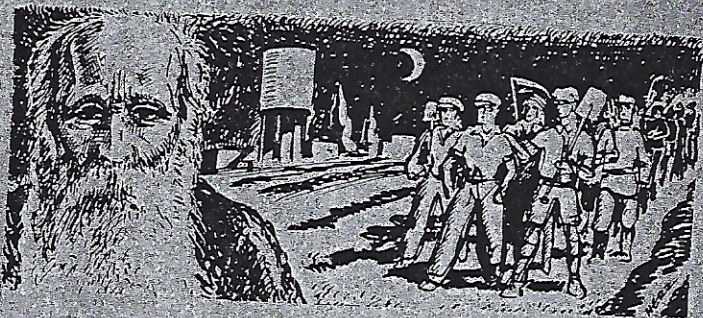


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THE SECOND ALIYAH

An Anthology



ZIONIST YOUTH COUNCIL
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the Second Aliyah came to Palestine.

Introduction

A PICTURE OF THE SECOND ALIYAH

By Shmuel Dayan

The Second Aliyah was unique in its basic principles. And one wonders how people without any organization before they came, achieved such unity in action. The greater part of these immigrants succumbed to defeatist moods; most returned to the places they came from, they could not hold out. Only a small proportion remained in the country. But there were among them exceptional characters whose worth was enhanced and defined by working in the group; and some of these left a mark that can still be seen in various sectors of Israel life, particularly in colonization.

What distinguished them from their predecessors of the First Aliyah was the goal to which they dedicated their lives: the "Conquest of Labor," to live as workers. They aspired to redeem Jewish colonization from parasitical dependency - so that our national existence would not be built upon non-Jewish sweat and labor. This was both a national and a personal ideal: to live by one's own toil, for only so can man be redeemed; for only this principle entitles our movement to define itself as rebirth, both of the person and the people.

Thus arose the slogans of Hapoel Hatzair: the conquest of labor, and national and individual rebirth.

Those who persisted - under conditions of semi-starvation, of difficult adjustment to life as day laborers, in competition with cheap "native" workers and in the face of the derision or the cynicism and despair of those idealists who preceded them, and of hatred on the part of the Arabs - those who remained were firm and strong like the healthy shoots of a tree nursery with which an orchard is planted; and even physically, it seems, they had great strength.

For the men of Degania, Nahalal, Kfar Yechezkel, Kfar Giladi and other settlements, are now approaching the seventies. They spent most of their years in Israel amid hard and anxious times.

Before they could settle on their own they usually worked for ten or fifteen years as casual laborers in heavy farm work or as guards in the Jewish colonies. Their food for years was never more than a noodle soup and some porridge. Many a day they hadn't even that much. Milk, eggs, and meat never came upon their tables at all. In Galilee they slept in barns with the cattle, and worked in the fields all day. In Judea, one room was home for several people at once.

That was their "housing situation" for many a year. Their beds were boards laid on tin gallon cans; no spring or mattress. And when they did settle on the land after fifteen years, they lived in tents or rickety barracks, which were open to wind and rain. Their diet was not quickly improved, either. And the work grew greater and much more difficult. Spiritual gratifications can evidently overcome the hardships of intolerable living conditions. Their iron will is shown in their success in withstanding all trials, including the temptation to return whence they had come, or to cast away their "dreams" and find a more comfortable situation. When I say "they," it includes without distinction those who still, after fifty years, work on the soil and those who today stand at the head of our government. For they all drank at the same stream: their spirits were formed out of the suffering of our people, its precarious situation, its landlessness, the pogroms in Homel and Kishinev, Bialik's cry of outrage in B'ir Haharega, and the national renaissance, together with the ill-success of early practical efforts at colonization in Israel. All these imbued them with the resolve to arise and emigrate, and become workers.

In Israel they became a united band of labor. The tie that bound them together was a tie of the spirit; their life in Zion and their hatred of exile. They were men of strong will. This was the power that enabled them to overcome their material and spiritual hardships, the self-hatred and hostility of the Palestine Jewish community, of the Jewish farmers, their predecessors, who had in the course of years become wealthy colonists. For many of these predecessors turned their back on Zionism and became adherents of the Uganda project, just at the time when the men of the Second Aliyah came to Palestine.

