

## Descent from Mount Zion

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Looking back now, it seems that I can pinpoint accurately the instant at which my political understanding began to change from a basically Zionist to a basically anti-Zionist position. On Yom Kippur, October 6th, 1973, I was at the local synagogue in London — not from religious conviction, but as a matter of course, since I was staying at my parents' home while on vacation from Jerusalem University. At about 1 p.m., my cousin came in, and said to me, "There's some trouble in Israel. The Arabs have crossed the borders." My initial response was disbelief: "That's impossible. The borders are impregnable. The Arabs are too disunited. You must be mistaken."

It soon became clear that he was not mistaken, and that Israel was indeed fighting a full-scale war. My view then became, "Well, they'll soon learn their lesson. It will last two or three days. Israel will occupy Cairo and Damascus. They'll beg for peace on their bended knees." This view too, was soon seen to be wrong, and as the full dimensions of the war became apparent, I experienced a major emotional and intellectual crisis. Even today, I cannot recall that second week of October 1973 without getting goose-flesh and a shiver down my spine.

I had a ticket to return to Israel on October 10; it didn't occur to me not to use it. I spent the days until then in confusion, reading all that I could on the situation, suffering from shock at what was beginning to look like Israel's

first military defeat, and above all talking with people — how had it happened, why, what went wrong? It seemed impossible, in terms of all I had previously understood, for this war to be happening.

The climax of this mood came with my return to Israel. The flight, in a plane full of Israelis no less confused that I was; the landing, with lights out, in a darkened airport; the severe expressions of all the people I met as I arrived; the drive from blacked-out Tel Aviv to blacked-out Jerusalem; and the reunion with my friends — all these made a lasting impression on me. From this time, I began to re-examine all that I knew, or thought I knew, about the Middle East. Although it was still some time before I began to define myself as "anti-Zionist," it was the shock of this period, I see now, that set me on this course.

I have described these impressions, not just as personal reminiscences. My development from Zionism to anti-Zionism was not pre-ordained, and under more "normal" circumstances may well have never occurred. Also, it seems that my mental and emotional state was partly a reflection of the mood of the country, and can thus help to explain some of the developments in Israel. I originally joined a Zionist youth movement, for social reasons, in 1966. Until then, I had no commitment to Zionism as an ideal, but merely an unquestioning support for Israel. Although I was not religiously observant, I felt myself to be Jewish; most of my friends were Jews, and I wanted to join a specifically Jewish group. Since I knew people who belonged to the local group of the Federation of Zionist Youth (FZY), I went to a meeting, and decided to take part in the group's activities. So my Zionist work was a result, originally, of chance, rather than deep ideological conviction.

At first, I was a rather passive member. I would go to meetings, listen to speakers, and take part in discussions, without seeing Zionism as a central part of my life. The 1967 war barely affected me, though the later euphoria, the "drunkenness of victory," reinforced my growing Zionist beliefs, and contributed a great deal towards my later inability to analyse the Middle East situation rationally. By 1968/9, I was spending an increasing portion of my time on Zionist activity.

The Federation of Zionist Youth is significantly different from the other Zionist youth movements in Britain in that it is unashamedly bourgeois, and is not linked to any political party in Israel. Most Zionist youth groups are affiliated to Israeli parties, usually to sections of the Labour Party. Their members wear uniforms reminiscent of the early Zionist pioneers, and are trained to live in kibbutzim. It may seem odd that Jewish youngsters in Britain, most of them from middle-class backgrounds, should join such movements; this is explained by them as an example of the downward social mobility which they see as a feature of the early Zionist colonization of Palestine.

In contrast, FZY, to which I belonged, described itself as "General Zionist" (i.e., neither "Labour" nor "Religious"). Members were not required to wear uniform, nor to adopt any specific interpretation of Zionism. Although its members supported policies from the "Labour left" to the religious and nationalist right, the movement was as a whole pro-establishment, and

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former members have included Abba Eban, and Sidney Shipton, current chairman of the Zionist Federation of Great Britain.

