

# Zionism and Kaiser Wilhelm

by

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# ZIONISM AND KAISER WILHELM

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FROM the time Theodor Herzl published *Der Judenstaat* in 1896, the Zionist movement was aware of the fact that its goals could only be achieved by the help of one or more of the imperialist powers. Thus the history of early Zionism — that is, the years between 1896 and 1917 — is stamped by unremitting efforts to secure imperialist favour. Under these circumstances, differences amongst the imperialist powers were inevitably reflected in the internal discussions of the Zionist movement and in Zionist contacts with existing nations. Thus, the rivalry between Britain and Germany that was growing increasingly sharp before 1914, was mirrored in the altercations between pro-British and pro-German factions within the Zionist movement.

Theodor Herzl approached the Ottoman Sultan for support — as he did von Plehve, the Russian Interior Minister, who was notorious for his anti-Semitic policy. He also strove with particular vigour to gain the favour of German imperialism. But as his efforts remained unsuccessful, he turned to Great Britain in 1900, thereby creating, in a manner of speaking, the pro-British faction that was soon to be led by Chaim Weizmann.

The founders of Zionism believed that they were offering the powers whose support they were trying to enlist, an attractive quid pro quo for their claim on Palestine, namely the support of the evolving Zionist movement. Already in 1896, Herzl was writing frankly in *Der Judenstaat*: "If His Majesty the Sultan were to give us Palestine, we could in return undertake to regulate the whole finances of Turkey. We should form there part of a wall of defence for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism."<sup>1</sup> Herzl was thus unmistakably offering Zionism as an agent for imperial-colonial policy. He made himself even clearer during the Second Zionist Congress — held in Basel in 1898 — when he declared: "Asia is the diplomatic problem of the coming

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (The State of Jews), Cologne, 1914, p. 30.

decades... we may in all modesty perhaps recall to mind that we Zionists, whose practicality of view people like to dispute, recognized and announced as imminent the coming development of European rivalry [i.e., the imperialist struggle to divide the world] a few years before the others did.”<sup>2</sup>

At the colonial division of the world, German imperialism was a late comer. Powers like England, France and even Portugal and Belgium had long ago seized the best portions of Africa and Asia for themselves. The appetite of German imperialism was hence particularly strong. Amongst the regions that had until then escaped division were territories of the decaying Ottoman Empire; these included Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia. Already in 1888, the mighty Deutsche Bank had landed a railway concession in Turkey, and in 1890 the first trade and friendship treaty between the German Empire and the Sublime Porte was signed, initiating a process that culminated in December 1899, when the notorious agreement on the building of the Baghdad Railway was concluded. In this drive of German imperialism into the Near East, the Zionists saw an opportunity that was not to be missed.

Yet prior to the First World War, there was still another, if less important reason why the Zionist movement was inclined to be pro-German. Theodor Herzl, who had been active in Vienna as a journalist, belonged to the German-speaking world and it was in Germany and Austria that he found his first followers. In Germany around the turn of the century there lived some 600,000 citizens of the Jewish faith. In comparison with the Jews of East Europe, the German Jews were more strongly assimilated, better educated and often occupied a higher social position. They were not uninfluenced either by their chauvinistic environment which saw in Germany the leading power in Europe. This affected their view of their own role as Jews, for it was the German Jews who felt themselves called upon to be the natural leaders of Jewry. Kurt Blumenfeld, one of the leading Zionist officials of that time, wrote in his memoirs in this respect: “...as they [the Jews] in East Europe were oppressed — everything beyond the Russian border had for them the fragrance of freedom.” Then, too, the Jewish upper class in the USA came originally from Germany and remained culturally bound to it, so that the “Jewish masses felt themselves allied with Germany at the outbreak of the First World War.”<sup>3</sup>

The German colonialist drive in the Near East found expression in the first journey to the East undertaken by Kaiser Wilhelm II. From October 13 to

<sup>2</sup> *Speech*, delivered at the Second Zionist Congress in Basel (Vienna, 1898), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Kurt Blumenfeld, *Erlebte Judenfrage* (The Jewish Question Experienced), Stuttgart, 1962, p. 87.

