities would need to exhibit as strong and unified a front as possible. In the best of national circumstances, "foreign policy" is the prerogative of the executive branch; in the *yishuv's* far more precarious and sensitive diplomatic situation, centralized decisionmaking was absolutely imperative. The circle was thus complete: both on the "domestic" plane as well as the external front the *yishuv's* leadership called the shots.

The irony of all this, then, was that the Mandate policy—both in its initial and later phases—actually aided the *yishuv* in its drive towards political consolidation. As a result of the Balfour Declaration, the Jews as well as the Arabs of Palestine were allowed, even encouraged, to develop their own communal institutions once it became clear that the two sides could not and would not do so jointly (the Arabs never accomplished this, for reasons that need not concern us here). Thus, despite not having sovereign control over their destiny, the Jews of Palestine in fact had a large measure of political autonomy without at first having to devote any significant economic resources to internal policing and external national defense.

By the time British policy shifted against the *yishuv* in the 1930s, the quasi-governmental institutions were already well in place; at that point, the new British policy only served to redouble the Zionists' efforts in mobilizing all their governmental resources for the struggle ahead. As a recent scholar of the period put it: "The British... presented the Zionists with a near optimal mix of positive and negative policies to help increase the capabilities of para-statal organizations" (Migdal 1989, 12).

The Lack of Institutional Counterweight

None of this is to suggest that the system which developed was fundamentally undemocratic. Far from it, for the number of parties

that won seats in the Jewish communal legislature was beyond anything usually found in preindependent times, let alone normal political periods. Nor was there anything approaching universal "consensual" agreement in the *yishuv*, within the broad socialist camp and especially between that camp and the Revisionists on the right. Nevertheless, despite these ideological and political cleavages, two factors mitigated against any early diminution of the overall centralized and paternalistic approach.

First, virtually all the parties (with the exception of the Liberal/Progressive camp) took the same "full service" tack towards their respective constituencies (to the extent possible, given the limited economic means of each). And how could it be otherwise? In order to have any hope of competing with Mapai and her satellite coalition partners (all of whom had the added advantage of controlling the levers of the Jewish communal government), other parties could not be perceived as lagging in their array of sociocultural offerings. Hence, the spectacle of party-owned and/or controlled newspapers, publishing houses, health plans, athletic teams, banks, insurance companies, etc., etc.

Second, if there was to be a real challenge to such socialistic paternalism, it would have had to come from the Revisionist side. However, while from a socioeconomic ideological standpoint Jabotinsky's party did indeed issue a challenge of sorts, the very *style* of revisionist rule—at its extremes bordering on the fascist, almost always authoritarian (despite Jabotinsky's own liberal proclivities)—merely reinforced the general air of top-to-bottom governance. The two major Zionist blocs, then, neatly complemented each other from this perspective: the socialists through their party organization, the Revisionists by way of their approach to political leadership. As we shall see further on in this book, it is no coincidence that the greatest demise of Israeli governmental paternalism occurred not after 1977 upon the fall of the Labor establishment (although that was certainly a major domino), but rather in the mid 1980s, only after the last of Israel's "strong" leaders—Menachem Begin—exited the political arena.

Unholy Trinity:

Labor Party, Laborious Government, Laboring Union

How did the socialist camp manage to stay in power for so long? The answer to that question provides still another factor behind the paternalistic stranglehold in which Israeli society was kept. The Labor bloc worked on not one (party), not two (government), but no

less than three different but interrelated planes. The third leg of this all-encompassing rule was, of course, the giant labor federation called the Histadrut. As a normal trade union, it would have been sufficient to significantly buttress Mapai's power. However, the Histadrut became far more than a simple trade union federation.

To begin with, it ultimately came to represent some 85 percent of Israel's salaried workforce—far and away a record among the world's democracies (by comparison, in labor's heyday in the United States less than a third of the country's workforce was unionized). However, due to the very difficult unemployment situation in which the *yishuv* occasionally found itself, this labor federation decided to do the heretofore unthinkable (except, perhaps, in Karl Marx's utopian dreams)—establish companies in order to guarantee employment to the arriving masses!

