



Zionist Political Philosopher Ze'ev Jabotinsky as a Freemason

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Abstract

Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky was the ideological philosopher of the secular liberal-right in the Land of Israel and in the Jewish communities around the world. His philosophy still has importance over the philosophy of Jewish intellectuals today throughout the world. Jabotinsky is the ideological father and founder of the Zionist Revisionist Movement (from the word "revision" – re-observation) in the Jewish world of the first half of the 20th century. The movement expressed a right liberal ideology, against the ideology of the Zionist socialist movement. Ze'ev Jabotinsky, after his expulsion from Palestine by the British Mandate, settled in Paris in the mid-1920s, where he served as a column writer at the *Posaldina Novosti*, the most popular Russian exile newspaper in Paris. Dozens of the Russian exile community in Paris at the time knew Jabotinsky, and many of them admired him because of the translations of Russian poetry. In addition, Jabotinsky, who was a publicist by profession, worked closely with some of the members of the "Northern Star" lodge in the *Posaldina Novosti* newspaper in Paris. As a result of their admiration for Jabotinsky, two journalists from the Russian exiles community (one of whom worked with Jabotinsky in the *Posaldina Novosti* newspaper), Alexander Poliakov and Mikhail Osorgin, decided to ask Jabotinsky if he would want to be a member of the "Northern Star" lodge and, as a result, to be a member of the Freemason order in France, Jabotinsky agreed.

Keywords: Ze'ev Jabotinsky, freemasonry.

1. Introduction

Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky was the ideological philosopher of the secular liberal-right in the Land of Israel and in the Jewish communities around the world. His philosophy still has importance over the philosophy of Jewish intellectuals today throughout the world¹.

Jabotinsky is the ideological father and founder of the Zionist Revisionist Movement (from the word 'revision' – re-observation) in the Jewish world of the first half of the 20th century.

¹ Bela Moshe, *The World of Jabotinsky: A Selection of His Statements and the Main Tenets of His Doctrine*. Tel Aviv: Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, 1972, p. 335.

The movement expressed a right liberal ideology, against the ideology of the Zionist socialist movement.

From the age of fifteen, he was known as a gifted journalist, poet, author, and translator. He was recognized as a first-grade intellectual. During his life he wrote thousands of articles, books, poems, letters and delivered speeches that influenced not only the Revisionist movement and its followers, but also gradually the entire Zionist movement.

According to his writings, Jabotinsky saw that the Jewish socialist movement, which at that time was at the head of the Zionist movement, implements successfully the national Jewish ideology by building Jewish communities in the Land of Israel, including institutions, economical structure and a fighting force. However, he identified that the Jewish socialist movements build the future Jewish state according to the philosophy of the ideological philosopher Karl Marx. Namely, they encouraged people to become member of the working class until there would be a class war with the bourgeoisie, and after that they would build a dictatorship of the proletariat with absolute equality between the classes in the population².

Jabotinsky maintained that it is impossible to integrate Jewish nationalism and socialist ideology that negates nationalism and demands national equality. Jabotinsky called the political-ideological ideas of the Jewish socialist political groups “shatnez”, the Yiddish word that means a mixture of things that do not mix.

Jabotinsky argued that the perception and assumptions of socialization on human nature are erroneous. He argued that the Soviet state, which calls for the elimination of private property, can't live long Because it is contrary to human nature. According to him, human nature is the desire of people to have control over their own assets and to expand this control.

According to Jabotinsky, the failure of communism in Russia is therefore empirical proof that the aspiration of people for private ownership of assets, including the means for ensuring the livelihood, is unavoidable. Individualism, which leads to the striving for personal benefit and personal property, motivates economic activity in human society. This idea is expressed in his writings in phrases such as: “*Every individual is king*”³ and “*the minimum state*”⁴.