The Second Aliyah was of the stern school of Shammai, not the gentle school of Hillel; firm in their views and sure of the justice of their cause and ideal; they were not mild and moderate in judgment. Their criticism was sharp and their words were edged. A.D. Gordon condemned as "parasites" those in the community who did not work. Joseph Aronovitz spoke these harsh words to the peasant proprietors: "We will come and rob you of your sons and daughters." The men of Hashomer mocked the farmers whose fields they guarded and called them "cowards."

Doubt gnawed at the hearts of these few dozen young men. Would they hold out? Would they learn to be laborers? They hoped to organize in one body for their common aim, but they were forced to divide and form two rival parties, because of a difference of method and approach, leading to the same goal. Their firmness in their own opinions shows a self-assurance that may have been exaggerated. But this was the source of the strength that made them overcome doubts and hesitations. Their firmness of will guided them on a true course, without retreat, with boundless zeal. Fanaticism is not an attractive quality, whether in a person or a group; but it is a sign of consecration, devotion, and faith. Through these traits of character, they gained the strength to make Hebrew a language of daily use, to establish Jewish labor in the Jewish economy and to master the soil.

Zealots are not comfortable companions. It is better to live with those who can prize and understand the views of others and find a way to mutual accommodation. For those who have no firm opinions, for those who waver, this is not difficult at all. But men of independent mind cannot change themselves for this would undermine their very foundation; they would thus surrender their independence. Such men are not pleasant for their opponents, but they are admired by all who think like them. Such men are fit for work and action. One can imagine the resentment, aroused by Eliezer ben Yehudah, what an irritating bore he must have seemed, but Jewish history regards him as the pioneer of the revival of Hebrew, after it had been dead two thousand years.

The strict observers, the men of harsh judgments, are not mere theorists. This their personal character will not permit. They take a stern compulsive view of their own vision, and hence are pitilessly uncompromising. That is why relations among the workers' groups become so difficult. The members of the Poale Zion, believing in the idea of the class struggle, lived no better

than did those of Hapoel Hatzair who were without regular work and from time to time without food. But they fiercely opposed the latter because they did not accept the ideology of class struggle. In their fanaticism, they went beyond the bounds of comradeship.

The relations between adherents of the small-holders' cooperatives and the adherents of the kibbutz and kvutza were similar. Each saw the opposition in the other idea, and could not understand how two rival ideas could live side by side in the same society. They could not rest content in the justice of their own cause, but demanded that everyone accept their views. For in an atmosphere of zeal and fanaticism, the fear that another view will prevail is always active.

These men were moral to the core, for their whole idea was one of concern for others, for the people. The people was diseased - as Joseph Vitkin put it - and its cure was labor, hard work. Everything that could save the people was holy. As for one's "ego" - whoever concerned himself with it? Wages must be measured by the actual value of labor, based on the standard accepted in the market for the labor of non-Jewish workers. Eliezer Shohat turned back to his employer the surplus that he wished to pay him above the daily wage of an Arab laborer.

They would starve rather than accept charity - that is, accept a wage any part of which was given out of benevolence. They immigrated in order to give, to be bricks in the structure of the people and the country. They regarded themselves as the chosen agents of Jewish history to renew the life of the people in its homeland. We can see that now, after half a century, for what they did shows a sense of election and a calling, though they themselves did not know it and never spoke of it. Their program was quite prosaic: an appeal to every Jew and to the whole people to go up and achieve Jewish labor, Jewish self-defense and security, and the revival of Hebrew. The very simplest of programs. With this, they appealed to Jewish youth, and made themselves the first to carry out the call.

The idea of labor was a basic principle in the belief of the Hovevei Zion, the Biluim, and the other early settlers. But it was only for a short time that it was actually carried out by the First Aliyah. Their colonies were quickly overrun with non-Jewish workers. The agents of Baron Rothschild did not concern themselves over this development. Even Ahad Ha'Am, the spiritual

guide of the Hovevei Zion, reconciled himself to the figure of a Boaz, a wealthy Jewish planter with non-Jewish hired hands, as the type of a Jewish farmer. Even the Bilu settlement went the way of all the others - Arab workers and Jewish supervisors.

