

What we seek is at bottom neither new nor dangerous to anyone. Instead of the many *refuges* which we have always been accustomed to seek, we would fain have *one single refuge*, the existence of which, however, would have to be politically assured.

Let "Now or never" be our watchword. Woe to our descendants, woe to the memory of our Jewish contemporaries, if we let this moment pass by!

The Jews are not a living nation; they are everywhere aliens; therefore they are despised.

The civil and political emancipation of the Jews is not sufficient to raise them in the estimation of the peoples.

The proper, the only solution, is in the creation of a Jewish nationality, of a people living upon its own soil, the auto-emancipation of the Jews; their return to the ranks of the nations by the acquisition of a Jewish homeland.

We must not persuade ourselves that humanity and enlightenment alone can cure the malady of our people.

The lack of national self-respect and self-confidence of political initiative and of unity, are the enemies of our national renaissance.

That we may not be compelled to wander from one exile to another, we must have an extensive, productive land of refuge, a *center* which is our own. The present moment is the most favorable for this plan.

The international Jewish question must have a national solution. Of course, our national regeneration can only proceed slowly. We must take the first step. Our *descendants* must follow us at a measured and not over-precipitant speed.

The national regeneration of the Jews must be initiated by a congress of Jewish notables. No sacrifice should be too great for this enterprise which will assure our people's future, everywhere endangered.

The financial execution of the undertaking does not present insurmountable difficulties.

Help yourselves and God will help you!

3

Theodor Herzl

A Solution of the Jewish Question

January 17, 1896

Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) was the father of political Zionism and founder of the Zionist Organization. An assimilated Jew of minimal Jewish commitment, he was aroused by the growing antisemitism he witnessed as the Paris correspondent for the Neue Freie Presse of Vienna from 1890 to 1895. He concluded that the only feasible solution to the Jewish Problem was a mass exodus of the Jews from the countries of their birth and a resettlement in the Land of Israel, and he devoted the rest of his life to realizing this idea. His book, The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question (1896), set forth his basic ideas and program.

Source: Theodor Herzl, "A Solution of the Jewish Question," *Jewish Chronicle*, January 17, 1896, pp. 12–13. Reprinted in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 422–27. Annotations adapted and used by permission.

I have been asked to lay my scheme in a few words before the readers of the *Jewish Chronicle*.¹ This I will endeavor to do, although in this brief and rapid account, I run the risk of being misunderstood. My first and incomplete exposition will probably be scoffed at by Jews. The bad and foolish way we ridicule one another is a survival of slavish habits contracted by us during centuries of oppression. A free man sees nothing to laugh at in himself, and allows no one to laugh at him.

I therefore address my first words to those Jews who are strong and free of spirit. They shall form my earliest audience, and they will one day, I hope, become my friends. I am introducing no new idea; on the contrary, it is a very old one. It is a universal idea and therein lies its power—old as the people, which never, even in the time of bitterest calamity, ceased to cherish it. This is the restoration of the Jewish State.

It is remarkable that we Jews should have dreamt this kingly dream all through the long night of our history. Now day is dawning. We need only rub the sleep out of our eyes, stretch our limbs, and convert the dream into a reality. Though neither prophet nor visionary, I confess I cherish the hope and belief that the Jewish people will one day be fired by a splendid enthusiasm. For the present, however, I would appeal in calm words to the common sense of men of practical judgment and of modern culture. A subsequent task will be to seek out the less favored, to teach and to inspire them. This latter task I cannot undertake alone. I shall take my part in it, in the ranks of those friends and fellow workers whom I am endeavoring to arouse and unite for a common cause. I do not say “my adherents,” for that would be making the movement a personal one, and consequently absurd and contemptible from the outset. No, it is a national movement, and it will be a glorious one, if kept unsullied by the taint of personal desires, though these desires took no other form than political ambition. We, who are the first to inaugurate this movement, will scarcely live to see its glorious close; but the

inauguration of it is enough to bring a noble kind of happiness into our lives. We shall plant for our children in the same way as our fathers preserved the tradition for us. Our lives represent but a moment in the permanent duration of our people. The moment has its duties.

Two phenomena arrest our attention by reason of the consequences with which they are fraught. One, the higher culture; the other, the profound barbarism of our day. I have intentionally put this statement in the form of a paradox. By high culture, I mean the marvelous development of all mechanical contrivances for making the forces of nature serve man's purposes. By profound barbarism, I mean anti-semitism. . . .