November 24, 1898 (directly after the Second Zionist Congress) the Kaiser first visited Constantinople, and then went on to visit Palestine and Syria. To the Zionists, this must have appeared as the opportunity to secure the support of German imperialism.

Theodor Herzl attached great importance to direct contacts with both Sultan Abdul Hamid II and Kaiser Wilhelm II. Already in April 1897, during the Turko-Greek war, the German Zionists had been collecting donations for the benefit of the Turkish Red Crescent in order to awaken Turkish interest. Dr. M.I. Bodenheimer, the Zionist official, later confirmed in his memoirs that the collection was above all organized "in order to show the Sultan what valuable services we could offer to him."<sup>4</sup> Herzl had formed a committee especially for the collection, and this committee issued an appropriate appeal to the Zionist clubs. Thanks to the donations, a group of physicians was suitably equipped and then dispatched to the war zone.

In August of the same year (1897) the First Zionist Congress convened in Basel. Directly after its conclusion, Herzl was successful in obtaining an invitation from Grand Duke Friedrich von Baden, to visit the latter's castle, Schloss Mainau. The Grand Duke — a relative of the German Kaiser — was in the first place interested to know what the Zionist movement was all about. In this encounter, Herzl was successful, it was said, in arousing the Grand Duke's enthusiasm for the Zionist cause. At any rate, the Grand Duke spoke with Kaiser Wilhelm II in October 1898, just before the latter's journey to the Orient, about the Zionists' ideas. David Wolffsohn, the Cologne banker (who was later elected to succeed Theodor Herzl after the latter's death in 1904) reported the talk between the Grand Duke and the Kaiser: "The Kaiser was even said to have been ready to assume protectorate powers over the new state. He was said to have expressed the wish to receive a Zionist deputation in Jerusalem so that he could disclose this to it."<sup>5</sup>

This communication put the Zionist leaders in high spirits. They saw the goal of their hopes within their grasp, and they decided that Herzl, Bodenheimer (as representative of the German Zionists) and Wolffsohn should head for the Near East. Herzl was full of enthusiasm. In Berlin, he had already negotiated with the German Chancellor Prince Hohenlohe, and with Bernard von Bülow, the Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, and he had believed that a Jewish state in Palestine was close at hand. Bodenheimer wrote:

<sup>4</sup> Dr. M. I. Bodenheimer, *So Wurde Israel* (Thus Israel was Created), Frankfurt on the Main, 1958, p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

The German ambassador in Turkey, Marshall von Bieberstein, stands ... in high favour with the Sultan. Supposedly the difficulty lay in finding a form for the state which would guarantee the supreme rule of the Sultan... In a communication addressed to Count Eulenburg, the German Ambassador in Vienna, Herzl had compiled all points of view in order to move the Kaiser into taking up the cause in his hand... The return of the Jews to Palestine would bring culture and order into that neglected corner of the Orient. By means of the German protectorate we would arrive at an orderly state of affairs. In this letter, the Grand Duke reportedly informed Herzl that the Kaiser was full of enthusiasm for the cause.<sup>6</sup>

Herzl's enthusiasm was shared by the Zionist movement. It was believed that a Jewish state in Palestine allied with the German Empire was within their grasp. The Zionist newspaper *Die Welt* wrote on October 28, 1898 enthusiastically about "the Germany in the East which would bring a new flowering to the people of ancient Palestine."<sup>7</sup>

Yet the stay of the Zionist delegation in Constantinople somewhat dampened the high spirits. Herzl was received by Wilhelm II in Constantinople at an audience that lasted one and a half hours. Herzl used this opportunity to put his views forward but he received merely the very general reply that the Kaiser would inform the Sultan of the Zionist point of view.<sup>8</sup>

