

## Vladimir Jabotinsky *Revisionism* Lesson Plan

**Central Historical Question: What was the core of the conflict between Jabotinsky and Weizmann which led Jabotinsky to found the Revisionist Party?**

### Materials:

- Revisionism PowerPoint
- *Revisionism* Video
- Copies of *Documents A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H.*

### Plan of Instruction:

*The PowerPoint, video and supporting documents reinforce lesson content through purposeful repetition and the gradual addition of new material.*

#### 1. Pass out Documents A-H.

Mini-lecture with PowerPoint:

- Slide: National Hero: *On September 1st, 1920, Jabotinsky arrives in London with his wife Joanna and son Eri. He receives broad and sympathetic news coverage. To the Jews he is a national hero, praised as the “Defender of Jerusalem,” “the Prisoner of Acre,” and the “Father of the Jewish Legion.” Despite his mistreatment at the hands of the British administration, he is optimistic and forgiving. As the Jewish Chronicle writes: “He looked none the worse for his unpleasant experience and showed no sign of a dampened or chastened spirit. On the contrary, he dismissed the episode with a shrug of his shoulders. Mr. Jabotinsky is brimming with zeal and energy, of which he seems to have an inexhaustible supply, to take his rightful place in the upbuilding of the nation in Palestine.”*
- Slide: Keren Hayesod: *In October, Chaim Weizmann, who is credited with ushering through the Balfour Declaration, invites Jabotinsky to join a new organization, the Keren Hayesod, also known as the Palestine Foundation Fund. It’s responsible for raising the massive amount of funds necessary to build the Jewish National Home. Jabotinsky joins the directorate and takes charge of the Keren Haysod’s public relations department. In November, 1921, he travels to the U.S. for seven months, during which time he speaks in over 50 cities with the purpose of raising money.*
- Slide: Zionist Executive Invitation: *Jabotinsky also takes part in other Zionist work, with Weizmann, as they campaign the British War Office to*

- reconstruct the Jewish Legion. In March, 1921, Weizmann asks Jabotinsky to join the Zionist Executive, the leadership body of the World Zionist Organization.*
- *Slide: Struggle of Conscience: Jabotinsky faces an intellectual and moral dilemma in deciding whether to join the Zionist Executive. The question that he struggles with is whether he should fight the leadership from without – storm the castle – or work for change from within. Because Jabotinsky already sees troubling signs with Weizmann’s leadership, which he feels is too accommodating toward the British. Although he fears that “The real power of government ... will remain in the same hands as yesterday,” meaning Weizmann, Jabotinsky decides in favor of joining the Executive. Unfortunately for Jabotinsky, his fears are borne out. The other members of the Executive ignore his suggestions. There is little follow-through on his suggestions that Zionists demand a say in the choice of senior officials in Palestine or that the British resurrect the Legion.*
  - *Slide: A Question of Tactics: Immediately after joining, Jabotinsky is at odds with Weizmann. The root of the disagreement is a question of tactics. Jabotinsky believes the Zionists should mobilize public opinion to bring about a change in Britain’s increasingly anti-Zionist policy. He believes the discrimination against the Jews of Palestine should be brought out into the open. Weizmann, on the other hand, believes in backroom dealings to push forward Zionist goals.*
  - *Slide: Sins of Herbert Samuel: Then there is the disappointing leadership of Herbert Samuel, first High Commissioner of Palestine. Weizmann failed to protest the precedents set by the British military administration. That failure now bears poison fruit as Sir Herbert Samuel, despite being Jewish and a Zionist, continues the same policy. Samuel, who is a weak character, is unable to resist Arab pressure or the scare tactics of his own anti-Zionist officials, who are holdovers from military rule, which he himself refused to get rid of. When the Arabs riot again in May 1921, Samuel appeases them, submitting to their demand to restrict Jewish immigration. He appoints Haj Amin al Husseini, who played a leading role in the Arab riots in Jerusalem the year before, as Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Weizmann knows all of this but refuses to condemn Samuel. In fact, he defends Samuel in public, only criticizing him privately.*
  - *Slide: Jabotinsky Resigns: The political situation deteriorates after the riots, with the British placing the responsibility for the Arab violence on the ‘unfair’ Balfour Declaration and statements of “Zionist extremists”. The political losses Zionism sustains during this period culminate in the*

