

CHAIM WEIZMANN

BY GEROLD FRANK

FEW men can be measured against their time with such perfection as Dr. Chaim Weizmann, President of Israel. Unquestionably one of the great figures of this generation, his career is so inextricably bound up with history that it is hard to say how much he shaped events, and how much he was their product. Some have called him the greatest living Jew. Others, paying tribute to his gifts as a research chemist, point out that had he never been a Zionist, he would still rank as a world personality because of his laboratory achievements. Still others think of him as the head of state who more truly than any of his contemporaries embodies in himself the characteristic faith and genius of his people.

Whatever the case, Dr. Weizmann's political labors will have to be assessed in terms of centuries, rather than years. It is sufficient to say — and this tribute comes from Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, who has not always seen eye to eye with him

— that Dr. Weizmann, more than any other living man, helped create the State of Israel. That is the single, incandescent fact about him that puts all else in shadow. That is to an extent his measure and his monument. For while many men helped build Israel, it was Dr. Weizmann who played the rôle of political alchemist through the years, who blended science and Zionism together to work magic upon the course of history.

What was it that Dr. Weizmann did? The great hope of Zion reborn is as old as the exile of the Jews. But it was Dr. Weizmann who became chief of those in this century who took the stuff of dreams and made substance of it. He and the movement he led took the yearning of the dispossessed, the inarticulate striving for dignity of a persecuted people, the centuries of bitterness and lamentation and dogged faith, and wove the pattern for millions of Jews. Because of their labors, Israel exists today.

It is impossible to discuss Weizmann

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without discussing Zionism, this movement of which he had been world leader for most of his adult life. From his earliest days he was a spokesman for Zionism. In his later days he became its principal ambassador to the world. He was at once its theoretician, interpreter, advocate, champion. For a man of peace, he has lived a highly embattled life. He fought the anti-Zionists in England and America, many of whom were wealthy Jews who thought Zionism an attempt to turn the clock back, or feared their support might impugn their loyalty as citizens of other countries. He fought those who feared the impact of a modern democratic industrial state upon the backward, feudal world of the Middle East. As a theoretician he fought Theodor Herzl, founder of modern Zionism, who wanted the Jews, in a moment of stress, to accept British Uganda, in South Africa, as a temporary refuge on the way to Palestine. He fought Louis D. Brandeis, leader of the American Zionists in the early twenties, when the latter began to stress the sociological and economic aspects of the movement at the expense of the cultural and political. In a final sense, Weizmann synthesized two great approaches in Zionism. The first was based on the idea that the Jews should struggle to obtain political recognition of their right to return to Palestine and establish a state

there. The second was based on the idea that the Jews, without waiting for political recognition, should go at once to Palestine and build the land — “create facts in Palestine,” as Weizmann once put it; and that ultimately, their achievements would lead to recognition. Weizmann harnessed this “political” and this “practical” Zionism together to a successful end.

It was, however, as advocate to the outside world that he was preeminent. Because of his work, such men as Arthur James Balfour, David Lloyd George, Lord Robert Cecil, Leopold Amery, Field Marshal Jan Smuts, and other British statesmen became supporters of the Zionist cause. It was the British government which in 1917 issued the Balfour Declaration, by which it pledged its assistance in the building of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. This document — a kind of Jewish Magna Carta ratified a few years later by the League of Nations — gave international recognition to the Return to Zion. It opened the path — though the road proved long, arduous and bitterly fought over — to the establishment, more than a quarter of a century later, of the State of Israel.

II

A major key to the man is to be found in the world into which he was born on November 27, 1874. He was the

third of fifteen children of Oser Weizmann, a lumber merchant in an obscure Russian village called Motel. The family's budget never exceeded \$300 a year. Young Weizmann's education was typical of the time. It began in a "Cheder," a one-room Hebrew school, which was also the home of the teacher, his family, and even the family goat. Here Weizmann was taught the Talmud, the book of Jewish law, and here he grew up at a time when the return to Zion was in the very air.

Motel lay in the heart of the notorious Russian "Pale of Settlement." This was an area outside of which Jews were forbidden to live. It was a Russia of Jewish repression, of pogroms, of anti-Semitic terror. Life for the Jews was all but intolerable. What enabled them to bear their indignities was their almost Messianic dream of a great free Jewish people again.