From Constantinople, the Zionist delegation travelled to Egypt by sea. From there they were to go on to Palestine in order to hold their planned meeting with the Kaiser. During the trip, Herzl commissioned Bodenheimer to work on an exposition that would be presented to the Kaiser. Bodenheimer wrote later commenting on this:

Our imagination had been urged on unchecked on account of the extraordinary event. So following the word of God in the Bible, I demanded the land stretching between the brook of Egypt and the Euphrates, as the region for Jewish colonization. In the transitional period the land would be divided into districts which would come under Jewish administration as soon as a Jewish majority was reached.<sup>9</sup>

This candid presentation of the Greater Israel concept (which to this day belongs to the programme of extreme right wing circles in Israel) did not, for tactical reasons, meet with Herzl's approval. He told Bodenheimer that the "time was not yet ripe for my [meaning Bodenheimer's] extensive thoughts;

<sup>6</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> See also Desmond Stewart, "Herzl's Journeys in Palestine and Egypt," in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, III, 3 (Spring 1974), pp. 18-38.

<sup>9</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

it would be more appropriate for the time being to create a germ cell out of which a state could grow organically. He had in mind a land company in which sovereign rights and royal prerogatives would be, to a certain extent, safeguarded. We hoped that when the Kaiser assumed power over the protectorate, these rights would show themselves to be of such value that a *chartered company* similar to that of Rhodesia<sup>10</sup> would be built on them."<sup>11</sup>

Following Wilhelm II's greeting of Herzl near the colony of Petah Tikva during a sightseeing tour, the Kaiser, while in Jaffa, received the Zionist delegation on November 2, 1898. Once more Herzl spoke out, concluding with the words: "We plan the establishment of a land company in Syria and Palestine, and we consider our cause to be so good, and so good the participation in it of those who are most magnanimous, that we request from your Majesty your gracious help in this work."<sup>12</sup>

But the Kaiser's reply must have been like a cold shower: the Zionists should go on working, for the land had room for all. A realization of the Zionist concept at that time could not have been in keeping with the concept of German Imperialism. The Foreign Office was not interested in provoking its Turkish allies into making difficulties, by supporting the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. In the eyes of German diplomacy, the disadvantages clearly outweighed the advantages of an open alliance with the Zionists.<sup>13</sup>

For Herzl, after the unsuccessful conclusion of his Palestine trip, there arose the question as to the direction the Zionist movement was now to take. Bodenheimer wrote:

Despite the failure in Jerusalem, Herzl did not want to drop the idea of a German protectorate. Already, then, Herzl represented the view that for us the question was solely whether we would come under German or British protection. Had the Kaiser leaned towards our cause, the movement would have had a German orientation. The question pressed for a decision in the near future.<sup>14</sup>

Herzl himself came to a decision soon. In 1900 he declared at the Fourth Zionist Congress, held in London, "England the mighty, England the free, will understand us and understand our aspirations. With England as starting

<sup>10</sup> In 1889/1890 the British South Africa Company founded by Cecil Rhodes gained concessions from which the British colony in present-day Rhodesia later developed.

<sup>11</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>13</sup> "Support for Zionism would not please German Christians and, it was soon evident, would anger the Sultan," according to Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

point we could be certain that the Zionist idea will grow mightier and rise higher than ever before.”<sup>15</sup> But the German Zionist leaders did not, on their part, give up their efforts to become allied with German imperialism. For this reason they also violently opposed the so-called “Uganda Plan.” The British government, under the impact of Zionist propaganda and in consideration of the usefulness of an alliance with the Zionists, had put forward the proposal that a region in Central Africa (where the state of Kenya now stands) be placed at the disposal of the Zionist movement for settlement. While Herzl advocated acceptance of this offer, wide circles of Zionist officials were opposed to it, not least among them the “German” faction which saw its connection with German imperialism wrecked if the British proposal was accepted. Thus amongst the opponents of the Uganda project at the Zionist Congress of 1903, the German Zionist leader Dr. Nossig was prominent. The project was eventually dropped.