The Jewish Question still exists. It would be foolish to deny it. It exists wherever Jews live in perceptible numbers. Where it does not yet exist, it will be brought by Jews in the course of their migrations. We naturally move to those places where we are not persecuted, and there our presence soon produces persecution. This is true in every country, and will remain true even in those most highly civilized. France itself is no exception till the Jewish Question finds a solution on a political basis. I believe that I understand antisemitism, which is in reality a highly complex movement. I consider it from a Jewish standpoint, yet without fear or hatred. I believe that I can see what elements there are in it of vulgar sport, of common trade, of jealousy, of inherited prejudice, of religious intolerance, and also of legitimate self-defense.

Only an ignorant man would mistake modern antisemitism for an exact repetition of the Jew-baiting of the past. The two may have a few points of resemblance, but the main current of the movement has now changed. In the principal countries where antisemitism prevails, it does so as the result of the emancipation of the Jews. When civilized nations awoke to the inhumanity of exclusive legislation, and enfranchised us, our enfranchisement came too late. For we had, curiously enough, developed while in the Ghetto into bourgeois people, and we

stepped out of it only to enter into fierce competition with the middle classes. Historical circumstances make us take to finance, for which, as every educated man knows, we had, as a nation, no original bent. One of the most important of these circumstances was the relation of the Catholic Church to "anatocism."² In the Ghetto we had become somewhat unaccustomed to bodily labour and we produced in the main but a large number of mediocre intellects. Hence, our emancipation set us suddenly within the circle of the middle classes, where we have to sustain a double pressure, from within and from without. The Christian bourgeoisie would not be unwilling to cast us as a sacrifice to Socialism, though that would naturally not improve matters much. But the Jewish Question is no more a social than a religious one, notwithstanding that it sometimes takes on these and other forms. It is a national question which can only be solved by making it a political world-question to be discussed and controlled by the nations of the civilised world in council.

We are one people—One People. We have honestly striven everywhere to merge ourselves in the social life of surrounding communities, and to preserve only the faith of our fathers. It has not been permitted to us. In vain we are loyal patriots, in some places our loyalty running to extremes; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow-citizens; in vain do we strive to increase the fame of our native land in science and art, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers; and often by those whose ancestors were not yet domiciled in the land where Jews had already made experience of suffering. Yet, in spite of all, we are loyal subject, loyal as the Huguenots, who were forced to emigrate. If we could only be left in peace.³ . . .

We are one people—our enemies have made us one in our despite, as repeatedly happens in history. Distress binds us together, and thus united, we suddenly discover our strength. Yes, we are strong enough to form a state, and a

model state. We possess all human and material resources necessary for the purpose. . . . The whole matter is in essence perfectly simple, as it must necessarily be, if it is to come within the comprehension of all.

Let the sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the requirements of the nation, the rest we shall manage for ourselves. Of course, I fully expect that each word of this sentence, and each letter of each word, will be torn to tatters by scoffers and doubters. I advise them to do the thing cautiously, if they are themselves sensitive to ridicule. The creation of a new state has in it nothing ridiculous or impossible. We have, in our day, witnessed the process in connection with nations which were not in the bulk of the middle class, but poor, less educated, and therefore weaker than ourselves. The governments of all countries, scourged by antisemitism, will serve their own interests, in assisting us to obtain the sovereignty we want. These governments will be all the more willing to meet us half-way, seeing that the movement I suggest is not likely to bring about any economic crisis. Such crises, as must follow everywhere as a natural consequence of Jew-baiting, will rather be prevented by the carrying out of my plan. For I propose an inner migration of Christians into the parts slowly and systematically evacuated by Jews. If we are not merely suffered to do what I ask, but are actually helped, we shall be able to effect a transfer of property from Jews to Christians in a manner so peaceable and on so extensive a scale as has never been known in the annals of history.

Everything must be carried out with due consideration for acquired rights and with absolute conformity to law, without compulsion, openly and by light of day, under the supervision of authority and the control of public opinion. . . .

Our clergy, on whom I most especially call, will devote their energies to the service of this idea. They must, however, clearly understand from the outset, that we do not mean to found a

theocracy, but a tolerant modern civil state. We shall, however, rebuild the Temple in glorious remembrance of the faith of our fathers. We shall unroll the new banner of Judaism—a banner bearing seven stars on a white field. The white field symbolizes our pure new life, the seven stars, the seven golden hours of a working-day. For we shall march into the Promised Land carrying the badge of labour. . . .

