

# THE UNKNOWN ESSAYS OF VLADIMIR JABOTINSKY

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*While most of Vladimir Jabotinsky's articles have been published in various volumes of collected writings and have thus been available to scholars for years, a number of his essays remain unknown to both scholars as well as his disciples. This is largely due to the fact that the Revisionist party's archives were destroyed during the bombing of London, but also because of the wide range of publications in which Jabotinsky published. This article introduces four recently discovered essays, "Self-Administration for Palestine" (1920), "The Justice of the Jewish Claim" (1921), "Shall the Jewish Middleman be Spared" (1930), and "The Jewish Mission, the Religious Ideals of the Jew and of the Aryan Compared" (1923), and discusses how they add to our understanding of Jabotinsky as well as their continued relevance for our own era.*

"It seems that the Zionist feuilletons of Zev Jabotinsky, on which so many were brought up at the beginning of this century, continue to influence and guide others."

Menachem Begin, "The 1972 Jabotinsky Ferment Among the Jews of Russia."

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If there is one area on which both the disciples and the opponents of Vladimir Jabotinsky agree, it is that Jabotinsky was among the most prolific of the pre-state Zionist leaders. In hundreds of essays, written in more than half a dozen languages, Jabotinsky devoted his pen and his heart to the struggle to create a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. While the vast majority of Jabotinsky's writings have been collected and translated into Hebrew,<sup>1</sup> a good number of articles and interviews remain unknown to contemporary Zionist historians, despite the fact that they fill in important gaps in our knowledge of Jabotinsky, as well as offer valuable precedents for the current crises faced by the Jewish people and the State of Israel.<sup>2</sup> This essay, which was originally published in Hebrew in a somewhat different form,<sup>3</sup> introduces several of these materials, while noting their continued relevance for our own era. Though this author has chosen to introduce this "unknown" collection by presenting four of the most interesting selections, the articles discussed here represent only a small portion of the larger body of unknown materials by Jabotinsky which, hopefully, will one day be made public.<sup>4</sup>

Among the most controversial issues in contemporary Jewish politics is the question of just how much influence diaspora Jewish organizations should have on the policies and the daily affairs of the Jewish state. While many of Israel's critics have claimed that the diaspora-Israeli tension which has arisen over this issue is a product of the tumultuous events of the past two decades, in reality it has existed since the very beginning of the Zionist endeavor and was recognized by Jabotinsky as an important issue as far back as 1920, when the Jewish Correspondence Bureau syndicated his article "Self-Administration for Palestine."<sup>5</sup> Taking into account the need for some influence from the diaspora on the growing Jewish settlement in *Eretz Yisrael*, Jabotinsky, in the essay, nevertheless demanded that the affairs of the *Yishuv* had to be run under a system of self-administration. "There should not be an administration of a number of officials from abroad and one or two local additions," he wrote, but rather "an administration of locally elected men with some additional representatives from the Zionist organization."<sup>6</sup>

Jabotinsky noted that previous attempts at self-administration had been dismissed for three reasons: 1) "National Discipline," or the claim that the *Yishuv* had to sacrifice its own interests to help further the World Zionist Organization's larger program; 2) "Demographic Considerations," or the claim that the tiny *Yishuv* did not have enough members to produce satisfactory leaders; and 3) "Fairness," or the claim that those who gave the money for the rebuilding of Palestine, should have control over how it was being used.<sup>7</sup>

In response to the first claim, Jabotinsky argued that the Jewish community in Lithuania was also to a certain extent required to follow "National Discipline" and make some sacrifices for the betterment of the Jewish people at large, but that even a 10 percent influence from abroad would be more than a significant contribution to "National Discipline" on the part of that community. Allowing for "slight modifications" for the special situation surrounding the rebuilding of *Eretz Yisrael*, Jabotinsky conceded that he would accept up to a 20 percent influence from abroad in the affairs of the *Yishuv*, "but that is about all."<sup>8</sup>