This only served to further ensure the perpetuation of Israeli public paternalism—in two different ways. First and foremost, the worker was now afforded yet another public address for economic beneficence; in fact, the Histadrut soon came to have virtual monopolistic control over the employment bureaus. As a result, a job seeker had little choice but to turn to the Histadrut when in search of a salaried position, and more often than not would find such work within the Histadrut's corporate alter ego. Once in, of course, the full panoply of Histadrut/Mapai indoctrination and services would be brought to bear. Whether directly or indirectly, a very significant portion of Israel's workers eventually found themselves in the comfortable bosom of Big Union.

Second, and concomitantly, whereas in most other societies of the early twentieth century the union camp at times constituted the sole major counterforce to government power, in Palestine and later Israel the Histadrut by so closely aligning itself—ideologically *and* institutionally—with the *yishuv's* Labor government, effectively took away from the working class any possibility of organizationally opposing overbearing government.

Worse yet, by burning both ends of the candle—as the employees' sole representative, and as the employer even in the late eighties of 18 percent of the national workforce (Rabushka & Hanke 1989, 13)—the Histadrut undercut its own primary role as steadfast guardian of the workers' rights. The perception (and occasional reality) of such a conflict of interest further undermined any possibility of an unalloyed ally of society's weaker strata.

Most startling, and almost forgotten in the mythology of early Zionist history, is the fact that if the most dominant personality on the

Labor scene—David Ben-Gurion—had had his way, the extent of paternalistic control and domination of the entire *yishuv* by the Labor/Histadrut alliance would have been even greater. The following description (coupled with Ben-Gurion's own quotes) by one of his sympathetic biographers is important not only for its explicit prescriptions, but because it offers us a glimpse into the mindset of Israel's premier founding father and first prime minister, who more than anyone else set the tone for governance in the emerging Jewish State (despite the occasional opposition of even his own Labor colleagues):

In the early 1920s, Ben-Gurion advanced the following proposal: to convert the Histadrut into a workers corporation, "...an egalitarian commune of all the workers of Palestine under military discipline...[that would] take over all the farms and urban cooperatives, the wholesale supplies of the entire working community, and the direction and conduct of all public works in the country."

In face of the fiercely critical reaction and the accusations of "Bolshevik" and "dogmatic" tendencies, Ben-Gurion was obliged to withdraw the proposal. He submitted a new plan that omitted such concepts as "military discipline," but this too was rejected by some of the Histadrut leaders. Finally he presented the Histadrut with a third plan that was far more moderate and prudent...the Workers Corporation, to which every member of the Histadrut would *automatically* [my emphasis; S.L-W.] belong and to which the Histadrut would entrust the administration of all its financial and cooperative enterprises to "direct its activities toward the needs of all the workers" (Bar-Zohar 1978, 50).

Israeli socialist paternalism, then, turns out to have been the more moderate alternative to Bolshevik Zionism—the actual early preferred choice of the nation's central political leader.

External Paternalism

As noted above, the resources found in early Palestine—of both the immigrants and the land itself—were exceptionally meager. In effect, this meant that still another layer of paternalism had to be added to the situation, above and beyond those Jewish communal institutions established in the *yishuv*. These were the external World Zionist Organization (WZO) and its later adjunct the Jewish Agency.

The ruling tone was set by the founder of modern Political Zionism, Theodore Herzl. A highly cultured and well-to-do Budapest/Viennese Jew, Herzl (unlike his ideological opponent Ahad Ha'am) had the prescience to understand that Zionism could only succeed if it looked to the Jewish masses—and not to the still all-too-comfortable middle class, or the intelligentsia—as the main source of *aliyah* to Palestine. Yet, Herzl was too much the refined gentleman to place much faith in the ability of such lower class *hoi polloi* to manage the difficult task of nation building by themselves. It would be up to him, and similar Zionist luminaries—genteel Dr. Chaim Weizmann the scientist, haughty Dr. Max Nordau, prominent Heidelberg Prof. Hermann Schapiro (the proposer of the Jewish National Fund), industrial tycoons Alexander Marmorek (vice president of the WZO) and Max Bodenheimer, *et al*—to plan and forge the path (financially and politically, not personally of course) for the Children of Israel's return to the Promised Land. Even the socialist leaders within the WZO, e.g. Nahman Syrkin, were not truly of the working class (although assiduously laboring for the workers); the model of benign Leninist leadership seemed to be their guiding political *modus operandi*, as Ben-Gurion acknowledged explicitly on at least one occasion (Avi-hai 1974, 286).