It was the Second Aliyah that placed Jewish labor at the foundation of our renaissance, they exalted labor and made it a value to fill one's life. The idea of "self-realization" made them what they were. This became the measuring stick of a man's morals and conscience. They made labor the principle of education for future generations and a foundation of Jewish ethics in our time. It was this force upon which we relied that made us into a laboring people.

Eliezer Ben Yehuda, the glorious zealot of the Hebrew language, was remote from the workers, both from their society and their views. There was no lasting contact between the two. In the fight for Hebrew the teachers were a small camp and the workers relatively numerous; and it was the latter who made Hebrew-speaking part of their daily lives, both in the colonies and in the cities. The laborers also fathered Hashomer, the armed force which first made possible an independent attitude in our relations with an environment rife with raiding and banditry, and governed mainly by respect for power. A voluntary system of guarding life and property was in accord with the spirit of the workers, who immigrated to Israel in order to offer up everything unreservedly for the redemption of the people. Duty in the Jewish guard was an educational force in the lives of generations and it made its impression upon the Arabs. It became the groundwork upon which was built the Haganah, that later paved the way for the Defense Forces of the State of Israel.

These three foundations - labor, the Hebrew language, and self-defense, - were laid down by the men of the Second Aliyah at the very beginning, in their first two years in the country.

In the very midst of their unemployment problem, their hardships of adjustment, and economic insecurity, they were filled with anxious thoughts about political organization. In fanatical insistence on their own ideological premises, individuals rose in opposition to each other and founded the two parties which served as organizational implements to defend the workers' interests and point-of-view.

When the question arose whether they should stick it out as wage-laborers, proletarians dedicated to the idea of Jewish labor, or go

into independent colonization, Joseph Aronovitch was inclined to favor wage labor. One could regard Joseph Vitkin, the protagonist of labor settlement on the soil, as retreating from a difficult but fundamental strategic position to one of greater ease. But actually Vitkin's assumptions were no less strategically fundamental, and they were rooted in a profound realization that the soil was waste, and that it was the rootless Jew who must cultivate it and turn it into fertile fields.

Today one may ask in bewilderment why, in 1908, they had to dispute over such issues - at a time when they tossed on their beds of boards in malarial fevers, and were eaten up with doubt whether they were really capable of working consistently in the burning sun with the turiya mattock, and living on oranges and cactus pears.

The debate arose when the call came to go to Galilee, where there were ploughhands, sowing and reaping, where the Jewish owner was a peasant type, and not a plantation owner ruling over Arab workers.

In those days Mitzpa was founded and Yamma (Yavneel) was settled, and they had to answer the question whether independent labor settlement did not simply mean abandoning the ranks of the workers.

Vitkin's views won out -- both in theory and in practice.

At that time the Galilean workers were struggling to found an organization aiming at the creation of a class of simple working farmers, not like the Judean planters, who were not themselves workers. They organized the Ploughman's Society, Hahoresh, in order to disseminate in Eretz Yisrael and abroad information about work opportunities and conditions in Galilee. It was a sort of labor exchange. The Hahoresh also took an active part in the famous strike in Kinnereth, and became the seed from which grew the Histadruth.

To create a class of working farmers in the Jewish people -- herein lay the basic idea that was later embodied in the moshav ovdim. The first precursor of this type of settlement was already established at that time in Ein Ganim.

S. Mamashi published in Davar reports from Galilee, in which he outlined plans of organization for the workers settlements. Joseph Vitkin published articles about a scheme for individual settle-

ment, based upon loans from the Anglo-Palestine Bank and leases of nationally owned land. The "Hadera commune" and the "Sedjera collective" took the road that led to the kyutza.

In contrast to the earlier colonists of Judea and Galilee, the workers developed two original forms of colonization, built on principles of justice and the exclusion of labor exploitation. They aimed to create a just society, realizing true Socialism. This, too, was in the period of 1907-8.

Because of the antagonism between the workers and the Petach Tikva planters, the workers were denied the benefit of assistance the colony used to grant in case of illness. They could not be served by the doctor, the pharmacist, or the loan fund, for the workers were officially boycotted by the colony. Consequently, the Petach Tikva workers instituted a rotating service of day and night care for the sick. This was the beginning of the system of mutual aid among workers -- in 1907. In a short time, they had laid the foundation for the Israeli workers health service Kupat Holim.

