

GIANT OF HISTORY

Ze'ev Jabotinsky Day is on 29th Tamuz which this year falls on August 30th. A few weeks ago, the life of Jabotinsky and his ideas were expunged from the Israeli school curriculum.

Ze'ev Jabotinsky was the founder of the Revisionist Movement, but he was much more than a political leader: he was a man of vision, far in advance of his time. He was often attacked for his ideas, many of which are now widely accepted.

He saw the importance of Jews being able to defend themselves long before this was generally accepted. When the pogroms of 1903-4 began, he organised self-defence units throughout Russia.

During the First World War, he campaigned for the establishment of the Jewish Legion comprising Jews of Palestine, to fight on the side of the Allies, thus introducing into Zionism a new dimension: the right of the Jewish people to fight for its historic homeland.

In 1920 he set up the first Haganah units in Palestine to protect the Jewish citizens against threatened massacres by the Arabs. When he first introduced these ideas he was labelled an extremist, but his view has become the main tenet of all Israeli governments: the right to defend its citizens with its own defence force.

In 1922 he tried to persuade American Jews to invest in the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine), rather than to give charity, and for the Yishuv to export to the diaspora. This idea was only accepted several decades later, and is now common practice.

In efforts to instil self-respect, he taught that 'Every individual is a king'. The basis of the education of his youth movement '*Betar*' was 'Hadar', meaning outward appearance, dignity, courtesy. He and the *Betarim* were always impeccably dressed and polite. Today no MK or lawyer would dream of going to work dressed in anything but a suit.

He had the ability to foresee the consequences of political events. He was the first to realise the danger of the Third Reich, attempted to organise an economic boycott, and tried to persuade Europe's Jews to leave before it was too late.

He was a poet and novelist, who often used his novels to put forth his ideas. In '*Prelude to Delilah*', Jabotinsky taught a timeless lesson, that of the danger of compromising at the start of negotiations. In his version of the well-known bible story, he tells of two men who both claim ownership of the same field, and the decision of the judge to give the larger part of the field to the man who claims all of it, while the one prepared to share it gets only a quarter.

It is an open question whether the decision to remove the contribution of Ze'ev Jabotinsky from the Israeli school curriculum was taken because of political considerations. Whatever our beliefs and whichever political party we sympathise with, it will be our great loss if we forget this giant of our history, if we cease to

teach the next generation about him and his ideas which are so relevant to Israel and the Jewish community around the world today.

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