Addressing the charge that the *Yishuv* was too small to produce suitable leaders, Jabotinsky noted that "we have seen the geniuses appointed from the heights of the central Zionist organization," and that he personally knew many members of the *Yishuv* who, had they been in power, would not have committed the errors made by the current leadership. Noting that not all the *Yishuv's* leaders had to be chosen from the *Yishuv* as it had existed prior to World War I, Jabotinsky argued, "The vital point is, they should be chosen by us of the settlement, and we should be responsible for all their actions, be these good or otherwise."<sup>9</sup> Responding to the claim that those who financed the settlement should have control over how the money was spent, Jabotinsky advised his readers:<sup>10</sup>

Of course, the money for the rebuilding of Palestine must come from without, but the actual responsibility, responsibility in the matter of hunger and the protection of life, will be borne by the settlement alone. When through shortsightedness on the part of others, the unfortunate happenings during the Passover of 1919 were brought to pass, the victims were the inhabitants of Jerusalem and not those of Boston. When in a similar manner and for identical reasons the present economic crisis in Palestine was produced, it is not the young men of Philadelphia who go hungry nor the young women of San Francisco who sleep out on the sands, but the young men and young women of Jaffa and Tiberias.

Though self-administration for the *Yishuv* was of great concern to Jabotinsky, it was not the only issue to capture his attention during the early 1920s. Certainly high on his agenda was the need to counter the growing hostility in Britain toward the 1917 Balfour Declaration which had called for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Though the Balfour Declaration was supported by a number of British leaders (including a young politician named Winston Churchill), by late 1921 it had come under attack by former officials of the British Palestine Administration as well as by

the *London Times* publisher Lord William Harmsworth Northcliffe. Fearing that Palestine would become a "Second Ireland," Northcliffe ran a series of anti-Zionist editorials in the *Times* and the *Daily Mail* urging the British government to drop the Palestine Mandate like a "hot potato,"<sup>11</sup> and it was in response to these articles, that Jabotinsky wrote his now forgotten *New York Evening Post* article, "Palestine and Zionism; A Reply to Northcliffe."<sup>12</sup>

The article, which contains a number of stinging responses to Northcliffe and other critics of Zionism, is also particularly important because it illuminates just how strictly Jabotinsky held Britain to its pledge to honor the Balfour Declaration. Noting that even if Lord Northcliffe himself was called upon to head the British government, Britain would still be bound to honor the declaration. Commenting on what he referred to as the "sanctity of the British Pledge," Jabotinsky wrote that it was "on this faith we based our policy from the moment when the first Jewish legionnaire went to fight for the allied cause in Gallipoli."<sup>13</sup>

"Reply to Northcliffe" (which was later republished in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* under the title "The Justice of the Jewish Claim"), is also particularly noteworthy for its extensive discussion of the moral justification of Zionism. Writing that the Zionists wanted "civilized public opinion to know that our cause is just and that our opponents are in the wrong," Jabotinsky noted that there were two compelling aspects to the Zionist problem: 1) that the Jews had no country where they constituted a majority, which almost always led to moral or material suffering, and 2) that the allies had recently won a war for the liberation of all suffering peoples. As a result of these two facts Jabotinsky argued, Great Britain created the 1917 Balfour Declaration in favor of the reestablishment of the Jewish state, which was confirmed by the other allied powers at the 1920 San Remo conference.<sup>14</sup>

Responding to Lord Northcliffe's charges that Palestine could not support an increase in its 700,000 population, Jabotinsky argued that fully 85 percent of Palestine's soil could be cultivated, and that Belgium, a country the same size as Palestine, supported a considerably larger population of 7 million. Addressing the question as to whether injustice would be done to Palestine's Arab population, Jabotinsky recalled the earlier colonial efforts by British settlers, Lord Northcliffe's forefathers, to settle America as well as other countries. Defending such settlement, Jabotinsky wrote that colonization was just as "sacred" as self-determination, and that the two concepts did not contradict each other:<sup>15</sup>

The principle of self-determination can only be applied to peoples as entities, not to every square mile of the world's populated surface. It takes account of every nation to live, not only of the present racial composition of every province and every town. And if your statistics show you one people possessing five times more land than it is able to cultivate, while another has no land at all, then it is only just that the former should be requested to concede a fraction of its surplus so that the latter may have a homestead. This is exactly the case of the Jews and the Arabs.