*Churchill White Paper of 1922, a document which waters down the meaning of the Balfour Declaration.*

*Jabotinsky remains on the Executive but a gulf widens between himself and the rest of the members. Jabotinsky tells a friend in 1922, “Weizmann wants to follow his system, without a struggle, in an atmosphere of beautiful words and expressions of love. This means to concede, to give in, to retreat. He would like the English to regard him always with “quiet satisfaction.” But we shall achieve this only if we show firmness in our views, if we don’t stop pressing, if they have to regard us sometimes with ‘anxious dissatisfaction.’”*

*Jabotinsky continues to pressure the Executive to change its methods in dealing with the British. In January 1923, he submits several resolutions. His recommendations are met with irritation and hostility. Weizmann, who doesn’t tolerate criticism, had said earlier of Jabotinsky, he “kicks impossibly all of the time and makes life and peaceful work almost impossible; so our little car moves like a Catholic procession.” That is now the general consensus. The desire that Jabotinsky resign is unanimous. Jabotinsky quits on January 18, 1923.*

- *Slide: Betar: Later that year, Jabotinsky is on a speaking tour of the Baltic states. He meets a group of Zionist high school students in Riga, Latvia who inspire him to form a worldwide youth organization. The Riga group becomes its first chapter. Betar is based around a code of personal behavior that Jabotinsky terms Hadar, its meaning translates best as “overall impeccability”. It attempts a drastic rebuilding of manners and behavior, an attempt to combat the misery and degradation into which the Jews of Europe had fallen. Betar emphasizes martial training and discipline. Betar also does away with other ideologies that have entered the movement, like socialism. The only ideology accepted by Betar is Zionism.*
- *Slide: New League of Zionist Revisionists: In the hopes of countering the erosion of Zionist goals, Jabotinsky founds a new party, the League of Zionist Revisionists. It holds its first conference on April 25, 1925 in Paris. Its goal is to “revise” Zionist policy by making it more assertive; to demand of Britain that it honor its obligations to the Jews. The Revisionists hope to reverse the climate of retreat that has crept into the Zionist movement. It has even become unpopular to admit that Zionism’s goal is a Jewish state. The Revisionists declare, “The aim of Zionism is the gradual transformation of Palestine (Transjordan included) into a Jewish commonwealth, that is, into a self-governing commonwealth under the auspices of an established Jewish majority.”*

- Slide: Arab Riots: *In 1929, the Arabs riot. Not only have the British, through their anti-Zionist policy, actively encouraged the riots, but they act weakly when the riots occur. The riots make a mockery of the Zionist leadership's assumption that Britain is carrying out the Mandate in a "satisfactory" way. Weizmann even praises the British response.*
- Slide: Jerusalem Speech: *On December 23, 1929, before a crowd of 6,000 in Jerusalem, Jabotinsky criticizes the Zionist Executive, warning against appeasing the Arabs. He offers a series of demands the Zionist leadership should make to the Mandatory power.*
- Slide: Barred from Eretz Israel: *Two days later, he departs the country for a speaking tour of South Africa. British officials claim the speech was inciting. But there was nothing in the speech of the kind. As one historian noted, "The very moderate Haaretz later (September 17, 1931) bluntly said that 'it would not make a single hair fall from anybody's head.'" Even so, when Jabotinsky, after a few months' abroad, wanted to return to Jerusalem, the Palestine administration refused to honor his reentry visa which had been issued to him before he left." Jabotinsky finds that he is banished, an attempt by the British to satisfy the Arab nationalists and anti-Zionist English politicians. Jabotinsky will never succeed in returning to the Land of Israel.*
- Slide: Passfield White Paper: *In response to the 1929 riots the British government adopts the Passfield White Paper, issued on October 20, 1930, it calls for limiting Jewish immigration and requiring Jews to get permission before developing more land. The White Paper sparks public outrage and Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald is forced to retreat. Jabotinsky sees this as proof that British policy can be changed through public pressure -- the tactic he's been advocating all along.*
- Slide: 17<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress: *For a time, it looks like Jabotinsky will succeed in changing the World Zionist Organization's approach. At the 17<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress in 1931, Weizmann is forced out of the leadership over dissatisfaction with his weak policy toward the British. Jabotinsky is not elected in his place, however. When he proposes a resolution to be adopted by the Congress proclaiming a Jewish majority in Palestine as Zionism's goal, the Congress refuses to vote on it. Jabotinsky tears up his delegate's card and declares "This is not a Zionist Congress!"*
- Slide: A Kangaroo Court: *After his experience at the last Zionist Congress, Jabotinsky wants to leave the World Zionist Organization to freely pursue his own policies. But he allows his colleagues to convince him to stay and*