The German Zionist leaders did not relax their efforts designed to gain support and assurances from the Imperial German Government. Thus Bodenheimer sought out Freiherr von Richthofen, the Under-Secretary at the German Foreign Office, and said to him “that it was of assured political significance for the German Empire to put the Jews of the East under an obligation to it. The opening of the Orient for the Jews would be a means whereby an element that was capable of speaking German would be siphoned out of Russia and Poland into that direction.”<sup>16</sup> (Bodenheimer was thereby using an argument that was later to be grasped enthusiastically by the representatives of German annexation policy in the Near East.) In his reply, Freiherr von Richthofen recommended, albeit non-committally, that the Zionists should turn to the *Norddeutsche Zeitung* (which was considered the unofficial organ of the German Foreign Office) to publicize their point of view.

In 1902 Bodenheimer once again submitted a memorandum to the Foreign Office. He wrote about this: “I hinted among other things at the economic advantage which would accrue to the German Empire through the Zionist settlements. The kinship with the language used by the Jews of the East [i.e., Eastern Europe, who spoke Yiddish, the language of Germany in medieval times, with Hebrew and Polish words added to it] would facilitate the establishment of trade and cultural relations. Moreover, the moral influence on the

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Josef Cohn, *England und Palästina* (England and Palestine), Berlin, 1931, p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

Jewish community and the significance of the Jews in the financial world should not be underrated.”<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly enough, the same thought appeared in a report by the Imperial German Vice-Consulate in Jaffa, dated February 29, 1912. It reads:

Since the German language is known by the Jews, even if many of them speak it in only a corrupt form, there exist between them and Germany ties that are capable of strengthening further... there are today about 100,000 Jews in the country, over 70,000 of them Ashkenazis, that is, belonging to the German-speaking world. Herein lies a strong hint not only for the German settlers in Palestine, but also for Germany's industrial and trade circles.<sup>18</sup>

This train of thought gained significance with the outbreak of the First World War. The ideologues of German imperialist policy in the Near East greeted their opportunity with enthusiasm. Hans Rohde, one of the advocates of the Baghdad railway strategy, wrote of Zionist immigration “that the fundamental thought — the creation of a new Israel in the Holy Land — has found an astonishing realization.... We Germans have every reason to be proud of this achievement. Not only were they essentially German means and German forces that created it, but it was above all German culture and the German language that has hereby been represented and cultivated in wide circles of the Orient.”<sup>19</sup> Rohde attached this fact to the demand that “in return, we who have until now strongly misjudged the wandering of the East European Jews into Palestine and given it little attention, should help them to find a new home there. In this way, we should catch three flies with one flap: we would there be serving German, Turkish and Jewish interests at one and the same time.”<sup>20</sup>

In this way, the interests of German imperialism and those of the German Zionist leaders met anew, for the German Zionists were at that time loyal Germans and faithful subjects of the Kaiser. This was illustrated in 1913, when there were altercations within the Zionist movement centred around the language of instruction for the pupils at the Jewish technical school in Haifa. The “Hilfsverein der deutscher Juden,” which sponsored the school, pleaded for German. The reason for that, according to Chaim Weizmann who demanded that Hebrew should be used, was perhaps “partly the strengthening

<sup>17</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Hans Rohde, *Deutschland in Vorderasien* (Germany in the Near East), Berlin, 1916, p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Hans Rohde, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> Hans Rohde, *op. cit.*, p. 90.



of German influence in the Middle East.”<sup>21</sup> Full of anger, Weizmann wrote: “The Germans used the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden with its system of schools as their instrument of intrigue in the Near East... England was very much behind in the general competition.”<sup>22</sup> (A compromise was finally reached when both languages were equally recognized.)