Let all of you who will join us fall in behind our flag [and] fight for our cause with voice and pen and deed. I count on all our ambitious young men, who are now debarred from making progress elsewhere. . . .

Thus we also need a “gestor” [manager] to direct this Jewish political cause. The Jewish people are as yet prevented by the Diaspora from undertaking the management of their business for themselves. At the same time they are in a condition of more or less severe distress in many parts of the world. They need a “gestor.” A first essential will therefore be the creation of such.

This “gestor” cannot, of course, be a single individual, for an individual who would undertake this giant work alone would probably be either a madman or an imposter. It is therefore indispensable to the integrity of the idea and the vigour of its execution that the work should be impersonal. The “gestor” of the Jews must be a union of several persons for the purpose, a body corporate. This body corporate or corporation, I suggest, shall be formed in the first instance from among those energetic English Jews to whom I imparted my scheme in London. Let that body be called “the Society of Jews,” and be entirely distinct from the Jewish Company⁴ previously referred to. The Society of Jews is the point of departure for the whole Jewish movement about to begin. It will have work to do in the domains of science and politics, for the founding of the Jewish state, as I conceive it, presupposes the application of scientific methods. We cannot journey out of Mizraim [Egypt] today, in the primitive fashion of ancient times. We must

previously obtain an accurate account of our number and strength.

My pamphlet [*The Jewish State*] will open a general discussion on the Jewish Question. Friends and enemies will take part in it, but it will no longer, I hope, take the form either of violent abuse or of sentimental vindication, but of a debate, practical, large, earnest, and political. The Society of Jews will gather all available information from statesmen, parliaments, Jewish communities and societies, from speeches, letters and meetings, from newspapers and books. It will thus find out for the first time whether Jews really wish to go to the Promised Land, and whether they ought to go there. Every Jewish community in the world will send contributions to the Society towards a comprehensive collection of Jewish statistics. Further tasks, such as investigation by experts of the new country and its natural resources, planning of joint migration and settlement, preliminary work for legislation and administration, etc., must be judiciously evolved out of the original scheme. In short, the Society of Jews will be the nucleus of our public organizations. . . .

Shall we choose [the] Argentine [Republic] or Palestine? Will we take what is given us and what is selected by Jewish public opinion? Argentina is one of the most fertile countries in the world, extends over a vast area, and has a sparse population. The Argentine Republic would derive considerable profit from the cession of a portion of its territory to us. The present infiltration of Jews has certainly produced some friction, and it would be necessary to enlighten the Republic on the intrinsic differences of our new movement.

Palestine is our ever-memorable historic home. The very name of Palestine would attract our people with a force of extraordinary potency. Supposing His Majesty the Sultan were to give us Palestine, we could in return pledge ourselves to regulate the whole finances of Turkey. There we should also form a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism.⁵ We should remain a

neutral state in intimate connection with the whole of Europe, which would guarantee our continued existence. The sanctuaries of Christendom would be safeguarded by assigning to them an extra-territorial status, such as is well known to the law of nations. We should form a guard of honor about these sanctuaries, answering for the fulfillment of this duty with our existence. This guard of honor would be the great symbol of the solution of the Jewish Question after nearly nineteen centuries of Jewish suffering. . . .

I know full well that in bringing forward a very old idea in a new form, I am laying myself open to derision and to every kind of attack. Gentler spirits will call my idea Utopian. But what is the difference between a Utopian scheme and a possible one? A Utopian scheme may be a piece of cleverly combined mechanism, lacking only the requisite force to set it in motion; a possible scheme on the other hand rests on a known and existent propelling force.

The force we need is created in us by antisemitism. Some people will say that what I am doing is to kindle antisemitism afresh. This is not true, for antisemitism would continue to increase, irrespective of my project, so long as the causes of its growth are not removed. Others will tremble for their goods and chattels, and professional business interests. . . .

What form of constitution shall we have? I am inclined to an aristocratic republic, although I am an ardent monarchist in my own country. Our history has been too long interrupted for us to attempt direct continuity of the ancient constitutional forms without exposing ourselves to the charge of absurdity.

