

Why Most American Jews Do Not Favor Zionism

Their Allegiance to This Country Is the First Reason, and They Object to a Union of Church and State in Palestine or Elsewhere

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EX-PRESIDENT TAFT in a recent article expressed a doubt as to the wisdom of forming a Jewish State. It was evident to me when I read the article that he had received his inspiration from American Jews who did not believe in the Zionist movement to establish an independent Jewish nation in Palestine. Similarly, I have been impressed with the idea that possibly President Wilson's attitude in favor of a Jewish State is due to the fact that some of his closest friends are avowed Zionists. They undoubtedly impressed their views upon the Chief Executive.

I doubt whether the President is familiar with the other side of the picture, and plans are now under way to present this other side. When the President returns to the United States a committee of American Jews, representing every section of the country and every walk of life, will without delay seek an opportunity to appear before him. They will endeavor to convince the President that most of the Jews of America are thoroughgoing Americans whose interests and devotion are unequivocally and everlastingly with this Government. They are willing to give all they have, even to life itself if need be, for the United States. They revere its flag and its institutions; they owe no allegiance, and desire to owe no allegiance, to any other country in the world. This is their Zion, and they feel that a so-called Jewish homeland in Palestine would be a hindrance and not a benefit to Jewry.

That it would be a hindrance, in my opinion, is made evident in several ways:

First—It creates a divided allegiance, as between our country and its Stars and Stripes and Zion with its white flag with the blue star. The Zionists, even in this country, are bent upon following their flag. The real American Jew knows but one flag, the Stars and Stripes. The American Jew sings "The Star-Spangled Banner" as his national anthem. The Zionist sings "The Hatikvah" as his.

Second—The Zionist doctrine is in conflict with our own free institutions. The Zionists believe in the foundation of a Government which shall embrace both Church and State. That is not in keeping with the trend of modern statecraft anywhere. In that respect Zionism is decidedly reactionary. Besides, the Jews of Palestine are a small minority of the population. Will the other people who live there consent to domination by this minority?

Third—There is the practical objection—against the huddling together in a confined territory of enormous numbers of the Jewish people. As every one knows, Palestine is small; it could never support the millions of Jews who live in countries where Jewish persecution is a matter of common occurrence. That huddling together has had a baneful effect in Russia, Rumania, Galicia, and Poland. The result would be a continuance of these disadvantages in the proposed new home.

Fourth—The greatest danger to the Jews in all those countries where they are on an entire equality with every other class of citizens is that, with the establishment of a separate Jewish State, they would be looked upon as aliens where today they are respected citizens. They would frequently be told to go to their own country, Palestine, by those agitators and fanatics who have a hatred of the Jew in their hearts. In fact, I have had a number of letters recently which stated the opinions of the writers. They suggested that it would be a good thing if the country got rid of the Jews.

This whole question, as raised by the proposal of a separate Jewish State, is much more serious than appears on the surface; and now, before a final decision

is reached, is the time to face the issue squarely. First, let us look at the Jew from the historical standpoint. The Jews were scattered at the time Titus destroyed Jerusalem, in 70 A. D. The Jew then found a home in practically every country in the world. After Constantine adopted Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire, the persecution of the Jews began and has continued more or less intermittently in various countries down to the present and yet the Jew is always willing to give his life to the country in which he finds a home.

Some years ago I was in Prague, the capital of Bohemia. In the old synagogue of that city, which in the past has witnessed many persecutions of the Jews, I saw a flag that had been presented to the Jewish congregation for its valiant assistance at the siege of Prague, when the Turks were defeated by the combined efforts of Christians and Jews. Of course, the expulsion of the Jews from England in the thirteenth century and their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 are well-known stories. During all the centuries that have elapsed since the recognition of Christianity as a State religion the followers of the Jewish faith, as I have stated, have been more or less persecuted in practically every country except the United States of America.

Further, I often feel that if American ministers of the Gospel would explain that the crucifixion of Christ was not a punishment inflicted by the Jews, but was a Roman punishment, much of the misunderstanding regarding the people of the Jewish faith would be obliterated. Everybody who has studied the history of the Jews knows that they never crucified any one by way of punishment. Their method of inflicting the death sentence was by stoning. Jesus claimed to be the King of Judea. That country was a Roman province, with a Roman Proconsul at the head of the Government. The letters that were supposed to have been fixed to the cross represented the words, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of Judea." It was treason to claim to be King of a Roman province,

and therefore the Romans executed by crucifixion the individual who claimed the kingship of their province.