Under such conditions, protest and revolt were inevitable. For some this revolt became part of the general restlessness of all the Tsar's subjects, Jew and non-Jew alike, who turned toward revolution. For others — and Weizmann was among these — the direction was toward the Jewish renaissance. Weizmann has described this beautifully in his autobiography: "In the depths of the masses, an impulse awoke, vague, groping, unfor-

mulated, for Jewish self-liberation. It was saturated with Jewish tradition; and it was connected with the most ancient memories of the land where Jewish life had first expressed itself in freedom. It was, in short, the birth of modern Zionism."

At the age of eleven, young Weizmann was already at work on a Zionist mission, trudging through the spring slush of neighboring villages. He was collecting pennies for what surely must have seemed one of the most absurd of causes: the raising of funds from the poverty-stricken Jews of Russia to buy land for Jewish settlement in a distant Turkish territory called Palestine, to which, at that time, Jews were not permitted to emigrate!

It was far-fetched, visionary, unrealistic. Weizmann himself has said repeatedly that it could only be understood in terms of faith. "This faith was part of our makeup," he wrote. "Our Jewishness and our Zionism were interchangeable; you could not destroy the second without destroying the first."

This was his credo throughout his life. At eighteen, rather than accept the *numerus clausus* of Russian universities, he studied chemistry in schools in Germany and Switzerland; and at the same time, he founded the first Zionist Society in Switzerland. In 1900 he became lecturer in bio-

chemistry at the University of Geneva; there he met his wife, Vera Chatzman, a medical student of Rostov-on-Don. After their marriage in 1904, Weizmann took an appointment as lecturer in chemistry at the University of Manchester, England. There he made his name as a chemist. In World War I, through a fermentation process, he solved the problem of manufacturing synthetic acetone, vitally needed as an ingredient of smokeless gunpowder, and helped Britain and the Allies win the war. But paralleling his scientific career was his Zionist career. He rose to be leader of the British Zionists, and later, President of the World Zionist Organization, a position he held, save for one brief interlude, until 1946.

As leader of the movement, Dr. Weizmann faced many crises. In later years there were the Arab riots of 1929 in Palestine. Then came new riots, particularly in 1936-39, this time inspired by the Axis, which sought to turn the Arabs of the Middle East against the Allies. There was the British White Paper of 1939, fruit of the appeasement era, which cut off Jewish immigration into Palestine at the very moment the need for a refuge for Hitler's victims was most pressing. There was the Second World War, in which Weizmann suffered a bitter personal loss — the death of his younger son, Michael, an RAF

pilot, who was missing in action. There was the upsurge of Jewish terrorism in Palestine, and the British decision, finally, to turn the Palestine problem over to the United Nations; and then the partition of Palestine, voted by the United Nations on November 29, 1947, and the establishment of Israel on May 14, 1948.

The way was not easy. No orator, no emotional speaker, given to understatement rather than emphasis, cautious as only a scientist can be, he was not popular with various segments of the Zionist movement. For nearly fifty years he pursued his careful, precise way, attacked for his moderation, for his pro-British orientation when Britain was progressively more unfriendly, for his early support of partition when partition was unpopular, for his endless patience. In May 1948, 36 hours after the provisional State was proclaimed, he was elected its President. "I doubt whether the Presidency is necessary to Dr. Weizmann," said Prime Minister Ben-Gurion. "But the Presidency of Dr. Weizmann is a moral necessity for the State of Israel."

III

Weizmann is a curiously complex man. He can be cold, detached, precise, more Anglo-Saxon than the Anglo-Saxon. Yet he can also be as

moody as a caged lion, impatient, cutting, bitter, ironic. In political battle he has given hard blows and taken them. He is not a Jew of the Ghetto, yet his talk has all the charm and anecdotal familiarity of the Ghetto, and Yiddish, with its intimacy, is his favorite language. He has the reticence, the horror of display, of the Englishman. He has a Frenchman's rapier-like wit, a Frenchman's sense of the perfect word. He knows six languages thoroughly, yet speaks each of them with a curious accent. He is, perhaps, that most elusive of persons, the true cosmopolitan. What makes all this rather paradoxical, is the equally unmistakable fact that Weizmann is, above all else, a Jew, steeped in Jewish culture, expressive of Jewish aspirations, and single-mindedly an exponent of Jewish nationalism.