*campaign in the lead-up to the next congress in the hopes of obtaining enough votes for a Revisionist Party majority. Jabotinsky campaigns mainly in Poland. Shortly before the Congress, on June 16th, 1933, a Labor leader, Chaim Arlosoroff, is killed on a Tel Aviv beach. The Revisionists' opponents, the Labor delegates, accuse the Revisionists of the murder. (Although the murder is never solved, he was likely killed by two Arabs who confess to the crime.) The Labor Zionists win big in the elections and control the 18<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress that year. Jabotinsky and the Revisionists are met with an atmosphere of intense hatred and scorn. The 18th Congress turns into a "kangaroo court" in which the entire Revisionist movement is tried, convicted and condemned. Jabotinsky says later, "The whole Revisionist party was deliberately and officially pilloried as organically connected with assassination." Jabotinsky has had enough.*

- Slide: New Zionist Organization: *The Revisionists exit the World Zionist Organization to form an independent New Zionist Organization. The decision to break with the WZO is based on Revisionist opposition to its policies and electoral changes in the WZO that would make Revisionist victory impossible. The New Zionist Organization adopts a program that demands Britain fulfill its obligations to the Jewish people under the Mandate, meaning, a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River.*

## 2. Play video: Revisionism

Introduce inquiry question: What was the core of the conflict between Jabotinsky and Weizmann which led Jabotinsky to found the Revisionist Party?

## 3. Whole class discussion:

- Jabotinsky believed in publicly criticizing the British. Weizmann believed in working behind the scenes to affect change. Jabotinsky said Weizmann's way led to 'unwitting apostasy' and 'disavowal'. Is there evidence that he was right?
- Historian Ben Zion Netanyahu has written that the hostility to Jabotinsky among Jews, including Zionists, for emphasizing military training in his youth movement Betar – to the point he was called Vladimir Hitler – seems remarkable now. In the era of the rise of Mussolini and Hitler can you understand why this would have been so controversial?
- What is your reaction to learning that the Zionist leadership at one point was not only afraid to declare its goal was a state but even to admit that it wanted a Jewish majority in Palestine?

- Jabotinsky was strongly opposed to this, insisting honesty was the best policy. Would you agree with Jabotinsky or do you think in politics it is sometimes necessary to fudge the truth?
4. Hand out Review Questions (may be used as end of class Quiz).