The unconditional support which the German Zionists extended to the policy of German imperialism was also underlined in May 1914, when the delegates to the conference of the “Zionist Union for Germany” meeting in Leipzig paid homage to Kaiser Wilhelm II.<sup>23</sup>

The outbreak of the First World War thus witnessed a majority of the German Zionists standing shoulder to shoulder with German chauvinists and jingoists, while the non-Zionist Central Union of German Citizens of Jewish Faith declared: “Every Jew must today do his duty.” The situation in Zionist circles also presented itself in August 1914 as follows: “Seized by the general war fever, the Jews of the German Empire (together with their Zionist leaders) passed through a kind of euphoria.”<sup>24</sup> The participation of the Zionist leaders in the general wave of German chauvinism, however, in no way meant that they had swerved from their goals. On the contrary, they were just as euphoric about their Zionism. Dr. Arthur Hantke, the Zionist official, declared a few days after the outbreak of the war, in a session held in Berlin attended by the Zionist leaders: “Zionist work must go on as if nothing had happened.”<sup>25</sup>

But something had happened; an imperialist war had broken out and the Zionists, in whichever camp they may have wanted to stand, saw their chance now to trade their support in exchange for a promise on Palestine. For the German Zionists, the outbreak of hostilities between the German and Russian Empires offered specially interesting aspects. The large Jewish population in the regions that were being fought for in East Europe — regions marked for annexation by German imperialism — entertained little sympathy for the Russian Empire with its policy of pogroms. Bodenheimer wrote: “Consequently, I thought that the imminent revolution in the East of Europe could be utilized towards a new political orientation for the Russian and Polish Jews.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> M. Weisgal and J. Carmichael, eds., *Chaim Weizmann, A Biography by Several Hands* (New York, 1963), p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error* (London: East and West Library, 1950), p. 184.

<sup>23</sup> See Gerhard Holdheim, *Politischer Zionismus* (Political Zionism), Hanover, 1964, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> *Die Zeit*, Hamburg, April 2, 1971.

<sup>25</sup> Blumenfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>26</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

Bodenheimer and the other Zionist leaders were of the opinion that the Zionist organization should set itself the task of winning the Polish and Russian Jews to cooperation with the advancing German troops. In return for this, the German government was to support the plans concerning Palestine. This attitude, by the way, corresponded with the widespread view among them that the German Zionists were called upon to lead the Jews of East Europe. The Zionist official Blumenfeld wrote in this respect: "The Polish and Russian Jews must be led by us." Then he added: "The Zionist movement is only in a statutory sense a democratic organization. In reality, the minority that is constituted by the Western Zionists should imprint its stamp on the movement."<sup>27</sup> This attitude was the Zionist variation of the famous German chauvinist slogan: "The world shall be delivered by the German character." The Zionist officials Bodenheimer, Friedmann and Motzkin themselves had been meeting since the outbreak of the World War with the purpose of effecting Zionist-imperialist collaboration. As a result of contacts with the (German) Foreign Office, the latter had set up a department called "Abteilung für Jüdische Fragen" (Division of Jewish Affairs).<sup>28</sup> Nahum Goldmann who later became president of the World Jewish Congress was then, though of Russian birth, living in Germany and joined the propaganda department at the instigation of Dr. Ernst Jaeckh.<sup>29</sup> This Division was later turned into a permanent department at the Foreign Office, under the direction of Professor Moritz Sobernheim.<sup>30</sup> Goldmann stood, as one of the officials in this department, in constant contact with the Zionist officials Dr. Arthur Hantke and Kurt Blumenfeld, for, he declares in his memoirs, "I tried within the framework of my activity to concern myself with the Palestine question."<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, the Berlin leadership of the Zionists had already made contact with a committee formed by the German monopolist Mannesmann (who became prominent owing to his interests in North Africa and the Arab world). Mannesmann had worked on the draft of an appeal to be directed at the Polish Jews. Bodenheimer, Friedmann and Motzkin advised the Zionists, however, to break contact with the Mannesmann committee, so that all efforts would be concentrated on people who seemed to them authoritative.