In his writings that Jabotinsky argued that “*the individual is the supreme creation of nature ... the State needs to serve the individual and not the opposite*”^{5,6}. Hence, he concluded that a person “*is intended to be free*” and “*only in exceptional cases is it permissible to make him a part of the mechanism*”⁷.

² Jabotinsky, Zeev, May 1931, Memo to the Worker Committee of the General Worker Union. In: Jabotinsky Zeev, *Letters to Different People* (Publisher: Jabotinsky Institute in Israel).

³ Jabotinsky, Ze'ev, *Autobiography: The story of my days*, 1938, pp. 38. In: Jabotinsky Institute in Israel.

⁴ Jabotinsky, Zeev, January 1938, *Introduction to the Theory of Market Economy*, In: Jabotinsky's Articles (Jabotinsky Institute in Israel).

⁵ Bela Moshe, *The World of Jabotinsky: Collection of His Statements and the Main Tenets of His Doctrine*, Tel Aviv: Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, 1972, p. 67.

⁶ Shoshani, Reuven, *Anatomy of a Critique of Socialism in Jabotinsky*. In: Avi Bareli and Pinchas Ginosaur (Eds.), *Man in the Storm: Essays and Researches on Zeev Jabotinsky*. Beer Sheva: The Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2004, pp. 93-119.

⁷ Shoshani, Reuven, *Anatomy of a Critique of Socialism in Jabotinsky*. In: Avi Bareli and Pinchas Ginosaur (Eds.), *Man in the Storm: Essays and Researches on Zeev Jabotinsky*. Beer Sheva: The Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2004, pp. 93-119.

2. Ze'ev Jabotinsky in Freemasonry

The “Northern Star” Lodge of the Order of Freemasons was established in Tsarist Russia in 1907 (a Lodge is a gathering place for Freemasons). This Lodge, founded by Maxim Kowalski, a law professor, and Alexander Amphitatrov, a philosopher, was considered to be one of the most prestigious in Tsarist Russia. This lodge had over 1,000 members, including members of parliament, journalists and military commanders. The “Northern Star” lodge was so popular among the Russian elite that all members of the Provisional Government of Russia were members of that lodge. One of them was Pavel Miljukov, who would later become the editor-in-chief of *Posaldina Novosti* in Paris, the newspaper that Ze'ev Jabotinsky will write in.

Following the Communist revolution in Russia in 1917, all the Masonic lodges in Russia were closed and their members were exiled to the Solovskii Islands or fled from Russia. Members of “Northern Star” lodge met again in Paris and were part of the Russian exile community in Paris. The members of the Russian exile community in Paris were in Russia important writers, professors, musicians and politicians, but in Paris they became cab drivers, dishwashers, production workers and beggars.

One of the exiles was Vasily Alexeyevich Mekalkov, a Russian lawyer who was appointed ambassador to France on the eve of the Communist revolution. Since his dismissal, due to the revolution, he decided to remain in Paris and served as head of the aid committee for Russian exiles in Paris. Among other things, he also helped re-establish the “Northern Star” lodge in Paris and was appointed to be her secretary.

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As a result of their admiration for Jabotinsky, two journalists from the Russian exiles community (one of whom worked with Jabotinsky in the *Posaldina Novosti* newspaper), Alexander Poliakov and Mikhail Osorgin, decided to ask Jabotinsky if he would want to be a member of the “Northern Star” lodge and, as a result, to be a member of the Freemason order in France, Jabotinsky agreed.

And Indeed, in the Archives of the National Library of France there is a report from the Secretary of the “Northern Star” lodge, Vasily Mekalkov, on May 25, 1931, to the Grand Lodge of France (a Grand Lodge is the National Directorate of a freemasonic order in each country):

To: The Grand Lodge of Freemasonry, 16th Kada Street, Paris.

By: Secretary of the Northern Star Lodge,

Re: Admission of a new apprentice.

