

# Zionists All

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**M**ANY TIMES PEOPLE ask me: “Are you a Zionist?” My stock answer is: “Depends on what you mean by Zionism.”

This is quite sincere. The term Zionism can mean many different things. Like the term socialism, for example. François Hollande is a socialist. So was Joe Stalin.

Any resemblance?

WHEN I was young, there was a joke making the rounds in Germany: “A Zionist is a Jew who asks a second Jew for money in order to settle a third Jew in Palestine.” My father was such a Zionist. That was before the Nazis came to power, or course. I suspect that this definition applies nowadays to many American Zionists.

Theodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, did not really want to go to Zion, a hill in Jerusalem. He did not like Palestine at all. In the first draft of the Zionist Bible, *Der Judenstaat*, he proposed Patagonia as the preferred site of the Jewish state, because of its mild climate. Also, because it was sparsely populated after a genocidal campaign by Argentina.

When the movement turned towards Zion, Zionism still meant many different things to different people. Some wanted the country to become merely a spiritual center of the Jews. Others wanted it to become a socialist Utopia. Others wanted it to become a nationalist bastion based on military force.

The renewal of the Hebrew language, which has become such an integral part of our lives, was not a part of the Zionist project at all. Herzl, whose initial ambition was to become a great German writer, thought that we would speak German. Others would have preferred Yiddish. The fanatical desire to rejuvenate Hebrew came from below.

Even the desire to found a Jewish State was not unanimous. Some ardent Zionists, like Martin Buber, dreamed of a bi-national state, half Arab, half Jewish. “Practical” Zionists wanted to fulfill the Zionist dream by patient settlement in the country, “Revisionist” Zionists wanted to achieve at once an international “charter”.

Religious Zionists want a state based on and dominated by the Jewish religion. National-religious Zionists believe that God has sent the Jews into “exile” because of their sins, and wanted to compel God by their deeds to

send the Messiah now. Atheist Zionists declare the Jews are a nation, not a religion, and want nothing to do with the Jewish faith.

And so on.

SO WHAT does Zionism mean nowadays? The word is bandied about in Israel without much thought. Almost every party wants to be seen as Zionist and brands its adversaries as anti-Zionist—a deadly accusation in Israeli politics. Only small minorities at the edges decline the honor. Communists on one side, ultra-Orthodox on another. (These believe that it is a great sin to go back to the Land of Israel in large numbers without God's express permission.)

For many Israelis, Zionism means nothing more than Israeli patriotism. If you want Israel to exist as a “Jewish state” (whatever that means) you are a Zionist. Also, you have to believe that Israel is a part of the world-wide “Jewish people” and its leader, a kind of command-center. In up-to-date terminology: “the Nation-State of the Jewish people”.

In a deeper sense, Zionism may mean the profound belief that all the world's Jews will eventually come to Israel, either by their own free will or driven here by anti-Semitism. The inevitable victory of anti-Semitism in each and every country is taken for granted. Therefore any real or imagined anti-Semitic wave—like the present one in France—is greeted with secret satisfaction (“We told you so”).

WHERE DO I stand?

A few years before the foundation of the State of Israel, a group of young people in this country, mostly artists and writers, declared that they were not Jews, but Hebrews. They were nicknamed “the Canaanites”.

Their gospel was that the Hebrew-speaking young people in this country were not a part of the world-wide Jewish community, but a separate new Hebrew nation. They wanted nothing to do with the Jews. Some of their announcements sounded positively anti-Semitic. They conceived the Hebrew nation as a continuation—after a brief interval of a few thousand years—of the original pre-Biblical Canaanite people. Hence the nickname.

Four years later I founded another group, nicknamed the “Struggle-Group”. We also proclaimed that we were

a new Hebrew nation. But contrary to the Canaanites we acknowledged that this new nation was a part of the Jewish people, much as the Australians, for example, are a part of Anglo-Saxon culture.

We also contradicted the Canaanites on one other crucial element of doctrine. The Canaanites denied the existence of an Arab nation or nations. We not only recognized Arab nationalism, but declared that the Arab nation was the natural ally of the Hebrew nation in the creation of a new Semitic Region.

Soon after, Israel was founded. 40 years ago, in a libel case, I was asked by the judge to define my attitude towards Zionism.

In response I invented the term “post-Zionism”. The Zionist movement, I testified, is a historic movement with incredible achievements—a totally new society, an ancient-new language, a new culture, a new economy, new social models like the kibbutz and the moshav. But Zionism also performed grievous wrongs, especially to the Arab Palestinian people.

However, I said, this is history. With the creation of the State of Israel, Zionism has fulfilled its role. Israeli patriotism must replace it. Like scaffolding that is dismantled once the new building is finished, Zionism has outlived its usefulness and should be discarded.

This is my belief today, too.

THE WHOLE question has come up again now because of the decision of the new combined election list of the Labor Party and Tzipi Livni's group to call itself officially “the Zionist Camp”.

On the pragmatic level, this is a clever move. The Rightist parties almost always accuse the Left of being unpatriotic, even traitorous, a fifth column. In our case, the Left is being accused of being anti-Zionist. So it makes sense for a new combined list to call itself Zionist. Not “a”

Zionist party, but “the” Zionist party.

(By the same logic, a very moderate French party once called itself the “Radical Party”, the word “democratic” has appeared in the official names of several communist countries and the German fascists called themselves “National-Socialists”.) Being sure of their hard-core adherents, they hope the misnomer will attract votes on the fringes.

One negative practical aspect of the name of the Labor list is that it automatically excludes the Arab citizens. For Arabs everywhere, Zionism is the synonym of evil. Zionism took away their country, Zionism expelled the Arab Palestinians and carried out the Naqba, Zionism today discriminates against the Arab citizens of Israel in all spheres of life.

However, very few Arab citizens voted in the recent past for the Labor Party anyhow, and these don't care either way about Zionism as a name. All Arab political forces in the country, including the Communist Hadash party which has a number of Jewish members, united this week in a common Arab list, and are expected to harvest almost all the Arab votes.

(This, by the way, is one of the ironies of Israeli politics. The “Israel Our Home” party of Avigdor Lieberman, which some consider fascist, wanted to evict the Arabs from the Knesset. Noting that none of the three Arab lists achieved 3.25% of the votes, they enacted a law that raised the threshold for entering the Knesset to this level. As a result, all the Arab parties, which detest each other, united in a common list that may reach 10% and more.

Apart from the Orthodox, this will be the only self-styled anti-Zionist party. Everybody else, from the far-right national-religious Jewish Home party to the far-left Meretz, declare themselves staunch Zionists.

So it's quite a coup that Herzog and Livni ran away with the coveted label.