The Federation of Zionist Youth did not follow any specific programme, but put forward as its triple aims *Tarbut* ("Culture," i.e., learning about Judaism, Israel, and Zionism), *Aliya* (emigration to Israel, a principle accepted by most Zionists, but carried out by far fewer), and fund-raising. When I first became active in FZY, the movement, under heavy pressure from the group leader sent over from Israel by the World Zionist Organization, was following the third of these aims, almost to the exclusion of the other two. My friends and I opposed this, and tried to change the movement's orientation.

Our argument was that the creation, in 1948, of the state of Israel should not be seen as the culmination of the Zionist movement. Israel was merely a tool for the implementation of the Zionist ideal, which we described as "the re-generation of the Jewish people." We opposed the interpretation of Jewish history put forward by Ben-Zion Dinur, professor of Jewish history at Jerusalem University and a former Israeli minister of education, which saw the previous 2,000 years only as a series of attempts by Jews to return to Palestine and re-create a Jewish state there — a process in which Zionism was merely the last, and ultimately successful, instrument.

- For us, Zionism was a matter of choice. The creation of Israel had not been inevitable, and Zionism was not just a tool for this creation. Instead, we argued, the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine had been a necessary stage in the Zionist scheme for ensuring the survival of the Jewish people. We saw Zionism only partly as a response to anti-Semitism and oppression. It was also a stand against what we saw as the central feature of Jewish life — the rapid assimilation to non-Jewish culture. Therefore, for us, raising money for Israel was only a minor part of the Zionist venture. The more important part was that which FZY defined as *Tarbut* — learning about the nature of Jewish existence, and proposing ways to end what we saw as the anomaly of a non-observant Jewish culture in the West. (It should be noted that I am not here arguing the merits of this position, but merely explaining my views in the years 1968/71.)

Our ideas and behaviour brought us into constant conflict with both the leadership of FZY, and the broader Zionist establishment. Of many examples, I remember one in particular. In 1969, the leadership of FZY proposed a motion to be debated at our conference, stating that "it is the duty of members of FZY to support, at all times and at all costs, the policies of the government of the day of the state of Israel." We opposed this, not just on humanitarian grounds — that Israel might do something unjust — but also on Zionist grounds — we were *Zionists*, not Israeli chauvinists, and could foresee situations in which the Israel government's view of Israel's best interest might conflict with our view of Zionism's best interest.

Our circle, which consisted of only about six to ten people, was vocal, and, for a while, influential within FZY. For all the long-term impact we made, we might as well not have bothered. FZY still exists as a pro-establishment bourgeois youth section of the Zionist Federation. But my involvement in this circle was certainly significant in the later re-assessment of my position.

I have written so far of my work against the accepted positions of FZY; but, of course, I agreed with many of the movement's ideas. In my years in FZY, I read most of the classic expositions of Zionism — Hess's *Rome and Jerusalem*, Pinsker's *Auto-Emancipation*, Herzl's *The Jewish State*, and other works. I learnt a lot of Jewish and Zionist history, and studied the political and social structure of Israel. My view of Israel as an instrument of Zionism, rather than end in itself, led me to a more critical appreciation of Israel — but it was still a Zionist appreciation. I would defend Israel to its critics, and I accepted without question its continued existence as a Jewish state. Israel might make many mistakes, but this did not lead me to reject Israel. Since I saw Israel as an expression of the Jewish people, of which I was a part, I saw it as my duty to try to correct these mistakes without "giving comfort to our enemies."

I was aware that many critics viewed Israel and the Middle East differently — but this awareness was no more than an intellectual fact. Thus, for instance, I read Uri Avneri's *Israel Without Zionists* and Maxime Rodinson's *Israel and the Arabs*, without in any way understanding them. Since I disagreed with them, they must be wrong, and my response was to ignore the central arguments of these books and to challenge every slight error or exaggeration. It was only much later that I realized the totally different outlooks of these two books, as I moved through a position similar to Avneri's of highly critical, but loyal, Zionism, to an anti-Zionist position similar to that of Rodinson. (My earlier reaction shows one of the characteristics of Zionism: all critics, from Labour party moderates to the Palestinian "rejectionists" are lumped together, and little attempt made to sort out their different arguments. Zionist critics are seen as unwitting allies of Arab extremism.)