“We hereby announce in his honor that the Northern Star lodge, on May 5, 1931, accepted Vladimir Jabotinsky, a journalist, translator, playwright and poet, as an entered apprentice. The candidate was presented by Brother M. Usorgin, a philosopher by and Brother S. Polyakov, a journalist. He answered all the questions correctly, presented a police non-criminal record certificate and accepted all the obligations required by Article 25 of the Constitution. Therefore, I'm sending you the “blue form”.

Signed,

Vasily Alexiyevich Mekalkov, Secretary of the “Northern Star” lodge, May 25, 1931.”

The “blue form” is probably the form that documented the progress of a member in the various degrees of the Order. Indeed, this form was found in the Archives of the National Library of France by the Israeli journalist Shalom Rosenfeld. It states that Jabotinsky was in the “Northern Star” lodge for more than five years and reached the degree of a Master-Mason (the third and highest degree in Freemasonry)^{8,9,10}.

It did not say in the form why Jabotinsky left the Order in France, but we know that in those years Jabotinsky had to leave France to take part in a number of activities to promote the goals of the Zionist movement. Starting with his initiative to bring the Polish Jews to Palestine that was presented to the Polish Foreign Minister, and with his appearance before the Peel Commission in 1937, and finally with his sudden death from a heart disease in New York in 1940 while trying to recruit a Jewish army among the Jews of the United States^{11, 12}.

This is the content of the “blue form”:

“Jabotinsky, Vladimir Yevgeny, was born in Odessa on October 18th, 1880. He became an entered apprentice of the Northern Star lodge on May 5th, 1931. He was elevated to the degree of fellow craft in the “Northern Star” lodge on January 7th, 1932. And he raised to the degree of a master-mason in the “Northern Star” lodge on November 3, 1932. He removed himself from the Order on January 2, 1936”^{13, 14, 15}.

The former Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel, the late Zvi Levin, in his book “Freemasonry is a Way of Life” (In Hebrew) from 1980, added that prior to Jabotinsky joining of the Order he was “a free mason without an apron”. This phrase is given by the Freemasonry to a man who expressed humanistic ideas of Freemasonry without having been taught ideas as a member of the Order. So, for Levin, it was only natural for Jabotinsky to be part of such an organization that is complementing his ideas and actions.¹⁶

⁸ Dov Alfon: Follow Ze'ev Jabotinsky in the 14th District in Paris, 2009, from the “Travel in Paris” An Israeli travelling website. (<https://streetsofparis.wordpress.com/2009/07/19/8/>)

⁹ Jabotinsky, Ze'ev, Documents on his Membership in the Freemasons, Documents and Articles, from the Jabotinsky Institute Archives in Israel. (http://www.infocenters.co.il/jabo/jabo_multimedia/Files/linked/%D7%901%20-1_6.PDF)

¹⁰ Dov Alfon, The West Bank, The Left Bank, *Ha'aretz* Newspaper, The “Gallery” Section, Israel, 09/05/2000

¹¹ Yaacov Shavit, *Mythologies of the Israeli Right: Studies in Political and Intellectual History of the Israeli Right*. Beit Berl College Press, Israel, 1986.

¹² Moshe Arens, *Flags Over the Ghetto*. Yedioth Ahronoth Publication, Israel, 2009.

¹³ Dov Alfon: Follow Ze'ev Jabotinsky in the 14th District in Paris, 2009, from the “Travel in Paris” An Israeli travelling website. (<https://streetsofparis.wordpress.com/2009/07/19/8/>)

¹⁴ Jabotinsky, Ze'ev, Documents on his Membership in the Freemasons, Documents and Articles, from the Jabotinsky Institute Archives in Israel. (http://www.infocenters.co.il/jabo/jabo_multimedia/Files/linked/%D7%901%20-1_6.PDF)

¹⁵ Dov Alfon, The West Bank, The Left Bank, *Ha'aretz* Newspaper, The “Gallery” Section, Israel, 09/05/2000.

¹⁶ Zvi Levin, *Freemasonry is a way of life* “Avuka Publications”, Israel, 1980, pp. 50-51.

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