The setting up of the Jewish Agency in 1929 established a new level of "Zionist paternalism," ultimately serving as a precedent for "sugar daddyism" of the worst order. It was one thing to have avowed Zionists paying the piper and calling the tune of nation building in the *yishuv*; it was quite another matter to have professed non-Zionists funding the enterprise.

That the Jewish Agency would soon be operationally taken over by the Zionist functionaries was beside the point; the idea and reality of constant reliance on external sources of funding (not merely external to Palestine/Israel, but to the Zionist movement as a whole) was the surest sign that the nascent Jewish State was becoming addicted to outside help. From Jewish Agency fundraising in the thirties and forties, to substantial German reparations in the fifties and sixties (and now once again from former East Germany in the nineties), and on to massive American foreign aid in the seventies and eighties, the pattern is all of the same piece in principle. Not only were the Zionist masses beholden to their leaders, but those same leaders carried matters one step further by becoming financially hooked on non-Zionist sources of aid.

Once again, this may have been unavoidable (and some would argue, continues to be unavoidable) given the dire financial straits in which the Zionist movement and the State of Israel have continually

found themselves. None of this is to impute some nefarious plot by the authorities—Israeli, Zionist, or non-Zionist—to control the whole enterprise out of any lust for power or financial gain. In almost all cases, objective needs for such an approach did exist in at least some measure, and certainly could be rationally justified in the context of an unusual and quite difficult situation.

Whatever the “moral” balance of credit/blame, however, one thing becomes clear in hindsight. Despite the relatively democratic nature of the *yishuv*'s (and later Israel's) election system, there was little actual grassroots democratic activity—not to mention personal freedom of choice—in evidence anywhere else in a system nurtured and directed from the top. By 1948, the pattern of top-to-bottom decisionmaking had been firmly set: in the founding of new settlements, building of industrial factories, development of academic universities, the territorial dispersal of new immigrants, and even the establishment of local government councils.

Pre-1948: Variables Leading Invariably to Paternalism

Overall, then, the factors underlying pre-Israel's development of a highly centralized, socialistically paternalistic, “strong” system of government were many. Whereas other “new states” coming into being in the twentieth century had to contend with a multitude of political actors and factors which tended to reduce the power of the rulers (at least from the standpoint of social control), several specific circumstances in the Zionist case enabled the rulers to increase and broaden their social control over the Jewish population. In analyzing the “crystallization of the state” and the absence of sources which usually tend to weaken the power of the emerging elite, Migdal (1989, 25) enumerates the most salient elements, most of which were noted at some length above. His conclusion aptly sums up our pre-State discussion as well:

In the case of Israel, an unusual number of exogenous factors neutralized and weakened the negative effects of old rulemakers, potential new rulemakers, and possible statebreakers on state consolidation. The overall weakness of actors in these three categories in actually challenging for social control coupled with the labor Zionists' fear of the potential damage some of these actors could do resulted in an unusual opportunity for the Israeli state to build a relatively high level of social control and capabilities. These factors include: 1) the weakening impact of

migration on old strategies of survival among Jews; 2) the weaknesses of potential local and all-Palestine rivals, both among the Jews and Arabs; 3) the willingness of British leaders of the mandatory state to grant significant autonomy; 4) the availability of skillful cadres, who did not exact a high ideological price for their participation in the state-in-making; 5) the willingness of elements in the World Zionist movement to work for diplomatic support and to channel significant material support to the Yishuv without exacting a high ideological or organizational price; 6) the relatively limited negative effects of the destruction of war on the ability to offer strategies of survival and the positive effects of the threat of war on inducing increased mobilization; and 7) the existence of a power balance in the Middle East, which impeded the emergence of a statebreaking hegemony in the region.

If Israel was virtually unique among the twentieth century's newly independent countries in the smoothness of governmental transition and essential stability of its regime, this was due in no small measure to the centralized and unified power of its government apparatus. As we shall see later on, however, it would also prove to be the source further down the road of much of the State's greatest domestic headache—a veritable revolt against such overbearing leadership.

Mamlakhtiut: The Ideology and Practice of State Paternalism

If the general pattern of governmental paternalism was already firmly set by the time of independence, it still lacked one thing—an official ideology. This was provided by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion early on, in a policy which he called *mamlakhtiut*, “statism.”

It was a measure of how much the Israeli public accepted the reality (and perhaps the need) for such centralization and paternalism, that Ben-Gurion had no qualms about declaratively and explicitly letting the cat out of the bag. From a personal-political perspective there was no need for him to do so, for he stood unchallenged as the fulcrum of the entire political system. Why then did he announce that the Israeli government would henceforth be guided by the principle of *mamlakhtiut*?