A document which I found recently gives a striking example of this split between intellectual awareness and political understanding of an anti-Zionist position. As part of a weekend seminar which we were organizing in 1970, we decided to stage a debate between the "Israeli" and "Arab" positions. Instead of inviting Arab speakers to state their case (we had

recently faced strong criticism after inviting the Jordanian ambassador to speak at a meeting), we decided to put "the Arab case" ourselves. Quite recently, I found the notes I had made at the time. I denounced Israel as a racist and colonial state, described the way in which Arabs were hindered in acquiring Israeli citizenship, discussed the way in which Zionism exploits anti-Semitism, and described Israel as an obstacle to Jewish freedom. At first, this debate worried me, as my exposition of "the Arab case" almost convinced me. I spent a few days agonizing, until I was able to reassure myself with a few Zionist platitudes: the Arabs have 21 states, why should we not have one; Israel has faults, but these are a result of the state of war, for which the Arabs are responsible; our need is greater than theirs. I presented "the Arab case" and promptly forgot it; it was only my recent rediscovery of these notes that reminded me that I was intellectually aware of the existence of certain facts and arguments many years before I was able to integrate them into a political view. As a Zionist, I had not merely rejected certain arguments — I had made myself unaware of them.

It now seems to me that what we learnt in FZY was not any sort of political analysis, but an intellectual game. It was not serious study of Judaism, Israel, the Middle East, and Zionism, but learning how to argue Israel's case and attack that of its opponents. We studied "the Arab case" not out of sympathy, nor in order to arrive at a political solution, but in order to pick holes in the arguments. I later expressed this by saying that what I had learnt as a Zionist was "a lie." I have often been asked, "What do you mean, a lie? Did people intentionally mislead you?", and many people have found this difficult to believe. I was therefore very interested to read Melanie Phillips' study of British Zionism, "Next Year in Jerusalem," in *New Society* (May 12, 1977), where she writes: "One young solicitor, who was at university in the late sixties after many years' membership of a Zionist youth group, says his feelings changed. My feelings are very complex, but at university I came to believe that, just as the Jews have a right to a homeland, so too do the Palestinians. I realized that the propaganda I had been taught just wasn't true." Melanie Phillips was a friend of mine in FZY many years ago, and so, I believe, was her informant. The quotation above does not prove that we were taught lies cynically: what it does prove is that my experience is not unique, and that other young people, after many years in Zionist groups, also felt betrayed and lied to.

It will be understood from what I have written so far that, although I went to Israel in 1971, as a Zionist, it was not in expectation of discovering Utopia. In fact, I went not so much from ideological commitment, as by chance. I was applying to universities in England; a friend suggested I apply to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the idea appealed to me. I wrote to Jerusalem and, before receiving an answer, went to Israel on holiday — my first visit. While there I heard that I had been accepted by the University, and stayed. It was all so off-hand and low-key that I find it difficult to explain it as a result of Zionist belief. It Just happened.

Many Jews have expressed their sense of "belonging" in Israel, of "feeling at home" immediately upon arrival. I felt none of that, and in many ways felt the "alien-ness" of Israel. This is difficult to describe — I didn't feel Israel was "foreign," but neither did I feel it was "home." It was a place, with advantages and disadvantages, like anywhere else. The obviously "Jewish" aspects of Israel — Saturday instead of Sunday as the weekend, public observance of Jewish rather than Christian festivals, the use of Hebrew — meant little to me as I come from a not-very-religious background.

One fact of which I quickly became aware was the inequality between "European" and "Oriental" Jews. This was the period of growth of the Israeli Black Panther movement — poor Jews of Middle Eastern and North African origin living in slums, who were struggling for a more equal distribution of resources. Travelling round the country, I couldn't fail to see the disparity between the slums and villas of Tel Aviv, between the rich kibbutzim and the poor development towns (although, since I didn't visit any Arab areas, I wasn't yet aware of the even greater disparity between Jews and Arabs). I saw this inequality, not as a function of Zionism, but as one of the problems which Zionism was intended to solve. It now seems paradoxical to see Zionism as both the creation of the Jewish people, and a means of creating this same people, but such was at the time my view-Zionism was an act of *will*, a reaction to the misfortunes heaped on the Jews by other people, a redress of a major historic injustice.