**Document A: “Chaim Weizmann: A Biography”,  
Norman Rose (1986)**

[Herbert] Samuel’s behavior was also giving Weizmann much cause for concern. In March 1921, he had appointed Haj Amin al-Husayni as Mufti of Jerusalem, a post that carried not only spiritual authority but also great financial and political power. Haj Amin, an incurable anti-Zionist, had been tried *in absentia* for his part in the 1920 riots and sentenced to fifteen years’ imprisonment. He had fled Palestine. Now he returned covered with glory. This was a monumental blunder on Samuel’s part, but, at that time, Weizmann was more concerned by Samuel’s decision to temporarily suspend immigration in the wake of the May 1921 disturbances and, still more, by his June speech, which placed a most limited interpretation on the Balfour Declaration. ‘Honour him, but suspect him,’ he advised, choosing as his text a popular Hebrew proverb. But he refrained from criticizing Samuel in public, not wishing to exacerbate relations with the British government. He consoled the Zionist Congress: never forget that ‘Samuel is the High Commissioner for Palestine and we are High Commissioners for *Erez Israel* [the Land of Israel]’. In private, however, he wrote ‘openly and with a brutal frankness.’ He told Herbert Samuel that there had been ‘a shifting of political values ... which momentarily obscure the vision of British statesmen.’ He hoped this was a passing phase, but the tendency to ignore the Balfour Declaration and the San Remo decisions ‘destroys the political foundation on which we have been building. ... It seems that everything in Palestinian life is now revolving round one central problem – how to satisfy “and to pacify” the Arabs. Zionism is being gradually, systematically and relentlessly “reduced.”’

Source: *Chaim Weizmann: A Biography*, Norman Rose, Elisabeth Sifton Books, Viking Penguin Inc., New York, 1986, p. 216-217.

**Document B: “Article in Di Tribune”, Vladimir “Ze’ev”  
Jabotinsky (March 23, 1921)**

Politically we have achieved a great deal, and those responsible have earned the eternal gratitude of the nation. But great political mistakes have been made: there has been too much rejoicing, too much thanksgiving, and too little exploitation of the promises given (by the British). There is a danger that even now, with the text of the Mandate known to all, and everybody has seen how beautiful are the principles and how weak the guarantees they are giving us, an attempt will be made to get the Jewish people once more to shout “hurrah!” – and to give thanks, instead of declaring openly and honestly that if we are expected to perform a major work of colonization we must be given substantial political rights ...

For two years we allowed the previous English administration to become accustomed to the idea that a serious anti-Semitic policy could be pursued in Palestine without risk to the career of the anti-Semites. When the cry went forth from Palestine that a pogrom against the Jews was being quite openly prepared the reply from “above” was always that these were only hysterical noises and that General X and Colonel Y were our best friends.

We must make it clear once and for all that the true cause of the corruption of the previous administration and of the catastrophe was not merely its own anti-Semitism but our eternal “all right.” ...

There are already signs that despite the influence of Herbert Samuel the feeling among many of the English officials has remained the same as in Allenby’s day ... Now as then they feel that the Jew is incapable of safeguarding his rights, and until killing actually starts he continues to say “all right.” Without a healthy opposition in the country, without hard daily resistance to every injustice, to every rude remark about Jews, no normal political atmosphere can be created anywhere in the world, and Palestine is no exception.

*Source: As Quoted In: Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky Vol. 1, Shmuel Katz, Barricade Books, New York, 1996, p.698-699.*

**Document C: “Memorandum to Zionist Executive”,  
Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky, (November 5, 1922)**

Our movement can only thrive in an atmosphere of clearness. It was the policy of drift and bluff that has brought us to the present situation. This policy – avoid a straight talk with the government for fear that they have up their sleeve a ready and unpleasant reply, and at the same time to tell the Jewish public that everything is in perfect order – this policy can no more be countenanced. With great reluctance I must even say that it will no more be possible to carry on this policy unless the Executive is prepared to face an open split in its own ranks.

*Source: The Jabotinsky Story: Rebel and Statesman, Joseph B. Schechtman, Thomas Yoseloff Books, New York, 1961, p. 426*

**Document D: “Jabotinsky: A Life”, Hillel Halkin (2014)**

In November 1923, he traveled to the Baltic states to drum up subscriptions for *Razsviet*. The trip was to prove a fateful one. While in Riga he delivered a lecture on the need for a more “activist” Zionism, after which he was approached by some students in the audience, members of a German-style Jewish dueling fraternity named the Hasmonean. He sat up with them till late at night, drinking beer and singing student and Zionist songs, and they proposed launching a movement to be headed by him that would put “activist” Zionism into practice.

