

Jewish Nationalism

Nationalism was a major force for independence and unification during the mid-1800s. But nationalism did not only affect countries, it also affected people. The Jews were being persecuted in many countries for hundreds of years. Pogroms and anti-Semitism were reoccurring themes in many countries as well. The need for change was starting to grow for the Jewish people and it started with one man, Theodor Herzl.

Herzl first encountered the anti-Semitism that would shape his life and the fate of the Jews in the twentieth century while studying at the University of Vienna. Later, during his stay in Paris as a journalist, he was brought face-to-face with the problem.

In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was unjustly accused of treason, mainly because of the prevailing anti-Semitic atmosphere. Herzl witnessed mobs shouting “Death to the Jews” in France, the home of the French Revolution, and resolved that there was only one solution: the mass immigration of Jews to a land that they could call their own. Thus, the Dreyfus Case became one of the determinants in the genesis of Political Zionism.

Herzl concluded that anti-Semitism was a stable and immutable factor in human society, which assimilation did not solve. He mulled over the idea of Jewish sovereignty, and, despite ridicule from Jewish leaders, published *The Jewish State* in 1896. Herzl argued that the essence of the Jewish problem was not individual but national. The Jews are one people, he said, and their plight could be transformed into a positive force by the establishment of a Jewish state with the consent of the great powers. He saw the Jewish question as an international political question to be dealt with in the arena of international politics. He started a plan called Zionism. Zionism is a political movement and ideology that supports a homeland for the Jewish People in the Land of Israel, where the Jewish nation originated over 3200 years ago and where Jewish kingdoms and self-governing states existed at various times in history.

Jewish reaction to his plan was mixed. Many Jews rejected it as too extreme, although there were those who responded with enthusiasm and asked him to head what was to become the Zionist movement. He succeeded in convening the first Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, August 29-31, 1897. The congress established the World Zionist Organization to help create the economic foundation for the proposed Jewish state. Herzl was elected president of the organization and chaired the first six Zionist congresses. He spent much of his time in his remaining years meeting with world leaders, both Jewish and non-Jewish, trying to enlist financial and political support for his dream of a Jewish state. He died in 1904 before his dream could become reality. In 1949 his remains were transferred to a mountain in western Jerusalem, which became Mount Herzl, and is today a major military cemetery.

1. What were two reasons Jews wanted their own home state?
2. What was the Dreyfuss Affair?
3. Define Zionism.
4. What was the purpose of the World Zionist Organization?

The Balfour Declaration

The Jews have been forced from their homeland by a number of different peoples. The area known as Palestine was considered to be their “promised land”, but was in the hands of the Muslim Palestinians. While a few Jews stayed in the region, most of the Jews moved around Europe and other places in the world without a homeland.

During WWI, Zionists or Jewish nationalists, living in Britain convinced Arthur Balfour that a Jewish homeland in Palestine was desirable and just. Balfour was the British foreign secretary and in 1917 he issued the Balfour Declaration. The declaration explicitly stated the right for a Jewish homeland in Palestine for Jews, but also stated that this in no way should displace Palestinians who already live there.

Foreign Office

November 2nd, 1917

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

"His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely, Arthur James Balfour

In 1920 Britain gained control of Palestine as a mandate from the League of Nations. They planned to make good on the declaration, but this caused a lot of problems. The Jews began streaming into Palestine because it was going to be split between the two groups. The number of Jews emigrating to Palestine increased steadily and caused Palestinians to become uneasy. From 1917-1939 hundreds of thousands of Jews left their countries and went to Palestine.

This was a temporary situation. The White Paper of 1939, also known as the *MacDonald White Paper* after Malcolm MacDonald, the British Colonial Secretary who presided over it, was a policy paper issued by the British government under Neville Chamberlain in which the idea of partitioning the British Mandate of Palestine was abandoned in favor of an independent Palestine governed jointly by Arabs and Jews. The Jews finally received their own home state in 1948 when the United Nations created two Palestines, one for Muslims and one for Jews.

1. What was the Balfour Declaration?
2. Why did the Jews want their own homeland?
3. What was the White Paper of 1939?

The May Laws: Russia, 1881

(1) As a temporary measure, and until a general revision is made of their legal status, it is decreed that the Jews be forbidden to settle anew outside, of towns and boroughs, exceptions being admitted only in the case of existing Jewish agricultural colonies.

(2) Temporarily forbidden are the issuing of mortgages and other deeds to Jews, as well as the registration of Jews as lessees of real property situated outside of towns and boroughs; and also the issuing to Jews of powers of attorney to manage and dispose of such real property.

(3) Jews are forbidden to transact business on Sundays and on the principal Christian holy days; the existing regulations concerning the closing of places of business belonging to Christians on such days to apply to Jews also.

(4) The measures laid down in paragraphs 1, 2, and 3 shall apply only to the governments within the Pale of Jewish Settlement [that is, they shall not apply to the ten governments of Poland].

1. What is the purpose of the May Laws?

The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel

The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.

In the year 5657 (1897), at the summons of the spiritual father of the Jewish State, Theodore Herzl, the First Zionist Congress convened and proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national rebirth in its own country. This right was recognized in the Balfour Declaration of the 2nd November, 1917, and re-affirmed in the Mandate of the League of Nations which, in particular, gave international sanction to the historic connection between the Jewish people and to the right of the Jewish people to rebuild its National Home.

The catastrophe which recently befell the Jewish people--the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe--was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by re-establishing in Israel the Jewish State, which would open the gates of the homeland wide to every Jew and confer upon the Jewish people the status of a fully privileged member of the community of nations.

This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State.

Accordingly we, members of the People's Council, representatives of the Jewish Community of Israel and of the Zionist Movement, are here assembled on the day of the termination of the British Mandate over Israel in 1948 and, by virtue of our natural and historic right and on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel, to be known as the State of Israel.

1. What reasons were given to prove that the Jews need their own state?
2. List the steps taken to get their own state?