Other aspects of Israel began to disturb me, but they too reinforced my Zionist convictions. One early example concerned me personally. Before going to Israel, I had been for an interview at the Jewish Agency/World Zionist Organization office in London to find out if I might be entitled to a grant. I was told that a grant would be dependent on my becoming a citizen. Since I knew of the status enjoyed by some of my friends who had previously gone to Israel — temporary residency — I enquired, and was told this would not apply to me. I made my own enquiries and discovered that this official had not been telling the truth; I went back to the office and insisted on my right to receive a grant as a temporary resident.

When, in Israel, I heard that I had been accepted to the university, I went to the Student Authority of the JA/WZO to find out

about my grant. They had no record of my application, and a telegram to London brought the reply that my file had been lost. I had to re-apply for a grant. On a subsequent visit to London, a friend, who now worked for the JAWZO, produced my file with a copy of the telegramme saying it had been lost. At about this time a number of JAWZO officials in London were sacked for giving misleading information. At the time it seemed that this lie, which had put me to great trouble, had been corrected by the Zionist movement.

As I became more critical of Israel I explained these criticisms in terms of an incomplete application of Zionism. It can be seen that this was entirely consistent with my earlier discussions within FZY on the relation of Israel to Zionism. I still called myself a Zionist, but opposed my concept of Zionism to the realities of the Israeli state.

I was in constant correspondence with friends in England and expressed many of these ideas to them. Unfortunately, I don't have copies of these letters, but I do have copies of two angry articles which I wrote for *The Young Zionist*, the magazine of FZY. The first was written, I think, in November 1971. During a German Cultural Week in Jerusalem, the novelist Gunter Grass was supposed to give a lecture at the university. Violent opposition by extreme nationalist Jews ended the lecture after a few minutes. These nationalists did not care that Gunter Grass had been a child during the Third Reich, nor that he was now an active socialist and anti-fascist. They hated him as a German. My article, which I entitled "The Other Side of Intolerance," ended "Was there any point in creating a Jewish state, if this turns Jews into racialist bigots?"

The second article, which I wrote on May 1, 1972, was a response to the violent assault by police on the Black Panthers' May Day rally in Freedom Square, Jerusalem — an assault that put one of my friends into hospital with a fractured leg, and several more into gaol. I entitled the article "Thank God We No Longer Need the Cossacks," and its conclusion demonstrates much of what I have so far written. I wrote:

And you, "at home," reading and forgetting, going to your JPA parties and your "Socialist" Israel teach-ins — you are equally guilty. For you are the people who can change this. You are needed here. If it matters to you that these things are happening in OUR land, if it disturbs you that my friends are in prison and hospital for no more than stating their opinion — then come here and help change Israel. If it doesn't concern you, then you have no right to call yourselves "Young Zionists" and I'm sorry I have wasted your time.

Nowadays, I would be unable to defend these ideas, except as an intellectual exercise, but they are important in showing the way I found it possible to reconcile apparently conflicting facts. They can also demonstrate the beliefs of some Zionists, and suggest ways of responding to these.

While researching an essay last year on the role of Zionism in Israel, I came across a peculiar quotation. It occurs in the essay, "National Liberation and the Zionist Model," by Eliot Yagod and David Kaufman, which I found in the pamphlet *Imperialism and the Middle East Conflict: Some Left-wing Viewpoints*, published by the Ad Hoc Committee for Peace in the Middle East — a front organization for the World Union of Jewish Students. Yagod and Kaufman write, "It is... absurd to suggest the de-Zionisation of Israel, for the concept of Zion serves to negate the dangers of blind and cynical nationalism while realizing values that can only be fulfilled within the context of a state." I have written in the margin "What does that mean?", but I know that seven or eight years ago I would have agreed with Yagod and Kaufman wholeheartedly. The passage would not have needed to be explained to me for I too saw Zionism as an ethical, rather than national, movement.