What language shall we speak? Every man can preserve the language in which his thoughts are at home. Switzerland offers us an example of the possibility of a federation of tongues. We shall remain there in the new country what we now are here, and shall never cease to cherish the memory of the native land out of which we have been driven.

People will say that I am furnishing our enemies with weapons. This is also untrue, for my

proposal can only be carried out with the free consent of a majority of Jews. Individuals, or even powerful bodies of Jews, might be attacked, but governments will take no action against the collective nation. The equal right of Jews before the law cannot be withdrawn where they have once been conceded, for their withdrawal would immediately drive all Jews, rich and poor alike, into the ranks of the revolutionary party. Even under present conditions the first official violation of Jewish liberties invariably brings about an economic crisis. The weapons used against us cut the hands that wield them. Meantime, hatred grows apace.

Again, it will be said that our enterprise is hopeless, because, even if we obtain the land with the supremacy over it, the poorest Jews only will go there. But it is precisely the poorest whom we need at first. Only desperados make good conquerors. The rich and well-to-do will follow later, when they will find the new country as pleasant as the old, or ever pleasanter. . . .

But we can do nothing without the enthusiasm of our own nation. The idea must make its way into the most distant miserable holes where our people dwell. They will awaken from gloomy brooding, for into their lives will come a new significance. Let each of them but think of himself, and what vast proportions the movement must assume! And what glory awaits those who fight unselfishly for the cause! A wondrous generation of Jews will spring into existence. The Maccabees will rise again.

And so it will be: It is the poor and the simple who do not know what power man already exercises over the forces of nature, it is just these who will have the firmest faith in the new message. For these have never lost the hope of the Promised Land. This is my message, fellow Jews! Neither fable nor fraud! Every man may test its truth for himself, for every man will carry with him a portion of the Promised Land—one in his head, another in his arms, another in his acquired possessions. We shall live at last as free men, on our own soil, and die peacefully in our own home.

NOTES

1. Herzl arrived in London on November 21, 1895. Through Max Nordau he met Israel Zangwill, who obtained for him an invitation to a banquet of the Maccabaeans Club, where Herzl expounded his ideas and established important contacts. There Herzl met Asher Myers of the *Jewish Chronicle*, who asked Herzl for an article. Consequently, the *Jewish Chronicle* article preceded *The Jewish State* by four weeks in its publication of Herzl's views.
2. "Anatocism" is the principle of charging compound interest.
3. This paragraph appears to have been taken verbatim from *The Jewish State*.
4. According to Herzl's plan, the Jewish Company was to be entrusted with the execution of the transfer of the Jews to their own state. The society that Herzl proposed was later to be called the Zionist Organization (after 1960, the World Zionist Organization).
5. This passage, which also appears in *The Jewish State*, is frequently cited as proof of the colonial, imperialist intentions of Zionism. It must be viewed, however, in light of Herzl's vision of the Zionist homeland as an ally of the colonized people in their struggle for liberation and restored dignity. In his novel *Old-New Land* (1902), for example, Herzl presents a romantic vision that encompasses the restoration of slaves to Africa as a solution to the so-called Negro Problem.

4

First Zionist Congress The Basle Program August 31, 1897

The First Zionist Congress, convened by Theodor Herzl in the summer of 1897 in Basle, Switzerland, founded the Zionist Organization and adopted the following official statement of Zionist purpose. While taking into consideration the agricultural achievements of such groups as the Bilu (see doc. 1) and Hibbat Zion (see doc. 2), the congress endorsed, in this statement, Herzl's political Zionism. According to Herzl, the Jewish Problem could be solved only by large-scale migration and settlement of Palestine, which could be attained only through the political assistance and consent of the community of nations. The solution to the Jewish Problem would thus be politically and internationally guaranteed by a charter granting the Jewish people (through the Zionist Organization) the right to reestablish an autonomous homeland in Palestine.

The aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law.

The Congress contemplates the following means to the attainment of this end:

1. The promotion, on suitable lines, of the colonization of Palestine by Jewish agricultural and industrial workers.
2. The organization and binding together of the whole Jewry by means of appropriate institutions, local and international in accordance with the laws of each country.
3. The strengthening and fostering of Jewish national sentiment and consciousness.
4. Preparatory steps toward obtaining government consent, where necessary, to the attainment of the aim of Zionism.

Source: *Jewish Chronicle*, September 3, 1897, p. 13. Reprinted in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 429. Annotations adapted and used by permission.