<sup>27</sup> Blumenfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> Nahum Goldmann, *Staatsmann ohne Staat* (Statesman Without A State), Cologne/Berlin, 1970, p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> Goldmann, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>30</sup> Goldmann, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>31</sup> Goldmann, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

They worked out their own draft which Motzkin then translated into Yiddish and submitted to Herr von Bergen, Counsellor on Polish Questions at the Foreign Office. This draft later became the basis for an appeal that was issued by the German general staff.

By this time, the leading German Zionist officials had set up a Committee for the Liberation of Russian Jews whose chairman was the bank director Franz Oppenheimer and whose deputy was Bodenheimer. Dr. Arthur Hantke was appointed to take charge of liaison work between the committee and the Zionist executive. The committee established itself in an office at Behrenstrasse in Berlin, and diligent activity ensued. Beside the support lent to the annexation plans of German imperialism in East Europe and the endeavours to win official approval for the Palestine project, relations with the World Zionist Organization had also to be maintained amidst the conditions of war. Since 1911 the Zionist leadership had had its seat in Berlin. But for the duration of the First World War a Zionist liaison office was established in Copenhagen, the capital of neutral Denmark, in order to maintain the connection between the Zionists on both sides of the front. The German authorities quickly recognized the advantages of utilizing the international connections of the Zionist movement. Bodenheimer wrote: "The connection with the Foreign Office secured some advantages for the Zionists. Thus I was able to provide some officials of the Central Zionist office with passports to Copenhagen.... Also it made it possible for me to send Dr. Mossinsohn, the director of the Hebrew secondary school in Tel Aviv, back to Palestine."<sup>32</sup>

The leading men of the German Empire allowed the Zionists such favours because they considered them likely to yield political rewards internationally. Many Jews had emigrated to the USA and it was hoped that they would have a considerable influence on US policy.<sup>33</sup> "Already at the beginning of the war, the Imperial General Staff had planned to send a 'Mission of Jewish Scholars' to the United States with the intention of informing the American Jews about Germany."<sup>34</sup> But as this project did not materialize, the Imperial Navy took it over. Bodenheimer reported

... that at the instigation of von Meyrowitz, who was an agent of Nord-deutsch Lloyd, the Imperial Navy wanted to send a trustworthy man to

<sup>32</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>33</sup> Similar efforts were meanwhile underway in Britain, where the pro-British Zionists were attempting to persuade Foreign Secretary Balfour that a British declaration on the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine would stimulate American Jews to work for a United States entry into the war.

<sup>34</sup> *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, Zurich, March 21, 1971.

North America, in order to make the Jews living there well-disposed towards the Axis powers. Since this corresponded with our intentions, we immediately contacted Dr. Jaeckh of the Imperial Navy<sup>35</sup> and arranged with him to dispatch two of our trustworthy men to North America. The expenses of this delegation were assumed by the Imperial Navy....<sup>36</sup>

This Zionist, but above all pro-German propaganda enterprise, cost the Imperial Navy no less than 20,000 gold marks.

A part of the German Zionist leadership, however, felt itself called upon to limit its pro-German activity, after the "Higher Action Committee" of the Zionists in Copenhagen had spoken out against the work of the Zionists in the Committee for the Liberation of Russian Jews. The Higher Action Committee had demanded strict neutrality, especially since the decision in favour of either England or Germany demanded by Herzl had up to this point not yet been taken. A similar reminder to remain neutral also went to Zionist leaders active in England (Chaim Weizmann and Jabotinsky.) In this connection, a reference should be made to a corresponding discussion of leading Zionists that took place in Paris in the summer of 1913, and which was also inconsequential. There, Max Nordau, Herzl's friend and one of the leaders of Zionism, recommended turning to England, while Bodenheimer advocated a pro-German policy. Finally, Nordau declared that England would "never allow the German Empire to have a foothold in Asiatic Turkey, as this would threaten the route to India."<sup>37</sup>