To a great degree, the answer lies in the first and most original brick of the entire paternalistic edifice noted earlier: the political parties. In the early 1950s they still wielded a huge amount of power, to the point of making governance difficult even for Ben-Gurion.

To take but one absurd example, the parties continued to demand that the masses of new immigrants be apportioned to the various parties by a "party key," with each party having first crack at indoctrinating and servicing its respective quota of new members within the Israeli "transit" camps. Not only was such a situation bizarre considering that most of these *olim* had not the foggiest notion of what a political party was or what it was supposed to do, but the socioeconomic and ideological makeup of these groups was wildly out of sync with the party key. For instance, whereas most of the parties were nonreligious (and not a few antireligious), the vast majority of the *edot ha'mizrakh* (Jews from Arab countries) who arrived immediately after Israel was established were fervently religious, with the rest religiously traditional at the least.

Thus, the very first socialization process these immigrants underwent was one of forced indoctrination, of expedited "modernization" in the parlance of the Israeli political establishment. The language here was quite explicit at times, as can be seen from the following statement by the head of the Jewish Agency's Culture Department: "our job and the job of the country is not to leave these (formerly) exiled people with their exile mentality, but rather to render them trustworthy partners in the great and noble Israeli revolution which has occurred" (Levitan 1983, 196).

Party-keyed immigrant absorption was but one of many problematic areas which threatened to cleave Israeli society asunder. There still existed several ideologically and party-oriented school streams in Israel, with the obvious potential of institutionalizing and perpetuating Israeli ideological factiousness. It was to avoid this threat of deepening societal cleavage that Ben-Gurion announced his policy of *mamlakhtiut*. Once again, however, while ostensibly warranted by the inherent dangers facing Israeli society, the actual effect was to deepen government centralization and the public's dependency on the institutions of government.

The clearest example of this was probably the relationship between Israel's central government and the municipalities. The Interior Ministry was given sole responsibility for the functioning of local government, and proceeded to do so with a heavyhandedness found only in authoritarian regimes. All local budgets had to be approved by the ministry which in any case provided more than 50 percent of the municipalities' operating revenue; local bylaws also had to be approved by the ministry, including any new forms of local taxation; and most unusual of all, the ministry had the authority—used on several occasions—to fire and replace the municipal council and mayor!

Such a governmental situation was especially insidious given that in Israel it is usually on the local level where one finds the fullest expression of grassroots activity and display of civic initiative. With the municipal councils' hands tied, however, there was little incentive for public political activity on the local level. In the event, it was not until the local election law was changed (direct election of the mayor in 1978), that local grassroots activity began to flourish. This was immediately crowned with the victory of many independent party lists, which already in 1978 collectively ruled over more local citizens than the Likud (Lehman-Wilzig 1982, 107)!

On the broader socioeconomic front, in the mid fifties the government began to take on an expanded role. If the central authorities had no choice but to place the masses of immigrants in transit camps catch-as-catch-can (because of the serious lack of housing), it was but a natural step to eventually move them out of those camps and decide for them that in the national interest they would be permanently settled in newly built "development towns" on the periphery—socially and geographically—of Israeli society.

Such a policy of forced exurbanization may have been at least partly justified at the time in terms of the country's need for population dispersal and settlement of very sparse areas (although almost all such development towns have by now proven to be economic failures). They certainly had the practical effect of increasing that population's overall dependency on the state's authorities.

To be sure, there was a certain trade-off inherent in Ben-Gurion's policy of *mamlakhtiut*; if the state's involvement in the citizens' lives increased, this would in no small part come at the expense of the parties themselves. Interestingly, but not altogether surprisingly, the greatest antagonism to the Prime Minister's policy came from within some parts of the socialist camp, as it had the most power to lose. Thus, for example, it was the Labor-oriented Palmach elite corps that argued most vociferously against its disbandment and wholesale integration into Zahal, the newly established Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) (Shapira 1985).

Why, then, did Ben-Gurion insist on upsetting his party's applecart? There can be no gainsaying his worry over the stability of the State, not to mention the need to bring a semblance of unity to the highly ideologically fractured society. By setting up one integrating army, by reducing the number of school systems to a minimum, etc., he hoped to change Israel from the chaotic Byzantine to the merely divided Levantine. On the other hand, there were two additional factors at play here as well.