Firmly convinced of the moral justness of Zionism, Jabotinsky noted the Jewish claim to Palestine while historic, was not based solely on historic rights, which he argued were only valid when supported by actual necessity. "When this is the case," he wrote, "the historic right becomes at once a factor of supreme magnitude; and there is no more striking example of historic connection between a race that lost its land and a country severed from its people than the connection between Israel and Palestine." This connection he declared, was recognized by the conscience of all the civilized peoples of the world and was one of the most widely known facts of history.<sup>16</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, Jabotinsky was often criticized by members of the Jewish intelligentsia for his early and harsh opposition to Communism and class war.<sup>17</sup> Though his role in the struggle against the now discredited Communist ideology is considerable, it must be said that his opposition to Marxism was not because of any lack of sympathy for the working classes, but rather because of a sense of respect for the historic role of the Jew as a merchant. While Jabotinsky developed this and other socioeconomic theories in a number of well-known essays such as "Socialism and the Bible"<sup>18</sup> and "Social Redemption,"<sup>19</sup> nowhere else does he dwell on the historical role of the Jewish trader as in his forgotten 1930 essay, "Shall the Jewish Middleman be Spared."<sup>20</sup> In this essay, which was written in a highly literary style, Jabotinsky expounded on the necessity of the merchant for the economic and cultural well-being of Western civilization while also chiding the efforts of some modern Jews to "bury" the middleman. To such Jews Jabotinsky wrote, "the tradesman is unproductive; he is a middleman who robs both the producer and the consumer; a parasite, a superfluous social figure who has played no creative part in world history — in short, he is "trefe" from every standpoint. Such ideology, wrote Jabotinsky, is "bad, dangerous and stupid." It was bad he noted, because up until the 1880s, trade was the chief characteristic of the Jews in the world economy, and "it does not sound right when we ourselves condemn

our old mode of activity." The ideology was dangerous he argued, because of its effect on impressionable Jews who, becoming ashamed of their fathers' businesses, allowed important Jewish economic positions to close.<sup>21</sup>

Obviously answering Marxist critics, Jabotinsky argued that the entire development of production from beginning to end, is the result of the work of the trader, and that without him no factory could obtain any raw materials. He further wrote that spiritual culture was also a child of trade, and that astronomy, geography and even literary works like Homer's *Odyssey* were enriched by the actions of the trader, who historically is the true fighter for progress.<sup>22</sup> Though aware of the dangers of Jewish involvement in only a few sectors of economic life, Jabotinsky nevertheless advised caution in dealing with the elimination of a classic Jewish role:<sup>23</sup>

That we Jews have too many tradesmen, for whom there has for a long time not been enough place in the world economy; that it would be a good and healthy thing to increase if possible the number of Jewish land and factory workers; that in Palestine we do not need more than ten percent of traders — all this is true and indisputable. But the anti-commercial ideology, which especially for us Jews is something like a slap in the face, appears to me as a stupid and superfluous accompanying phenomenon. By the grace of God we are descended not only of a people of law-givers, prophets and conquerors, but during the past two thousand years also from a people of merchants. Today we are seeking new and wider paths for our national activities, but that doesn't mean that we must shut up our trading stalls. To do this would mean to evacuate a position. Careful!