The young Hasmoneans caught Jabotinsky’s fancy. Even in their carousing, they seemed different from other young Zionists he knew – less argumentative, less concerned with ideology and its fine points, more prepared to act as a cohesive body. Mutual aid was a supreme value from them. At the railroad station as he prepared to leave Riga, he witnessed a fraternity member, recognizable by his cap, struggling with two heavy suitcases. At once a fellow Hasmonean left the girl he was talking to and hurried across the platform to help. A simple, even trivial incident, it struck Jabotinsky as something he would never have seen in his own student years.

He returned to Berlin full of enthusiasm. He had met, he wrote in a letter, a new Jewish youth,

One thirsting for discipline and strong leadership – something that didn’t exist in my own generation or in the generation of the war. It’s had a decisive effect on me. I’ve made up my mind to return to [the sphere of] action rather than [limit myself to] writing – that is, to do whatever is necessary to found a movement that will encompass [Zionist] activists from all over the world.

A Yosef Trumpeldor Organization for Activist Zionist Youth was established in Riga, and Jabotinsky founded a League of Zionist Activists in Berlin. This was the beginning of Betar, which did not start out as a centralized or even single organization. ...

If Labor Zionism had its heroic ideal of the pioneer, so would he – and the Betarnik would be more noble, more iron-willed, more self-mastering and self-transcending than the Zionist prole of the socialist commune. The missive continued:

Betar is also austereness; guard the purity and grandeur [*tif'eret*] of your lives like the Nazarites of old. Let this be your credo: grandeur in everything – in your speech and behavior, in your relations with friends and enemies, with Jews and Gentiles, with women and children and the elderly. Treat your work (whether behind a desk or outdoors, in a private or public capacity) as something sacred; be a weapon, strong and sharp, in times of danger; be exemplars of courtesy and honesty in your daily lives in society.

Eventually, Jabotinsky found the “clear, simple word” he was looking for. It was the Hebrew *hadar*, which replaced the *tif'eret* of his 1928 missive. *Hadar* had no exact equivalent in English. “Majesty,” “dignity,” “pride of bearing” – there is something in it of each. For Jabotinsky, it embraced a comprehensive code of behavior that would rehabilitate the new Jews from the maiming effects of Diaspora life. In his manifesto “The Idea of Betar,” written in 1934 when the movement was nearly seventy thousand strong, he devoted a section to *hadar* that stated:

Although it is important that everyone strive for *hadar*, it is particularly important for us Jews. The life of exile has greatly weakened in us the healthy instincts of a normal people, above all, in relation to the outer forms of our existence. We all know, and sometimes complain to ourselves, that the average Jew considers it superfluous to pay attention to his manners and appearance. ... [Yet] Just as everyone should attend to his personal hygiene, not because of what others will say if he doesn't but – even if he lives on a desert island – as a matter of self-respect, so every word he utters and every movement he makes should reflect a higher consciousness of his “lordliness.” Every man must be a lord unto himself, the Jew especially. ... We Jews are the most “aristocratic” people on earth. ... Behind every one of us stand seventy generations of ancestors who

could read and write, and who spoke about and inquired into God and history, peoples and kingdoms, ideas of justice and integrity, humanity and its future. Every Jew is in this sense a “prince.” It is bitter irony, the consequence of exile, that Jews are regarded everywhere, even by themselves, as lacking the social graces of a nursery school child.”