My criticisms so far suggest a rapid disillusionment with Israel, but that is far from the truth. First, because I had few illusions about Israel as a place; second, because despite my increasing criticisms of Israel, I still accepted many of its basic premises. It should continue to exist as a Jewish state. Maybe concessions should be made to the Arab states, but only when they were prepared to accept Israel's existence. Israel and "the Jewish people" shared a common destiny. I also accepted many of the common opinions and misconceptions regarding the post-1967 situation. I visited the Golan Heights, saw how they looked down over the Jordan Valley kibbutzim, and agreed that this area should never be returned to Syria. I saw how close the border had been to Tel Aviv, and agreed that even if this area was returned to Jordan, it should remain under Israeli military control. In particular, I lived in Jerusalem, a city I grew to love, and agreed that it should never again be divided (I did not understand that after 1967 it had been united politically, but not socially: it still is two cities). I also agreed with the assessment of the political and military situations, summarized in the phrase "Time is working to our benefit." Israel should not expect to hold "the territories" (they were often called "the territories" without an adjective, so that one need not specify whether they were "occupied," "held," "administered" or "liberated") for ever, but until "the Arabs" showed signs of reason Israel should not return them.

The post-1967 borders were far shorter than before the war, and thus easier to defend. The "territories" gave Israel strategic depth, which meant that in the unlikely event of a war it would be fought far from the Israeli population centres. But such a

war, in any case, would not break out because the Israel army's superiority was overwhelming, and the Arab states were disunited. The PLO were a group of thugs. They may have had some justified grievances, but their behaviour was forfeiting them any possible sympathy. And it was possible, indeed necessary, to ignore the opinion of other countries, for they — justifiably — were concerned above all with their own interests.

Thus, despite my disapproval of certain aspects of Israeli life, and my growing sympathy with the further left elements of Zionism to be found in *Siach*, the Israel New Left, in the summer of 1973 I was a full partner to the agreement that "our situation has never been better" — and it is for this reason that the October 1973 war came as such a shock to me, and caused such a major re-evaluation of my beliefs.

The October war is a clear example of a military victory leading to a political defeat. One agreed opinion in Israel is that "We can only lose a war once," i.e., that the supreme military goal is the preservation of the Israeli state, and in this the Israeli army clearly succeeded. However, the importance of this war was not really in the limited territorial gains made by Israel, Egypt and Syria, but in the fact that it occurred at all. According to all the common assumptions in Israel at that time — assumptions which I also held, and have listed above — this war should not have been possible.

Despite the shorter borders and "strategic depth," Israel's losses were far greater than in the 1967 war, fought on the basis of "indefensible" borders. The war lasted far longer, and, at one time, it seemed that Israel might be defeated. Defence Minister Moshe Dayan was rumoured to be having a nervous breakdown, and his miserable television performance during the early days of the war had a disastrous effect on public morale. Why was all this happening?

My first reaction was a reappraisal of the strategic considerations. The shorter post-1967 borders could be viewed as providing "strategic depth" but equally they also resulted in longer lines of communication; and again, this war was now being fought on land held by Israel rather than by the Arab states. In particular, I began to realize the implications of claiming "strategic depth" and then building civilian settlements in the area so described, thus creating a demand for further "strategic depth." Either the "strategic depth" argument was consciously false, or it was an excuse for further expansion. Nevertheless, this was clearly not a full explanation of what was going on. -

Israel was beginning to speak of the *Mehdal* — the "oversight" that had allowed Egypt and Syria to launch a completely unexpected attack. There were tales of total confusion and chaos; reservists without weapons or transport; boots without laces and lorries without petrol. Generals started publicly to accuse one another of various forms of irresponsibility. All this, however, was merely a symptom of an underlying problem; one which I could not at that time identify, but which was clearly political.

Towards the end of the war I wrote a short essay inspired by a sentence of Theodor Herzl's diary: "The man who invents a terrible explosive does more for the cause of peace than a thousand gentle prophets." Herzl believed that his proposal for a Jewish state was a spiritual "terrible explosive," one which completely altered the nature of Jewish existence. I agreed that he had indeed created a "terrible explosive," but one which did not serve the cause of peace. I argued again that Israel as a state was not the end of Zionism but only part of its means, and I questioned whether that end might not be better served by other means.