Many of the active Zionists, however, did not feel themselves bound to the Copenhagen bid for neutrality. In England, Chaim Weizmann worked closely with the British government and rendered good services in armament production, in the hope of receiving a promise on Palestine. In Egypt, in the winter of 1915, Josef Trumpeldor organized the first Jewish military contingent in the British army — the "Zion Mule Corps" which saw service in the British attack on the Dardanelles. Mid-way through the First World War, Vladimir Jabotinsky began his efforts in London to set up a Jewish Legion, while in Palestine itself, the leaders of the Zionist movement had, at the outbreak of the First World War, reached "an understanding with the Turkish government to set up a Jewish Legion in order to protect the country. Two representatives of these circles — Yitzhak Ben-Zvi [who later became President of Israel] and David Ben-Gurion [who later became Prime Minister for many years] proposed in

<sup>35</sup> This is clearly an error by Bodenheimer; Dr. Jaeckh was active in the Propaganda Division of the Foreign Ministry. See Nahum Goldmann, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>36</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>37</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

November 1914 to the Turkish Commander-in-Chief the setting up of a Jewish volunteer legion with the stipulation that this legion would remain in the country for the duration of the war, and would only defend its population in case of attack. The proposal was accepted by the military council.”<sup>38</sup> The paragraph referring to “defence in case of attack” could only have in mind the British troops advancing on Palestine. Yet as the Turkish authorities later withdrew their consent and moved against the founders of the legion after it had already been deployed in its positions, Ben-Zvi and Ben-Gurion fled to America where they once again advocated the formation of a Jewish Legion, but this time to fight alongside England against the Turks!

In reply to the formation of the Jewish Legion in England, Jamal Pasha, the Turkish Commander-in-Chief in Syria and Palestine, issued an evacuation order to the Zionist settlers in Palestine. This development again caused the German Zionists to be active in protecting the Zionist colonies in Palestine. “The only means of preventing a catastrophe,” wrote Nahum Goldmann, “was through drastic intervention by Germany.” General attempts by German circles in Constantinople remained unsuccessful... “until finally Kaiser Wilhelm himself was persuaded to seek the cancellation of the order. That helped.”<sup>39</sup>

Many German Zionist leaders were not committed to the notion of neutrality. However, the German military leadership was now much less interested in Palestine than in the Russian front. Bodenheimer, along with several other Zionists, travelled to the Eastern Front, where they were received in “Upper East Headquarters” by General Ludendorff and later also by Field-Marshal von Hindenburg. Bodenheimer wrote about the meeting that Ludendorff

... showed lively interest in our endeavours. He welcomed our intention to inform the Jewish population of the political situation and of the prospect of an improvement in their position in the case of the axis powers achieving victory. To him we proposed sending our trustworthy men into the occupied territory so that understanding between the military and the Jews would be facilitated<sup>40</sup> [and, it must be pointed out, to disseminate Zionist propaganda to the East European Jews.]

This collaboration between the Zionist leaders and Ludendorff was not without its piquant element. Ludendorff had already in the late autumn of

<sup>38</sup> David Ben Gurion, *Chaluzischer Zionismus oder Revisionismus* (Halutz Zionism or Revisionism), Berlin, 1934, p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> Nahum Goldmann, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>40</sup> Bodenheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

1914, in his capacity as general Chief of Staff of the Eastern Command of the Imperial Armies, issued an appeal in the Yiddish language "to my dear Jews in Poland." In this appeal he promised that the German armies would bring them freedom.

Ludendorff had soberly calculated the effect of this proclamation. In the first place, he aimed at driving a wedge into the population of the occupied territories especially by raising the status of the Jews, so that the oppressive policy of the German military authorities would be facilitated. In addition, he entertained the hope that the Yiddish language would be of service to German occupation policy.<sup>41</sup>

Yet Ludendorff, this partner of the German Zionists (his name was, at the wish of the German military Rabbi Rosensack, lent to a Jewish people's kitchen in Kowno), was also one of the most notorious German anti-Semites. He was an early friend and follower of Adolf Hitler and actively participated in Hitler's putsch in Munich in November, 1923. Ludendorff, whose anti-Semitic pseudo-theories were to become part and parcel of German fascism, wrote four years after the conclusion of the First World War such nonsense as the following: "The top leadership of the Jewish people worked hand in hand with France and England. They saw the coming war as the means by which they could realize their political and economic aims... to this end the Jewish people needed the defeat of Germany."<sup>42</sup>

The military failures of German troops in the East, however, bestowed upon the Zionist helpers of Ludendorff no successes worth the name. Meanwhile the German government refused to make a commitment to the Zionists on Palestine.