The Jews were invited to Russia to escape persecution, but from the first the Jews in Russia—and this applies with equal force to Poland and Rumania—were oppressed and persecuted. There was one way alone by which the Jew could secure immunity in those countries. He could buy it by bribing the Government officials. He soon discovered that if he hoped for peace for himself and his family he must be in a position to pay certain amounts of money to the corrupt officials, as the price for exemption from molestation. Therefore he felt it incumbent upon himself to become a money-grubber, and he was not particular, frequently, as to how he became the possessor of money. He charged exorbitant rates of interest; he became a smuggler; he became addicted to petty crimes. But I have always had a great deal of sympathy for those people, because to no small extent they became what their Christian neighbors made them.

In our own day we have repeatedly received news of pogroms, or massacres, which brought a shudder of horror into every human

heart. The Zionists are desirous of returning these Jews, the victims of persecutions in our own day, to the original homeland of the Hebrews. The American type of these Jews is found on the east side in New York, and in the ghettos of all our large cities that have a considerable Jewish population. I frankly assert they have never been been a self-governing people, and, to my mind, it would be some years before they would become self-governing. I am just as anxious as any Zionist to prevent persecution of my co-religionists or the persecution of any other race of men, but I must repeat that I do not believe that Zionism will prove the panacea that its advocates expect. And if the proposed Jewish State should turn out to be a failure the position of the Jews would not be improved.

Here in the United States we have enjoyed the blessings of civil and religious

liberty since the birth of the republic. We are as much a part of the United States as the followers of any other faith. The history of these United States is as dear to us as anybody. In the war just closed thousands of my co-religionists came gladly to the colors of our country to fight for the rights of this nation. They laid down their lives on many a field. The history of the "lost battalion," which was made up largely of east side pushcart men, trousers makers, and butonhole sewers, is as bright a page of courage and intrepidity as any of our war. They had thoroughly imbibed the spirit of American institutions. They proved themselves good Americans. They undoubtedly will want to live and die Americans.

I know that I voice the sentiment of the overwhelming number of Jews in this country when I say unreservedly we are content to live here and to die here; that we intend that this country shall always be our homeland and that of our children. The latter feel as strongly about this as we their elders do.

The percentage of American Jews that would want to emigrate to Palestine is so small in comparison with our number in this country that it is a negligible quantity. I suppose anti-Semitism will continue to exist after all of us of the present generation are dead and gone, and the anti-Semite, if the Jewish homeland in Palestine should be founded, would constantly insist that we Jews are simply sojourners in the United States; that they expect us to return to Palestine; that therefore we are a species of aliens—and it would not take long to make the expression read "undesirable alien." Here is the danger I have previously referred to. I feel that many of my coreligionists have similar views on this subject, and I have reason to believe that a large proportion of the Jews of England, France, and Italy feel the same way about it.

To my mind there is a better solution of the Jewish question. The "Pale of Settlement" in every country where one exists should be abolished. That term comes from Russia. When the Jews were invited to Russia they were confined to what is known as the "Pale of Settlement," a comparatively narrow strip of country inside the Russian frontier. The rulers of that benighted country seem to have designed that should Russia be invaded the Jewish population, which has always been considered alien, would literally be a buffer between the enemy and the citizens of Russia. If, on the other hand, Russia should do the invading, the territory occupied by the Jews would be the first crossed by the foraging armies of Russia. This actually happened in the recent war. Not only should the "pales of settlement" be abolished, but the ghettos everywhere should also be obliterated. The Jews should be permitted to settle in any part of any country without hindrance or molestation. Their neighbors everywhere would find them kind and considerate citizens of the country, the city or the community in which absolute civil and religious freedom was given to them. The Jew is as public-spirited and as benevolent toward the unfortunate of every creed as any class of people on the face of the earth. All he wants is a fair opportunity. He needs no especial favors. Given equal opportunity, he does not in any way or at any time become a burden on the country which emancipated him.

If I could express a fervent wish that is near my heart, with the knowledge that it would be fulfilled, I would say to non-Jews everywhere: Be tolerant, and especially tolerant to those people who gave you your Saviour, His mother and the Apostles of your faith.



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