His remarkable success as a spokesman for the movement of Jewish independence may be traced to many factors. First, he is gifted with a luminous personality, a quality of personal charm which rarely fails to captivate those who meet him. "I do not want to see that Dr. Weizmann," Winston Churchill once confessed when he learned that Weizmann wished to protest unfriendly British acts in Palestine. "I must resist him, and I cannot resist him." Secondly, Weizmann's chemical renown provided a

calling card which opened doors to him that Zionism never could have. Thirdly, he was an authentic carrier of the folk feeling of the Jewish masses for Palestine. This faith, carried with him from Motel, burned in him with a kind of radium-like intensity. No one who met him was likely to be unaware of it.

There was, for example, the occasion when C. P. Scott, then editor of the Manchester *Guardian*, first encountered Dr. Weizmann. The meeting, a casual one, took place at the home of mutual friends in Manchester, shortly after the outbreak of World War I. Scott became interested in this tall, somber-eyed man and asked him, "Are you a Pole, Dr. Weizmann?"

"No, I am not a Pole," Weizmann replied. "I know nothing of the Polish question. I am a Jew, and if you wish to talk to me about that, I am at your service."

This sort of refreshingly direct approach was a challenge Scott could not fail to accept. Out of that meeting came a warm friendship. Scott became an ardent Zionist. Since he was the most influential journalistic voice in all Britain, he played an important part in the early days of the Zionist movement. He was a noted liberal; he knew virtually everyone of importance; and he enthusiastically introduced Weizmann to them.

Another example was Weizmann's meeting with Lord Balfour. Balfour, in the course of an election campaign, came to Manchester, where Weizmann was then still a comparatively unknown lecturer. Balfour consented to meet him when he learned that Weizmann was one of the Zionists who had turned down the Uganda offer.

Weizmann had been in England only a short time. His English was still quite bad. He worried over what he could say to Balfour, but he went to the great man's hotel, and was ushered into his room. Their meeting was scheduled to last fifteen minutes. But Weizmann spoke persuasively; he opened horizons to Balfour that the latter had no idea even existed; and Balfour kept him nearly an hour-and-a-quarter, although his constituents were clamoring outside to see him.

"Supposing," Weizmann said to him at one point, trying to explain why Uganda was out of the question, "supposing we were to offer you Paris instead of London?"

"Why, we have London," Balfour replied.

"Yes," said Weizmann, "and we had Jerusalem when London was a marsh."

At another point Balfour, still wrestling with this idea of Jews who wished to return to Palestine, and

only Palestine, asked, "Are there many Jews who think like you?"

"Mr. Balfour," Weizmann replied, "I believe I speak the mind of thousands of Jews whom you will never meet but with whom I could pave the streets of the country I come from."

Weizmann made an impression upon Balfour that the latter never forgot. Years later, it was Balfour who, as British Foreign Minister in 1917, signed the famous Declaration in support of a Jewish national home.

There have been stories that the Declaration was a gift to Weizmann in return for his chemical discoveries. Weizmann himself has indicated that this is not true. Actually, the post-war future of Palestine was being discussed on the highest political levels by the Allied Powers. Their plan, if victory came, was to free the people of Europe under Austro-Hungarian rule, and those of the Middle East under Turkish rule. The liberal British point of view was expressed by the Manchester *Guardian*. In 1915 it declared editorially that Palestine should be established as a buffer state by the Jews, to protect the Suez Canal and Egypt from attack.

At the same time, the moral aspects of the Palestine issue interested many persons. If justice was to be the fruit of this war, it seemed to them necessary not only that the Arabs be freed,

but that the People of the Book be returned to the Land of the Book. They saw, too, that a Jewish state at the junction of East and West would be a bastion of democracy for both Britain and America. They felt, also, that such an act would bring the Allies the moral support of the Jewish people throughout the world, and thus help ensure an Allied victory.

Before any final decision was made, the British government canvassed the Allies. President Wilson was consulted. He supported the idea. France, Russia, Italy, and the other powers agreed, and the Balfour Declaration became history.

In the years that passed, Weizmann carried on his advocacy of Zionism all over the world. He traveled year after year collecting funds for building up Palestine along the scientific lines he was convinced must be followed. Palestine must be a new kind of state. He saw no point in Jews coming into Palestine and living there as they had lived in Warsaw or Berlin. Instead, he wanted to see established a labor society, the kind of society which is today the backbone of Israel. He felt that the unhealthy economic groupings of Jews outside Palestine — the emphasis upon trades, commerce, and the professions — must not be transferred to Palestine. There he wanted to see a Jewish peasantry grounded in the land, and a people

who held to the dignity of labor, who would build the land acre by acre, tree by tree.