In contrast, the Zionists working in England were more successful. On November 1, 1917, the Balfour Declaration was issued and the orientation of the Zionist movement was henceforth decided. The man responsible was Chaim Weizmann who had endowed his pro-British leanings with arguments similar to the proposals Herzl had made to Wilhelm II and the German Zionists.

We can reasonably say that should Palestine fall within the British sphere of influence, and should Britain encourage a Jewish settlement there, as a British dependency, we could have in twenty to thirty years a million

<sup>41</sup> Walter Mohrmann, *Antisemitismus* (Anti-Semitism), Berlin, 1972, p. 93.

<sup>42</sup> Erich Ludendorff, *Kriegführung und Politik* (Warfare and Politics), Berlin, 1922, p. 73.

Jews out there, perhaps more; they would develop the country, bring back civilization to it and form a very effective guard for the Suez Canal.<sup>43</sup>

The Balfour Declaration embarrassed both the pro-German Zionists and the German government. Weizmann later declared:

The German government, on the other hand, was deeply distressed that the British government should get the better of it. It called our representatives in Germany together and tried to explain to them that the German government would have eventually done the same thing, but that it could not because of its alliance with Turkey, which compelled it to move slowly in the matter.<sup>44</sup>

On January 5, 1918, the German Foreign Minister in Berlin transmitted to the members of the Zionist executive stationed in Berlin, Professor Otto Warburg and Dr. Arthur Hantke, an official explanation which read: "With regard to the endeavours of the Jewish community and of the Zionists in particular, we welcome... particularly the intention of the Imperial Ottoman government to promote a flourishing of Jewish settlement in Palestine through the safeguarding of free emigration and settlement, within the country's absorptive capacity. The imperial Ottoman government, which has constantly proved its friendly attitude towards the Jews, allows them regional self-rule and the free development of their own culture in accordance with the country's laws."<sup>45</sup>

This declaration was merely an attempt to escape embarrassment, and remained far behind the Balfour Declaration. At the Gaza front, the Turkish troops and the German contingents were on the retreat and the German *dream of imperialist sway* in the Orient was no more. There was no visible reaction on the part of the German Zionists to the declaration of the German Foreign Ministry. The time was past when such Zionist declarations as the following were made: "I understand Zionism as being above all one of the great European movements of expansion.... We see the future of the Turkish Empire as being with the future destiny of Germany."<sup>46</sup>

As a result of the defeat of German imperialism in the First World War, the pro-German faction in the Zionist movement lost its former influence and was superseded by the pro-British elements. When in 1920 a rally following

<sup>43</sup> Letter of Weizmann in November 1914, quoted in *Weizmann, A Biography by Several Hands*, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>44</sup> Chaim Weizmann, *Reden und Aufsätze* (Speeches and Essays), Berlin, 1937, p. 285.

<sup>45</sup> *Jüdische Rundschau*, January 11, 1918, quoted in Josef Cohn, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>46</sup> Alfons Paquet, *Die Jüdischen Kolonien in Palästina* (The Jewish Colonies in Palestine), Weimar, 1915, pp. 6, 7.

the annual Zionist conference in London was held and addressed by Lord Balfour, Weizmann, Lord Rothschild and Max Nordau, Bodenheimer expressed his regret when he wrote: "Even on this occasion, the German Zionists were excluded. Otherwise it would have been appropriate to let Professor Warburg, who was president of the World Zionist Organization, speak." Laconically, Bodenheimer added: "Nordau stressed in his speech the political and military significance of the Jewish state in regard to the security of the Suez Canal."<sup>47</sup>