Ben-Gurion had grave doubts that the Jews were ready for self-government (Cohen 1987, 201). This was certainly colored by his Zionist antipathy to anything having to do with Diaspora life. As the Jews were stateless for well over 1800 years, there could be little doubt in his mind but that they had lost their self-governing skills. The establishment of a state in and of itself was not proof that the Jewish people were ready for managing their own political affairs. This ability would have to be nurtured by the State itself, a sort of political guardianship for a politically adolescent public. The inherent paradox here obviously did not occur to, and certainly didn't bother, Ben-Gurion: how does one autocratically teach one's child to stand on its own two feet?

Finally, there was undoubtedly a degree of self-interest in the matter as well. Once the State came into being, it was clear that the resources at its disposal would soon far surpass those of the party, however dominant Mapai happened to be. As it was inconceivable that the Labor camp would relinquish the reins of power in the foreseeable future (despite some potential diminution of political support; see below), there was little risk involved in such a transfer of power from party to State, and much political benefit to be accrued to the Labor camp's leaders, who also happened to run the government.

Indeed, the real advantage was not necessarily in the amount of *added* power being shifted from the socialist parties to the socialist government. After all, this was merely juggling the same balls by the same juggler from one hand to the other. Rather, it was the *other* (non-socialist) parties' *loss* of control and power that would be the main benefit from Ben-Gurion's perspective. By removing certain functions from *all* the political parties (even his own), his hand could only be strengthened.

Moreover, by the early 1950s it was becoming clear that although the *edot ha'mizrakh* immigrants were by and large going to be part of the blue-collar class in Israel, many of them would not identify with secular socialism as expounded by the Labor camp. While they would probably support the Histadrut for economic reasons, their political vote for left-leaning parties on national issues was far more uncertain. Labor's proportional party support, therefore, was bound to decrease over time. Transfer of authority from party to state was mere prudence in the face of such a possibility.

On the other hand, it was obvious that the fast-growing government white-collar sector of clerks, managers, and other functionaries (increasingly manned by the new immigrants) also would not readily identify with Labor values. *Mamlakhtiut*, however, could provide a

meaningful value system for them, thus tying them politically and ideationally to the ruling party.

Mamlakhtiut, then, may have been perceived by the Israeli public as a meaningless shift of power from one political source to another, but in reality it only further concentrated power in the State of Israel's central government, thereby creating the basis for deeper—and certainly more comprehensive—political paternalism. Once again, Ben-Gurion was quite clear on this score. Not only would *mamlakhtiut* be henceforth the dominant approach, but he personally would have no qualms about seeking further paternalistic aid from any quarter, especially in those circumstances where Statism alone proved to be insufficient, as Avi-hai (1974, 75) noted of Israel's first prime minister:

He outlined two major tasks for the Histadrut: the shaping of the image of the state (its social relationships), and undertaking pioneering tasks in the fields of education, the economy, and society, "which cannot be achieved by the force of coercion and law or by the government bureaucracy *alone*" [my emphasis; S. L-W.].... [H]e clearly placed the supreme national interest above the voluntary act of will and conscience.

Ben-Gurion, therefore, was not about to eviscerate the Histadrut's power—it was to continue to function as a tool for the dissemination of governmental largesse across the board. The question was never really one of whether to weaken socialism in the interests of Statism but how best to exploit the former in the more efficient pursuit of the latter.

Paternalism: To What Extent Was it Necessary?

Was such a general paternalistic approach inevitable? While it may have been partly necessary due to the difficult circumstances of the pre- and early-State periods, the *extent* to which it was applied seems to have gone beyond any real nation building need. Moreover, the Labor movement itself had an early sterling example of nonpaternalistic political life—the kibbutz. To be sure, differences of scale do not enable us to make facile comparisons between the minipolis of the kibbutz and the megapolis of the *yishuv*. Yet certainly some of the kibbutz's highly democratic decisionmaking processes could have been adapted and applied to the larger Jewish society.

More interesting is a related question: was the highly centralized and paternalistic approach in line with Jewish political experience?

Here the answer is decidedly negative, and provides the first clue why it was almost inevitable that Israeli centralized governmental paternalism could not last.