Despite his contributions to Zionism and the rebirth of Israel, Jabotinsky is still considered an opponent by many outside of the Revisionist camp, and his writings even today, are distorted and slanted to depict him as a fascist and anti-democrat. Among the most serious of these distortions, is the claim that Jabotinsky was essentially a fascist and racist, a contention largely publicized by Professor Shlomo Avineri in a 1980 *Jerusalem Quarterly* article, "The Political Thought of Vladimir Jabotinsky."<sup>24</sup> Though the charge was challenged at the time of the essay's publication in a rebuttal essay ("Jabotinsky Distorted") by the late Dr. Israel Eldad,<sup>25</sup> and subsequently refuted in a fine essay by the Russian Literature scholar, Alice Nakhimovsky,<sup>26</sup> it is Avineri's work which is most often quoted by researchers and others looking for material on Jabotinsky,

and which has been cited by Hebrew University Professor Ehud Sprinzak, in his *The Ascendance of the Israeli Radical Right*.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, in light of such contentions, those interested in Jabotinsky's views on race and the "Aryan ideal" will be fascinated to read his 1923 essay, "The Jewish Mission, the Religious Ideals of the Jew and Aryan Compared."<sup>28</sup> Here, Jabotinsky expounded on the differences between the Jewish and Aryan religions, noting that "Judaism strives to create a godlike society, while the Aryan religions lay the stress on the breeding of the godlike individual." Demonstrating the uniqueness of Judaism, Jabotinsky noted that the Ten Commandments and the *Taryag Mitzvot* primarily deal with man's duty toward his fellow man, while the typical Aryan religions "though mindful of man's duty to man," are primarily interested in the inner purity of the individual." Expressing his theory of Christianity, Jabotinsky viewed the religion as an "amalgamation of Jewish and Aryan ideals," whose teaching of love as the regulator of social wrongs was an idea preached by all Jewish leaders from Deuteronomy to Hillel. However, he concluded, Christianity is Aryan in the stress it lays upon the inner purification of the individual, an emphasis best illustrated by the New Testament's promise of reward in future life, which Jabotinsky noted is unknown in the Old Testament. To elucidate this point, Jabotinsky presented the case of the "Hermit" or the individual who seeks to perfect himself by refraining from earthly temptations. "To Buddhism and Christianity," noted Jabotinsky, "'the Hermit' is a saint. To Judaism however, he is of little value and cannot even fulfill the Ten Commandments!"<sup>29</sup>

The Jewish mission then, according to Jabotinsky, is one of social improvement, and the way to accomplish this is to gather the collective genius of the Jewish people together in a Jewish country, rather than to spread it out through all the countries of the diaspora. In an intriguing literary analogy, Jabotinsky explained that had William Shakespeare devoted his talents to merely editing plays, he might have improved the general level of the plays of his era, but would have deprived the world of his genius. Similarly, claimed Jabotinsky, the Jewish people, if spread out through the diaspora, would raise the general cultural level of the world, while depriving the world of the "progressive genius" which would be developed if the Jews were concentrated within one country!"<sup>30</sup>

While it remains to be seen what will happen if all the Jews are concentrated within one country, one certainly does not have to wonder what Jabotinsky "might" have accomplished for the Jewish people, as his work was singularly directed towards creating a renaissance in Jewish life. There are many other forgotten and

unknown essays by Jabotinsky, and with their publication, we will learn considerably more about this Zionist leader and political thinker.<sup>31</sup>