Meanwhile, one surprising and disturbing aspect of the war was becoming apparent. It seemed that intelligence regarding the intentions of Egypt and Syria had, indeed been received by Israeli sources, but had been rejected even before it reached high levels due to its contradiction of consensus views. One suggestion made at the time was for a restructuring of Israeli intelligence to ensure that this sort of information would be assessed at the highest political levels, instead of at lower, clerical levels. But I could see that this was insufficient, for I was well aware that I had internalized these conceptions, and that my judgement too had been clouded by reliance on illusory beliefs. Israel's failure had been political, rather than military or administrative, and demanded a political response.

Israel was now undergoing rapid internal developments, and for the first time I was taking an active part. The parliamentary elections, originally scheduled for the end of October, had been postponed until December — but they were to be fought on the same basis. The Knesset is elected by a proportional representation system, with voters casting their vote for an entire list put forward by a party. It was decided that the lists for the December election would be the same as had been proposed for the October election: that parties could not change their lists, and that new groups could not put forward a list. This meant, to me, ignoring the new situation.

A committee of inquiry, consisting of generals and judges, had been appointed to consider the implications of the war. Its

preliminary report laid the blame squarely on the Chief of Staff, David Elazar, and exonerated the political leadership. Many people were not prepared to accept this, and a movement started to remove Dayan from the Defence Ministry. Parents of war victims demonstrated wherever he appeared, accusing him of direct responsibility for their sons' deaths. Dayan was held responsible, not just as Defence Minister, but as a symbol of the arrogance behind the false political conceptions with which he had largely been identified. A demobbed war hero, Motti Ashkenazi, began an individual protest outside the government offices in Jerusalem, calling for the resignation of the entire government, and many people — myself included — joined him there for part of his vigil.

The wave of protest created several new movements, with names such as Change, Reform, etc. These were not allowed to take part in the election. The Labour Party, whose election propaganda had previously centred upon Dayan, Golda Meir and her special adviser, Israel Galili (whose plans for an acceleration of Jewish settlement in the occupied territories had been a major factor in Sadat's decision to go to war), now stressed its other side — •relatively young people, untainted with guilt for the war, who might offer some hope for a different future. A group of academics argued, under the slogan "Despite Everything, Labour," that, for all its faults, only the Labour Party could have any hope of changing the situation and bringing peace; that the parties of the right and centre would be worse, while the parties to the left of Labour were not serious political forces, and a vote for them would help the right to power. They also put forward the ingenious argument that the candidates between positions 40 and 50 on the Labour list — those who stood a chance of election if Labour gained a large vote — contained a higher proportion of "doves" than the rest of the Labour list, and that therefore a large Labour vote would mean a more moderate Labour party.

Although ingenious, this argument was unconvincing, and I maintained that only by electing representatives of the left parties would there be any hope of influencing events in the Knesset. I was impressed by the position of *Moked*, an amalgam of parts of *Siach*, and the pro-Zionist section of the Israel Communist Party. *Moked* was proposing an Israeli commitment to withdrawal from *most* of the occupied territories, and tacitly accepted the idea of a Palestinian state next to Israel. This position was about the most radical that could be adopted without renouncing Zionism, and I accepted it. I was still motivated, however, by strategic considerations and by anger with the Labour Party, rather than by a critical analysis of the reality of Israel. This critical analysis was to come as the result of further developments in Israeli life.

One act which disturbed me was the re-opening of Jerusalem University. The academic year normally started after Yom Kippur, but, of course, the war had caused its postponement. But, in December, it was decided to start a curtailed year. Many of us felt that, with a large proportion of the students still doing reserve duty this was a wrong decision, and that the year should have been cancelled. The only provision made for students still doing reserve duty was a request to those at university to make notes or recordings of lectures to be sent to them. I agreed that the war and its aftermath should not be allowed totally to disrupt everyday life, but the fact that some university students were still in the reserves surely made it a special case.