*Source: Jabotinsky: A Life, Hillel Halkin, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2014, p. 147-148.*

**Document E: “The Jabotinsky Story”, Joseph B. Schechtman (1961)**

“*Alea jacta est*,” Jabotinsky announced with mock pomposity to this writer on November 6, 1924: “I am again in the field, and I am going to do my damndest to launch a truly Herzlian movement. The foundation conference of this movement, so often postponed, will this time take place not later than next spring. You can count on it.” The name of the movement was the object of lively discussion among the Paris group that was in charge of the preparatory work. Several suggestions were offered: “Activists,” the “*Rasswyet Group*,” etc. “And why not ‘Revisionists?’” timidly asked one of the younger zealots, Y. Yeivine. Jabotinsky liked the suggestion. It tallied with his concept of the mission he was about to undertake: to revise the program and tactics of the Zionist Organization ...

In an article, “Political Tasks of the Conference,” which appeared in the *Rasswyet* on April 19, 1925, Jabotinsky insisted that “it is time to proclaim aloud and clearly” that the aim of Zionism is the establishment of a Jewish State.

**Vocabulary**

Alea Jacta Est: (“The die is cast”) is a Latin phrase attributed by Suetonius to Julius Caesar on January 10, 49 BC as he led his army across the Rubicon river in Northern Italy.

Source: *The Jabotinsky Story: Fighter and Prophet*, Joseph B. Schechtman, Thomas Yoseloff Books, New York, 1961, p. 37-38

**Document F: “The Jabotinsky Story”, Joseph Schechtman (1961)**

On December 23, 1929, two days before his departure from Palestine, Jabotinsky spoke in Tel Aviv before six thousand people. He subjected the policy of the Zionist Executive to devastating criticism and decried it continuing in office. He warned against concessions to the Arabs which lead nowhere, and presented a clearly defined program of demands to be submitted to the Mandatory Power. ...

Some time after his departure, officials of the Palestine Government had a “friendly talk” with Jabotinsky’s political associates and plainly hinted that his return to Palestine would be most unwelcome: his speeches and articles had been causing excitement and angering the Arabs. The Colonial Office informed Jabotinsky personally that the High Commissioner had been displeased with his speech. The answer was: if the speech contained something unlawful, the Palestine Government should arraign the orator or the paper that published the speech before a court of law. The Government did not take recourse to either of these legal steps. There was obviously little hope of obtaining a conviction even in a Palestine court. The speech was anything but inciting. The very moderate *Haaretz* later (September 17, 1931) bluntly said that “it would not make a single hair fall from anybody’s head.”

Nevertheless, when Jabotinsky, after a few months’ stay abroad, wanted to resume his work in Jerusalem, the Palestine administration refused to honor the reentry visa which had been issued to him prior to his departure. ...

There can be hardly any doubt that this banishment was an attempt to satisfy the wishes of both Arab nationalist agitators and anti-Zionist English politicians.

*Source: The Jabotinsky Story: Fighter and Prophet, Joseph B. Schechtman, Thomas Yoseloff Books, New York, 1961, p. 125-126*

**Document G: “Interview with Jewish Telegraphic Agency”, Chaim Weizmann (July 3, 1931)**

I have no sympathy or understanding for the demand for a Jewish majority. A majority does not necessarily guarantee security. ... A majority is not required for the development of Jewish civilization and culture. The world will construe this demand only in one sense, that we want to acquire a majority in order to drive out the Arabs.

*Source: As Quoted In: Chaim Weizmann: A Biography, Norman Rose, Elisabeth Sifton Books, Viking Penguin Inc., New York, 1986, p. 290-219.*

**Document H: “Speech Before 17th Zionist Congress”,  
Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky (July 2, 1931)**

[T]ruth has a purifying effect. Are we not all tired and are we not all nauseated by the constant evasions. Clearing the atmosphere is a political imperative – and it will be achieved if we tell the truth. Why should we allow the term “Jewish State” to be described as extremism? The Albanians have a state of their own, the Bulgarians have a state of their own, a state after all is a normal condition of every nation. If a Jewish State existed today nobody would say that this was not normal. And if we are aiming at normalization, it is permissible to say that this is extremism – and are we ourselves expected to say it?

*Source: As Quoted In: Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky Vol. 2, Shmuel Katz, Barricade Books, New York, 1996, p.1254.*