When Zvi Yehuda established the supply stores in Samaria, and through the initiative and activity of Meir Rothberg, Hamashbir centers were set up in Kinneret and Degania at the beginning of the First World War, in 1914, they created the nucleus of Hamashbir which has since grown and spread to its present magnitude. At first, Hamashbir included the purchase of farm produce in its activities, but after a short time Eliezer Yaffe founded Tnuva for this purpose.

It is astonishing how so few people were able, in the face of the hard conditions of that time, to lay down so imposing a foundation for the growth of Zionism and the labor movement, upon which the variegated forms of colonization were erected: the redemption of the soil, Hagana and the cooperatives, the revival of Hebrew and the rise of a workers' literature -- so that all later waves of immigration found nothing lacking in the foundation for them to build upon.

Few were the ideologists and thinkers who were active and stimulated others, molding them into an organized body. They were probably no more than a minyan in each of the political parties. They studied at no universities; most of them were far from the culture of books and of art. They did not acquire their culture from without, but it grew out of their own spirit, from their natural capacities. Their self-expression by word and pen was not polished;

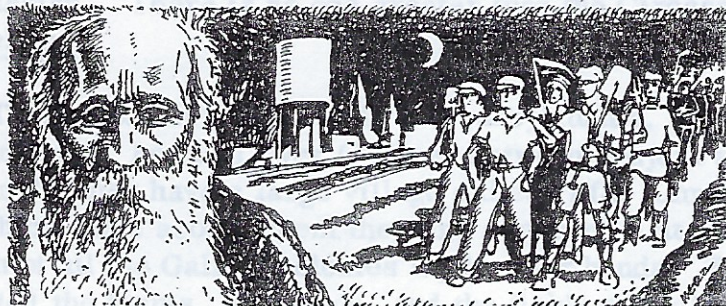
Self-Defense

their inner yearnings were better expressed in the settlements they founded in the fields of Galilee, or on watch "behind the wall" (which surrounded the early settlements in Eretz Yisrael), or in their rides over the expanses of their fields. And altogether they totalled no more than two or three hundred men and women.

The riddle, how so small a number could lay secure foundations for the generations that followed - that riddle is unsolved.

Perhaps it will be easier for us to understand this if we take into consideration that any voluntary emigration involves the qualities of courage and strength. A man leaving his country and family and all that is near and dear to him to go off to a strange country, without a fixed occupation, without means, such a person must be a man of courage, for a weak man could never take such a fateful step. The outstanding characters among them were certainly men of a forceful spirit. They were all, in a sense, Robinson Crusoes; the way back was cut off for them and they had somehow to rebuild their own and their people's life in the new land.

They considered themselves a band that had taken on a responsible mission. They raised a standard and rallied the people in the country and throughout the Diaspora, concentrating all their will upon a single goal: the revival of the people and the country. That flaming vision, which raised the men of that time to the heights of primal creation, immersing them in the fundamentals of thought and the task of creating a new national way of life -- herein is the key to solving the riddle of the Second Aliyah.



Self-Defense

A natural part of the over-all concept of Kibbush Avodah was the necessity for defending that which one was building. Philosophers of the Second Aliyah realized early that they must take over from the Arabs the duties of sh'mira, and make themselves completely responsible for their own efforts.

Although the struggle was a hard one, there grew up in this period the first organized Jewish force of modern times, a force which became, by rigid screening and testing, outstanding in the art of defense.



ON MISHMAR

By David Ben Gurion

The watch of the colony were then Circassians, our neighbors from Kfar Kamah. They occupy a peculiar place among the population of Palestine. The Turkish government is always friendly with the Circassians, whom she invited to come from Caucasasia and Bulgaria to settle here. Their chiefs receive high military positions and wield great power in local government. Their pride is founded not only on the sympathies of the government, but also on their unusual abilities. They possess great courage and bravery, and an intensive desire for work. Besides, their economic position is good, and secure. They are well versed in fighting and their name is on everyone's lips. No fellah, no Bedouin would dare to provoke a Circassian. "There is no one greater than the Circassian," says the fellah.