Another factor which was disturbing me was the wave of spectacular PLO attacks within Israel, particularly at Maalot and Kiryat Shemona. Previously, I had seen such attacks as nasty but essentially minor irritants, not really affecting the political realities. Now I began to realize that only a political response to the PLO (though I had not yet defined what sort of political response) would end these attacks.

In April 1974, Golda Meir resigned. She had stayed in power long enough to be able to suggest that her resignation was neither an admission of responsibility for the war, nor a surrender to the calls for her to go. After much wrangling within the Labour Party, she was replaced by former Chief of Staff, Yitzhak Rabin, who offered a policy of "continuity and change." (By the time of his resignation three years later, it could be seen that Rabin had kept half of his pledge — "continuity." There was little sign of "change".)

But probably the phenomenon which most influenced my attitudes was the growing evidence of financial corruption in Israel. A series of scandals culminated in the amazing affairs of the "Israel Corporation." This company, set up by the government in the 1960's, had been granted extensive subsidies and tax concessions by the government on the understanding that the company would encourage new industry in development areas in Israel. The corporation, however, saw its role as a financial holding company and, instead of building risky new factories, it concentrated on buying established factories and shares in other companies.

To overcome financial difficulties, the company perfected a system of circulation of money through subsidiaries, "Swiss banks and shady holding companies in Lichtenstein. This enabled them to enter the same money in their books twice, and

thus double their apparent balances. The collapse of a few Swiss banks and the misappropriation of funds by the company's Managing Director led to the exposure of the system. Among those directly involved in the scandal were Baron Edmond de Rothschild and Dr. Tabor Rosenbaum, two leading figures in the World Zionist Organization.

As the scandal developed, it involved more and more members of the Zionist establishment until it began to seem that deception and corruption

were the norm in Israel. One aspect of this scandal was the exposure of how Zionist contributions from abroad were not being used for the purposes stated by the fund-raisers, but were, in fact, going straight to the coffers of Israeli political policy and from there to Swiss bank accounts of Israeli millionaire defence contractors, or directors of party economic enterprises. People started talking about the "black economy" — a system existing outside the official economy, and based on bribery, tax evasion, defence contract work, exploitation of Arab labour, Zionist contributions, political party funds, Swiss banks and Liechtenstein companies. One investigation suggested that this "black economy" was actually *twice the size* of the official economy, and still growing. It was the evidence of this vast system of fraud which led me to question Zionism as well as Israel.

An old jibe defines a Zionist as "A Jew who persuades a second Jew to give money to enable a third Jew to live in Israel." I reformulated this as "A Jew who persuades a second Jew to give money so that the first Jew should be rich in Israel." It began to look as though the Zionist movement was a vast conspiracy designed to enable some Jews to live well at the expense of others. This was still a practical criticism of the Zionist organization, rather than a political critique of Zionism, but I believe that it opened the way to my later development.

At about this time I had more trouble with my grant. Previously, the grant had been increased annually; this year it was reduced, although all my friends had their grants increased. I made a complaint and received a reply from the Student Authority stating that "Your grant may be re-assessed upon regularization of your resident status." In plain English, what they meant was that they would pay me a full grant if I became a citizen. I would not agree to this blackmail, and had to ask my parents for more money. This affair made me very bitter and hastened my return to England.

In October 1974, I returned from Israel to England, still not an anti-Zionist, but no longer calling myself a Zionist. I started to read more deeply about the Middle East and came to support the idea of a Palestine state next to Israel. I was reading the paper, "Israel and Palestine", published in Paris by Maxim Ghilan, who, as a journalist in Israel, had had several brushes with the security forces. His paper made strong criticisms of discrimination and repression in Israel, and of the economic structure of the country, but did not put this in the context of a critique of Zionism, i.e., of the idea that Israel should remain a "Jewish state."