In a sense, Ben-Gurion had it all wrong. For one, the use of the word *mamlakhtit* instead of the equally reasonable *medina'ut* constitutes a strong indication that he was consciously misreading early Jewish political history (Cohen 1987, 202). Whereas *medinah* was far the more prevalent term in the Bible (cited fifty times, by his own account), its general meaning was of a province, large capital, or state, and not an all-encompassing nation or country. Thus, his semineologic use of *mamlakha* (the larger and more powerful "kingdom"), described merely his own idiosyncratic conception of the State of Israel—despite its being an unnatural type of political construct by Jewish historical standards.

Nor was his mistake a matter only of the first half of Jewish history when the Children of Israel were (usually) sovereign rulers of the Holy Land. Even throughout eighteen hundred years of Diaspora history, the Jewish people managed to develop a very rich and variegated tradition of self-rule. The reason that Ben-Gurion did not see this is that (once more) he viewed the matter from the perspective of national sovereignty, which the Jews did not have in Exile. From the standpoint of political autonomy, as manifested in the Jewish *kehilla* (local community), the Jews had very wide and deep experience in self-governance—at times (due to the peculiar nature of the general feudal system), far greater than their gentile compatriots (Elazar 1981, 23–63). Even more to the point, such governance was highly democratic in nature, with actual elections usually held every year or so.

Nor was such low-level Jewish self-rule merely a function of Diaspora existence. In point of fact, the *kehilla* structure was the real embodiment of Jewish government from time immemorial (thus *medinah*, not *mamlakha*). The Jewish people began their national history as a conglomeration of twelve tribes, each with its own flag, family structure, and (according to legend) specific professional occupation. The first recorded era of Jewish national life took place under a *confederal* political arrangement (Judges, I–XXI), with most legal and political matters taken care of within the tribal structure. Only in national emergencies is an occasional politico-military front formed to resolve the specific problem, and even then of only a few tribes (Judges 7: 35).

An even better indication of where the Jewish political-institutional bent lay was the ensuing monarchical period, when an attempt was made to centralize power in the hands of the king (and let it not be forgotten that even the establishment of the monarchy was literally a

product of grassroots pressure on the prophet Samuel). The arrangement lasted through a mere three monarchs, with civil war erupting after Solomon's death. Israel would never again be fully united.

What of paternalism from the standpoint of government services? While it would be highly anachronistic (and unfair) to measure the Bible's social welfare ethic in terms of modern socialism or even contemporary social democracy, two things do stand out clearly in the Bible.

First, there is a great amount of concern for social justice, equity, fair treatment of the poor and downtrodden, etc. From this standpoint, Labor Zionism was but biblical ethicism in modern garb. Second, and more to our point, almost none of these "social welfare" services (except judicial fairness, etc.) were to be directly provided for by the governing authorities but rather by the general population. There is no governmental philanthropy in the Bible, merely the insistence that Jews set aside money and/or agricultural produce (charity in our terms) for the less fortunate. Even in areas of life which are universally accepted as the exclusive prerogative of the state, e.g. military conscription, personal freedom was not completely negated. A coward or a bridegroom could not be forced into serving (Deut. 20: 8; 24: 5).

What of the later Diaspora period? Didn't we note above that the Jewish *kehilla* during the long *galut* period had in fact a comprehensive approach to government service provision? The answer is yes, but this only highlights the hypocrisy of Labor's own approach (assuming that it consciously copied the *kehilla* model). For the fact of the matter is that modern Zionism stood for the negation of the Diaspora. Conversely, time and again the Zionist leaders would hark back to the biblical, pre-Diaspora period, as the only one worthy of providing any sort of model for the renascent Jewish State. Thus, conceptual consistency should have dictated that the Labor Zionist movement incorporate the relatively non-Statist principles of the earlier Jewish Commonwealths in its contemporary system of governance, and not the governmental values of the Jewish *kehillot*, which it publicly loathed.

Altogether, then, in its concern for social justice, the public's welfare, etc., it can be said that Labor Zionism's heart was certainly in the right place from a historical Jewish perspective (i.e., biblical values), but its hands—the overly centralized institutional means and hyper-paternalistic political approach—were not in keeping with that earlier Jewish political culture and tradition. This is not to say that that biblical politico-cultural predilection could by itself roll back the entrenched paternalistic Israeli system (see Table 1.1), especially given

the political tradition that evolved in the Diaspora communities. Only when it became clear much later that such a system of governance was no longer appropriate and had indeed become bankrupt (literally and figuratively), did the establishment begin tottering and prove to be vulnerable to grassroots demands for a change in governing style and substance. We now turn in the following chapter to the growing manifestations of internal Labor party and general governmental decay, which paved the way for the eventual grassroots revolt.

