

# THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN ZIONISM

216 *Must Engage in Vital Activities if it is to Be Living Force*

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THE merits of Zionism in the United States, in all its manifestations, are inestimable. But organized American Zionism does not match the size, capacity and world importance of Jewry in the United States or the very high degree of its practical devotion, emotional attachment and constructive service to Israel. Why this should be so is a matter for an historical analysis which need not be undertaken at this stage. The fact that this position obtains must be faced, and faced squarely.

Hadassah is an exception to this general proposition. (So is the Pioneer Women's Organization in its own sphere.) But this special position of Hadassah and its splendid record of practical work for Israel do not in themselves begin to solve the problem of the future of Zionism in the United States, even in the field in which Hadassah's position is supreme.

There is one elementary question: Can the American Zionist Movement as a whole, or any of its constituent parts, recruit new members on a wide scale from the large numbers of Jews not hitherto associated with organized Zionism? More particularly, can organized Zionism make an effective appeal to the younger generation?

If the answer to this question is in the affirmative, that is, that new and younger people can indeed be attracted, then the question is why such effort is not undertaken, or, if undertaken, why it is not successful.

## Parties in the Diaspora

This question as to new membership leads to another. Does the existing party structure of the Zionist Movement in the Diaspora attract newcomers or is it a barrier? This question has to be examined dispassionately without any preconceived bias resulting from loyalty to any particular party.

There may be an American

Jew who is ready to accept the Zionist approach to the meaning of Judaism and of Jewish history, and is anxious to develop a more purposeful connection with Israel than that which results from a contribution to the U.J.A., from the buying of bonds and from an occasional visit to Israel. Must he be obliged in addition, to acknowledge himself as a Zionist, to determine as well his ideological stand in terms of party affiliation? Why should this be so absolutely necessary today? Why should an additional obstacle be put in his way? Does not the fact that you cannot just become a Zionist, but must decide beforehand to what particular brand of Zionism you wish to belong, serve as a deterrent to joining?

There are three possible answers to these questions. The first is that the issue is not worth bothering about, since, in any case, whether the movement stays federal or becomes unitary, its chances of attracting new recruits are very slight indeed. Such an answer would be part of a general negative appraisal of the situation.

The second answer may be that, far from being an obstacle, the existence of certain party organizations within the Zionist Movement provides rooms for its expansion. Some parties may claim, possibly correctly, that by virtue of their ideology, or of their more intimate identification with the constructive effort in Israel, they stand a better prospect than others of gaining new members or of attracting wider circles into their fold — a prospect which they would forfeit if they were to merge and to dissolve in an all-embracing Zionist organization, and to obliterate their distinctive individualities. If this is the case, those parties are entitled to every possible support. If they succeed, they will not be gaining ground at the expense of other organizations, but will be registering new conquests for Zionism as a whole.

The third answer is that

party affiliation as a condition precedent to the enrolment of anyone as a Zionist is an obstacle to the growth of the movement, and a completely unnecessary one at that. In other words, the party structure is a handicap to the movement's survival and revival, and the sooner the parties are abolished in the Diaspora, the better for the cause of Zionism.

It is not for me at this juncture to take a definite stand on this crucial issue, but the issue is there, and it must be faced with an eye to the future and not to the past. It is inconceivable to me that new recruits should be forced, so to speak, into a party strait-jacket for which they have no use. Even if the existing parties are not called upon to dissolve and merge with one another, a framework must be devised for new non-party Zionists within the scope of the movement as a whole. In the particular case of the United States, such a framework can and should be created under the auspices of the American Zionist Council.

## Collective Affiliation

What applies to individual enrolment holds good for collective affiliation. Here I refer to what I have already written about the possible readiness of Jewish groups outside the Zionist Movement to associate themselves with it in any form that may be found feasible and constructive. If such affiliation proves practical at a national level, well and good. If it is possible only at the world level, that is, with the World Zionist Organization or with the Zionist Congress, no question of narrowly conceived local or sectional prestige should be allowed to stand in its way. On the contrary, it should be the bounden duty of every Zionist organization to do whatever it can to make such an association possible and fruitful.

Underlying these problems of either personal enrolment or collective affiliation is a deeper question. Why should a non-Zionist Jew become a Zionist today? Supposing he is a good Jew and a fervent supporter of Israel, but is not a member of any Zionist organization, why should he become one? Or, for that matter, why should a non-Zionist Jewish organization, which is fully prepared to assist Israel, associate itself with the Zionist Movement? Would they become thereby more intensely Jewish in their thinking or action, or at least more Israel-minded? What is there in the programme and activity of the Zionist Organization as such — apart from those organizations which engage in direct and practical work for Israel — which holds out to them a promise of deeper satisfaction or of higher fulfilment in terms of their Jewish life?

The question can be put

differently and perhaps more pointedly. Assuming there is not much practical chance of inducing masses of Jews to join the Zionist Organization as individuals, or of securing the association with it of important extra-Zionist groups, need that mean the end of the Zionist Movement, its gradual shrinkage and eventual disappearance from the scene of Jewish history, as the present generation of Zionists dies out and no younger generation arises to take its place? I do not think it should. Provided there is only a limited influx of younger members, there is still a vital task for a live and vigorous Zionist Movement to perform. It all depends on its capacity to radiate its influence outside its ranks, to permeate masses of Jews with its spirit, and to make its message theirs. To do that it need not necessarily expand, however much its numerical expansion is in itself desirable.

It must be a living force. To be such a force it must engage in activities that are vital at the time.

This is the second of three instalments of an article by Mr. Sharett taken from an address he delivered in New York in November. The first instalment appeared on Friday.