I also read Fouzi El-Asmar's book, *To Be an Arab in Israel*, which made a deep impression on me. For the first time, I realized how Zionism appeared to one of its non-Jewish subjects. (In Israel I had known few Arabs, and had not discussed politics with them.) Fouzi's book made me realize that it was the Zionist enterprise itself, and not a distortion or incomplete application of it, which was responsible for the oppression of the Palestinians and the entire Middle East conflict. It also convinced me that the question of Palestinian rights is the central issue which influences everything and not just a side issue. What impressed me more than anything else was that the book seemed to be written more from sorrow than from hatred. Fouzi's criticism of Israel and Zionism was forceful, but I could not find in his book any trace of the anti-Semitism and threats to murder all Jews which, I had always been told, were the motives for all Arab anti-Zionists. For the first time, I became aware that anti-Zionism was an honourable and reasonable position, and one which stressed the non-identity of Judaism and Zionism.

This last point was very important. Although I knew that not all Jews were Zionists, as I understood the word, it had still seemed to me that Zionism was the only logical position for a Jew to take. Most Jews were sympathetic to Zionism, even if not themselves Zionists, and I was unable to understand the position of those few Jewish anti-Zionists of whom I had heard. Although I accepted that not all criticism of Israel was anti-Semitic, I was still convinced that most critics of Israel were using this as a cover for anti-Semitic views. This view had been modified, but not destroyed, by experiencing Israel myself and by meeting Israeli critics, but it was Fouzi's book, more than anything else, which swept away the last vestiges of this superstition and helped me to understand Zionism more clearly.

When I revisited Israel in the summer of 1975 I already viewed it much more critically. One incident which sticks in my memory is a discussion with two friends, one Jewish and one Arab, on the future of Israel. My position turned out to be

similar to that of our Arab friend, Salman. We were talking of creating a single state for all Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Our Jewish friend, Irit, who was also very critical of the government, could not support this. For her, it was essential that Israel remain as a Jewish state and concessions should be made to the Palestinians in order to ensure the survival of a Jewish state. I was now accepting the possibility, though not the necessity, of an anti-Zionist solution.

The final step in my development as an anti-Zionist came with my studies in the School of Peace Studies. There, I was taught by Fouzi El-Asmar, whose book had so greatly influenced me, and by Uri Davis and Akiva Orr, Israeli Jewish anti-Zionists whom I knew by reputation. In my three years at Bradford, during which period I have greatly benefited from my contact with these three men, I have spent much time studying Palestine/Israel, Zionism, and Jewish history. I now call myself an anti-Zionist, which means that I see Zionism itself as a major cause of the conflict in the Middle East.

This essay, parts of which I have been trying to write for several years, has helped me to understand my development. Although my political transformation seems radical, I do see a pattern emerging. From my early days in the Zionist movement, when I opposed a "Zionist" ideal to Israeli reality, I have never uncritically supported Israel. Living in Israel strengthened my criticisms. The 1973 war led me to question some of my Zionist premises. The aftermath of the war, and the succession of financial scandals, showed me that my "Zionist" ideal clashed not only with Israeli reality, but also with the practice of the Zionist movement. And my recent studies, together with my friendships with Israeli anti-Zionists, and with Palestinians and other Arabs, have brought a total rejection of Zionism.

I was, indeed, a Zionist and actively supported the Zionist cause. Had I known 12 years ago what I now know, I doubt that I would have become a Zionist, and for this reason I feel deceived and manipulated. As well as feeling this in a general way, my experience with the Student Authority led me to feel personally deceived. (Some people have said that this problem was a result of individual bloody-mindedness, rather than official policy. This may be true, but I experienced it as part of a process of rejecting Zionism, and it is therefore relevant to this essay.) My Zionism was based on ignorance and misunderstanding, not on the hatred, greed and political ambition of the official leaders of Zionism, many of whom knew the facts which I preferred not to know.

I believe this to be true of most people who call themselves Zionists, and therefore try to explain to them the reality of Israel and Zionism. Many people don't want to understand, and have quoted to me the sort of arguments I used to use. An essay which I wrote for the School of Peace Studies last year examined some of these arguments, and showed how they were not related to the reality – but, having been a Zionist myself and used these arguments, I can understand some of the reasons for their use. I hope that this essay has shown how experiencing some of this reality led one believing I – but not blinded by – these arguments, to reject them.