Their place of habitation is in Transjordan, in the neighborhood of Kunetrah. And in Lower Galilee, between Sedjera and Yemman (Yabinel), they have a large village called "Kfar Kamah." With the Jewish colonies around them they are at peace -- at that time the Watch of all the Galilee colonies lay in their hands. They also guarded the farms, the woods, and the fields of Sedjera. The administrator did not dare to appoint a Jewish Watch.

It became clear to us that we would not take over the Watch at once. Slowly, step by step, a struggle for each separate post must be launched. We decided to begin with the farm. For several nights, we saw to it that the man on Watch did not come to his post. He allowed his name alone to Watch. So are the Arab watchmen, noted for their bravery and their plundering, in the habit of doing. For the Watch are chosen the greatest, most well-known thieves and murderers in the district. Thus it is certain that the knowledge alone, that he has taken over the Watch, will prevent robberies. And even if a robbery occurs, they can ascertain, by means of their large acquaintance, the location of the stolen articles, and return them to the owner, not, of course, without taking a bribe. Though the Watch is responsible for the robbery, it nevertheless takes a large sum of money from the owner for returning it, giving as an excuse for taking the money that they must pay the thief a "price" for the returned goods. Nearly always, they themselves bring about a robbery so that they may later profit by it. And thus our Circassians were in the habit of doing. Instead of walking up and down outside the wall in the dark, he used to go to the Arab village, Sedjera, to enjoy himself with his drunken friends. We brought the administrator's attention to this, showing him how unfaithful the Circassians were, and how false, and how harmful such a system was for us. He listened to us attentively. We decided to convince him of the situation with facts. Once, on a dark night, some of us took several of the best mules from the farm. Immediately we notified the administrator of the robbery. He ran to the barn at once. The mules were gone. So he blew his whistle for the watchman to come -- once, twice, and yet again -- no one came. He went outside, walked around the wall -- perhaps the Circassian had fallen asleep. No one was to be found. Some one was sent at once to look for him in the Arab village. There he was found asleep. The administrator dismissed him, and one of our chaverim was appointed to take his place.

The first stronghold had been captured.

We knew that the Circassians would not let this happen without some form of protest. And sure enough, several days later, when the administrator awoke in the morning, he saw that the window-panes of the house had been broken, and that embedded in the walls of his room were Martini bullets, though both watchmen who were on guard then, had heard no shots. It had been a dark night. Outside a storm raged, and a heavy rain beat down, and it was obvious that the attacker had done this with the idea of frightening the Jewish Watch. Until then the Arabs had nicknamed the Jews, "Children

of Death," i.e.--delicate, frightened, and gentle. And they were right. The Jews whom the Arabs then knew and saw about them were truly deserving of the name. And this time, too, the attackers thought they had "children of death" to deal with, and that they needed only to threaten the new Watch several times, and they would leave their posts voluntarily.

But this time they were mistaken. Soon after that night we organized ourselves. Besides the regular Watch and the chaver who had previously been assigned to be with him, we decided to arrange a Watch consisting of all the workers in pairs. Every two hours a new couple would go on Watch. This would continue from the beginning of the evening until the morning star rose. Without taking our clothes off, we used to lie down in the grain-barn near the mill, our weapons near us--and each pair used to go out on guard when its time came and lurk among the thick cactus or among the rock-crevices. They waited for anything that might come and were ready to call the others to help when needed. This was winter time, and a terrible storm, whose like we had not had for a long time, raged for an entire week over the whole country. In the colonies of Judea, the storm had robbed almost all the trees of their oranges, and had wrought great damage in the orange plantations.

It was so dark that one could not see what was going on around one. When I went out on Watch with my companion, we had to hold on to one another. The trees, the rocks, the houses -- all were sunk in the blackness of the night. We could not even talk to one another -- our voices disappeared in the storm which did not cease all night. It seemed that Nature, too, had joined our enemies and wished to test us. This lasted for about two weeks; finally, the attacks ceased. The Arabs realized that they could not frighten us thus or remove us from the Watch, and they withdrew.

We had come out victorious.

