



Benzion Netanyahu, *The Founding Fathers of Zionism*, Noble OK: Balfour Books and Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2012, 230 pp.

*Review by Yisrael Medad*

As the author of this collection of five essays makes clear, and perhaps only an author such as the late Professor Benzion Netanyahu could feel confident about making such a clarification, the volume that had appeared just two months before his passing, at the age of 102, includes his thinking on major thinkers of Zionism first published in 1937, 1938, 1941, 1944 and 1981. The collection, in its present form, was first published in Hebrew seven years ago and has now been published in English translation. If one takes into consideration the many languages of the five intellectuals whom Netanyahu discusses, analyses and summarizes, this is truly a multi-cultural effort.

Indeed, this volume is more than multi-cultural in the true sense of the term in that the author demonstrates an understanding of many aspects of the historical periods in which his heroes lived, their personal backgrounds, the enterprises in which they engaged and the circumstances which they needed to overcome, or, at the least, challenge. While Herzl and Jabotinsky were successful as organizers, the others, Leo Pinsker, Max Nordau, and Israel Zangwill, excelled in the literary arts, and all were outstanding in realms other than Zionism and its politics. They were multi-talented. And, to adopt a present-day pejorative term, they “settled” into Zionism, adapting the age-old religious vision of the “Return” to the modern paradigm of nationalism.

Herzl, of course, was the Austrian-born founder of political Zionism, author of the tract, *The Jewish State*, and the convener of the first Zionist Congress in 1897. Nordau, his fellow-traveler back from assimilation and European literary activity, was an author and social critic. Pinsker, yet a third assimilationist despite a strong Jewish personal upbringing, was a physician and in a *volte face*, founded in 1881 the Hibbat Zion movement whose mission was “support of Jewish Farmers and Artisans in Syria and Palestine”. Zangwill, the British playwright, moved from “melting pot” assimilation to Zionism and then territorialism, the locating of any land available other than what was called Palestine at the time. The fifth, Russian-born Jabotinsky, columnist, poet and journalist, created the Jewish Legion of World War I fame, defended Jerusalem during the 1920 riots but as the head of the Revisionist Movement went into opposition against Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion.

It is then no accident that Netanyahu included no representative of religious Zionism, neither of the Hibbat Zion pre-Herzlian variety, nor the Mizrahi va-

riety of Rabbis, such as Reines or Kook. Moshe Shamir made this observation at the book launch of the Hebrew edition that took place at the Jerusalem Theater. It is remarkable since Shamir who grew up and became a leader of *HaShomer HaTzair* was a product of the most secular anti-religious, stream of Zionism. Netanyahu, as he testifies in the film documentary, "Benzion" (whose premiere was cancelled because of his death), while the son of a rabbi, was not at all observant. The five figures he selected as "founders" were distinctly secular if not agnostic. They possessed the unique ability to work in both worlds--the Jewish and the universal.

What Benzion Netanyahu sees in his subjects that makes them powerfully attractive is, as he writes about Jabotinsky (p. 192), that "the masses of Jews never properly understood how unique Jabotinsky's feat was...something special and extraordinary had been achieved". Leon Pinsker, Theodor Herzl, Max Nordau and Israel Zangwill, together with Jabotinsky, are all symbols of those who could be said to have 'come back' to assist in the movement to redeem the Jew as member of more than an ethnic/religious community. That is, as a nation and to reestablish its proper place in the world.

But more than this, Netanyahu looked for the revolutionary deed, the jump-start aspect of a concept. In studying Herzl, Netanyahu notes that sovereignty was not enough. The ability to employ military power was essential (p. 82) and on the background of the Jewish reality at the turn of the twentieth-century, that was very much extraordinary. Zangwill's excellence may be found in his total commitment to Jewish existence even to the extent of championing the principle "a minority will rule the majority" (p. 176), so as to achieve independence. Pinsker drew Netanyahu's admiration in the choice he made to become a teacher in order to assure the enlightenment of the Jews, but after the pogroms of 1881, set for himself and his people the nationalist goal to be gained by self-help.

Netanyahu searched for those who possessed idealism, who could inspire the greater community. For him, these five, in one form or another, were, "historical prognosticators." Despite what could perhaps be seen as shortcomings, they broke out on behalf of the Jewish people. The private worlds of success these Jews created, while admirable in their own right, were but a pre-stage for the decision they made and the way they publicly promoted their decisions on behalf of the Jewish people. This characteristic made each a "founding father."

Netanyahu's essays encapsulate both the personal history and the public activity of his "founders." Despite the many decades that have almost all but banished the memory of most of these figures from our consciousness, he treats us to a sweep of knowledge and thought that can serve as a Zionist foundational text. At a time when Zionism is not only being pilloried and the campaign of delegitimation has reached a level that approaches open anti-Semitism, this volume could be considered a fitting testament to Netanyahu's personal approach to Jewish nationalism.

If not including a representative of religious Zionism may have reflected a personal preference, his omission of a representative of the labor/socialist stream was clearly political. More than anything, this book reflects Netanyahu's effort to reclaim the narrative of Zionism for the Jabotinsky-Revisionist school that promoted a forceful declaration of belief in a vision of a free, vital and resourceful Jewish state. This was his legacy.

YISRAEL MEDAD is Information Resources Director at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem and lectures on Zionist history.



Itamar Marcus and Nan Jacques Zilberdik, *Deception: Betraying the Peace Process*, Jerusalem: Palestinian Media Watch; 2nd edition (2012).

*Review by Asaf Romirowsky*

There are two layers of media bias when it comes to Israel. The first emanates from the West that focuses on Israel's "so called" genocidal policies which, because they are not blatantly anti-Semitic are perceived as "legitimate criticism." The second originates in the Arab-Muslim world. Its accusations are blatantly anti-Semitic and have successfully revived medieval "facts" from the blood libel to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. But, at the end of the day, both contain an essential layer of anti-Semitism.

Western media bias toward Israel has become one of the main soft power weapons for those who wish to demonize Israel in the public eye and generate negative views of Israel in order to pressure Israel to succumb to Palestinian demands. It is also a pervasive tactic employed by groups like the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS) and the accepted tactic of Palestinian political warfare against Israel, in addition to terror and the "armed struggle." It is founded on the spurious equation of Zionism with apartheid, which was endorsed by the 2001 World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa.

The accusation not only states falsely that Israel is a racist state engaged in war crimes and ethnic cleansing but also demands that international organizations and NGOs shun and isolate it as a step toward its eventual dissolution. The true nature of the BDS movement is effectively incitement to discrimination. That is anti-Semitism.

Itamar Marcus, founder and director of Palestinian Media Watch (PMW) and PMW analyst Nan Jacques Zilberdik, recently published a book entitled, *Decep-*