TABLE 1:

Israeli Governmental Paternalism, Socialism, and
Centralism in Selected Areas of Life

A) *Economy*

1- Approximately 25% of the national workforce are employed by government ministries or government corporations (chapter 5).

2- An additional 18% are employed by the Histadrut and/or its sundry corporations (chapter 1).

3- 90% of Israeli real estate is owned by the State Lands Authority, which will not sell land but only offer 50-year leases.

4- The Israeli public is forbidden to carry foreign currency in its possession, prohibited from having foreign currency accounts overseas, and severely limited in the amount of foreign currency that can be removed for overseas trips.

5- For nonsalaried workers, tax assessments are set by the tax authority based on what it feels the worker's income should be, rather than on what the worker declares it to be. The burden of proof here is legally on the worker.

6- Due to a system of "golden shares," the vast majority of corporate stockholders have had no say in the management of their companies; management or the original owners maintained full operating control (chapter 5).

7- Of the country's five major banks, two were party-affiliated, and one more was controlled by the Jewish Agency (chapter 2).

8- Very high tariffs have been established against many foreign products to "protect" local industries, sometimes for decades without change (chapter 5).

9- The government set and controlled virtually the entire credit market, as a result of its voracious debt appetite and through sundry bureaucratic and statutory regulations regarding bank lending and pension fund investment (chapter 5).

10- At times (nonwar years), Israeli government expenditures (central and local authorities, plus other national institutions directly tied to the State) have exceeded the total gross national product (GNP) (the income generated from all sources). Just the expenditures of the central government alone have

Continued on next page

TABLE 1 *Continued*

reached as high as 76% of GNP — far in excess of any other Western country (chapter 5).

B) *Society*

1- Matters of personal status — marriage, divorce, conversion — are wholly the province of the Orthodox Rabbinate (chapter 9).

2- Establishment of new settlements is done exclusively by government fiat (chapter 4); numerous new townships were set up in areas of “national need” but not popular demand, to be populated by poor new immigrants with no other choice offered them (chapter 1).

3- No private schools have been established on the elementary level, although an ultra-Orthodox (*Agudat Yisrael*) “independent” system is allowed to exist (chapter 8).

4- Until 1990 there was but one government-controlled TV station, and three government-controlled radio stations. No private stations (even cable) were permitted by law (chapter 6).

5- Half the country’s daily newspapers are organs of specific political parties. Every newspaper must have an editor-in-chief over twenty-five years old, who speaks the language of the paper, and possesses no criminal record; two copies of each paper must be delivered daily to the district commissioner; plus other press conditions which remain on the books from the time of the British Mandate.

6- 85% of Israel’s population were covered by the Histadrut’s *Kupat Cholim* (health system), which did not allow any choice in the patients’ selection of a physician (chapter 7).

7- Child adoption is exclusively in the hands of the Social Welfare Ministry, with agency and private adoptions outlawed.

8- A system of monthly government payments exists to encourage an increased number of births.

9- A government-appointed Movie and Theater Censorship Board (the latter abolished in 1991) has decided which productions would not be shown in Israel as they might give offense (political, religious, and/or moral) to various sectors of the public.

C) *Polity*

1- Local government is financially and administratively beholden to the Interior Ministry (chapter 1).

2- There is no written constitution guaranteeing civil rights, although some “Basic Laws” have been passed by the Knesset over the years regarding government institutions, e.g. presidency, army, Knesset, etc. (chapter 10).

3- Despite its origins under the British Mandate, the Israeli court system has no trial by peers (jury system), but rather exclusively by magistrate.

4- All outdoor protest assemblies of over fifty people must get a police

Continued on next page

TABLE 1 *Continued*

license in order to demonstrate; the police will then set the conditions of the protest (duration, location, etc.).

5- In most of the major parties, candidates for inclusion in their respective Knesset lists were selected until the late 1970s by the upper party leadership (through what was called a *va'adat minuyim*), and rubber stamped by the party's Central Committee (chapter 12).

Note: All of the items in this table were in evidence from 1948 to at least the early Seventies. As will be explained in the course of the book, some of these elements were abolished or reformed in the late seventies and throughout the eighties under the impact of public pressure.