## Notes

1. For an extensive listing of Jabotinsky's publications in all languages, see Israel Yevarovitch, *The Writings of Zeev Jabotinsky, A Bibliography* (Tel Aviv: Jabotinsky Institute, 1977).
2. While there are a number of reasons why these essays were not discovered earlier, one of the most probable is that they were written before the formation of the Revisionist party and thus were never known to Jabotinsky's followers in the subsequent party, or in Betar. Other essays which were published after the formation of the party, were probably written during Jabotinsky's trips to the United States and "lost" when the Revisionist archives were destroyed in the bombing of London.
3. *Ha'umma*, vol. 113 (Fall 1993):61-66. Since the original publication of this article, a number of parallel scholarly works on Jabotinsky have been published in English. These include Shmuel Katz, *Lone Wolf, A Biography of Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky*, vols. I and II (New York: Barricade Books, 1996); Raphaella Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every Individual A King, The Social and Political Thought of Ze'ev Vladimir Jabotinsky* (Washington, D.C.: B'nai B'rith Books, 1993); Rafael Medoff and Oscar Kraines, "Jabotinsky's Campaign in America: A Previously Unpublished Interview," *Journal of Israeli History*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 1994):223-229.
4. This author is aware that the question which is on the reader's mind is, how did "I" come to discover these essays which had for so long eluded everyone else. In general, the answer is that I checked every page of various Jewish newspapers published between 1920 and 1940, which I thought might have published articles by Jabotinsky. In some cases my research turned up nothing, in others I discovered articles which had never been cited anywhere.
5. Vladimir Jabotinsky, "Self-Administration for Palestine," *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (Montreal), November 12, 1920, p. 6.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 4 and 11.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
11. Howard M. Sachar, *The Emergence of the Middle East 1914-1924* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1969), pp. 400-401.



12. Vladimir Jabotinsky, "Justice of the Jewish Claim," *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (Montreal), May 12, 1922, p. 7. This essay will be of serious interest to those such as literary critic Hillel Halkin, who have argued that Jabotinsky's writings do not reveal how he would have responded to the current Israeli-Arab negotiations. See Hillel Halkin, "Zionism's Dark Star, Reassessing Jabotinsky's Vision," *Moment*, June 1997, p. 81.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. One of the first European intellectuals to detail the moral depravity of the Communist party was the writer Arthur Koestler, who had earlier served as Jabotinsky's secretary. It has been this author's contention that it was largely Jabotinsky's influence, and not merely a disillusionment with the Stalin-led party, that ultimately turned Koestler away from communism. See Louis A. Gordon, "Arthur Koestler and His Ties to Zionism and Jabotinsky," *Studies In Zionism* (Autumn 1991):149-168, and "Koestler Revisited," *Midstream* (March 1994):13-15.
18. Vladimir Jabotinsky, "Socialism and the Bible," *The Jewish Chronicle Supplement* (London) (January 1931):i-ii.
19. Vladimir Jabotinsky, "Social Redemption," *Our Voice* (January 1935):6-8.
20. Vladimir Jabotinsky, "Shall the Jewish Middleman be Spared?" *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (Montreal), July 18, 1930, pp. 1, 21.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 21.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
24. Shlomo Avineri, "The Political Thought of Vladimir Jabotinsky," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 16 (Summer 1980):3-26.
25. Israel Eldad, "Jabotinsky Distorted," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 16 (Summer 1980):27-39.
26. Alice Nakhimovsky, "Vladimir Jabotinsky, Russian Writer," *Modern Judaism*, vol. 7, no. 2 (May 1987):171.
27. Ehud Sprinzak, *Ascendance of the Israeli Radical Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 25-26. For a recent example of how anti-Zionist authors use Avineri to interpret Jabotinsky, see Paul Breines, *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (New York: Basic Books 1990), p. 163. For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see Louis Gordon, "Shlomo Avineri and the Defamation of Jabotinsky's Legacy," *Ha'umma*, vol. 119 (Spring 1995):363-368.

28. Vladimir Jabotinsky, "The Jewish Mission, the Religious Ideals of the Jew and the Aryan Compared," *The Jewish Tribune and Hebrew Standard* (New York), August 17, 1923, p. 1.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 1 and 15.
31. This author believes that a substantial number of additional essays by Jabotinsky as well as articles on his Zionist Revisionist movement, exist in various publications which remain to be checked by scholars.