"A state cannot be created by decree, but by the forces of a people and in the course of generations," he insisted. "Even if all the governments of the world give us a country, it would only be a gift of words. But if the Jewish people will go and build Palestine, the Jewish state will become a reality."

And so, indeed, it did come to pass.

IV

Dr. Weizmann the scientist has been rather eclipsed by the recent, more dramatic, political and military events in Palestine. But Israel today bears Weizmann's stamp as a scientist as surely as it bears the mark of his social vision. He has constantly urged that scientific research must precede every practical enterprise. Years ago he founded the Daniel Sieff Research Institute at Rehoveth, a town of some 6000 population about half an hour's automobile ride from Tel Aviv. This became a center of chemical research, and later, the nucleus of the great Weizmann Institute of Science, which was founded in 1944, the first million dollars of its cost being presented to him on his seventieth birthday by a group of American friends. Today the Weizmann Institute is undoubtedly one of the finest of its kind,

with outstanding physicists, chemists, technologists and researchers. Some of its achievements during the war verge on the fantastic.

In the building of Israel, the problem of space is a major one. Dr. Weizmann has attacked it in characteristic fashion. There is a classic tale that in 1937, Lord Peel, head of a British Royal Commission in Palestine to investigate Arab-Jewish difficulties, came upon Dr. Weizmann in his laboratory one afternoon, working among his test-tubes.

"What are you doing, Dr. Weizmann?" he asked.

"I am creating absorptive capacity," Weizmann replied.

Absorptive capacity has been one of his major preoccupations in Israel. Summed up briefly, it means, How can you make ten blades of grass grow where none grew before? How can you make one acre of wasteland, which furnished scarcely enough sustenance for a handful of goats, become so fertile that it will support half a dozen families? In Israel this problem is a fundamental one. Land once fertile has been eroded through centuries of neglect. Deserts exist where gardens once flourished. A country into which immigrants are pouring at a rate of nearly a thousand a day must have the capacity and the space to absorb them. In this task Dr. Weizmann's scientific contribu-

tions have become a key to the future.

He does not believe there are limits to the horizons of his small country. It is small, but that only means that science must achieve what nature cannot do in solving the problem of space. He likes to recall that nearly twenty years ago Lord Passfield (Sidney Webb) turned to him, and with the authority of a recognized economist, declared, "But Dr. Weizmann, do you realize there's not room enough to swing a cat in Palestine?"

Since that day, Dr. Weizmann likes to point out, approximately half a million more persons have come into Palestine and been absorbed.

Today at the Weizmann Institute, the early discoveries he made in England during World War I are bearing fruit. At that time, he was able to produce acetone by discovering a bacterium that converted carbohydrates — sugar and starch — into acetone and butyl alcohol. What excited chemists then was that for the first time bacteria had been used in the production of industrial chemicals. Dr. Weizmann, on the basis of this work, was able in the Second World War to discover a method for the manufacture of synthetic rubber. He was called to the United States then to give the benefit of his work to this country during those critical days.

His work in other fields also have rather awesome possibilities. Weiz-

mann's assistants are experimenting in the production of cheap foods which may help end starvation in such countries as China and India. At the Institute, peanuts and peanut cake, soya beans and soya cake — waste products usually fed to cattle — are being "upgraded"; that is, being transformed into nutritious, easily digested food for human beings. This product, as Dr. Weizmann has pointed out, is entirely of a vegetable nature, and although it contains no meat, it has a meaty taste. It is a particularly valuable diet in countries where religious laws forbid the eating of meat.

The recent war between the Arabs and the Israeli pointed a lesson for the Institute scientists. They tapped resources they had never known existed. What they created in the white heat of emergency, intended only for war purposes, are now being used as weapons in the reconstruction of the country.

A few examples are instructive. Lack of water is one of the most important problems in Palestine. There is water to be found, but much of it is brackish, salty, and of no use to man or the land. As a result of researches at the Institute, it is now possible to turn millions of gallons of this brackish water into sweet water, at a ridiculously low cost.

Castor oil is being turned into nylon thread. The castor bean grows almost

indigenously on the arid soil of Palestine. It opens the way to a great plastics industry. The Jews are taking marsh weeds and hard grasses, and turning them into a synthetic wood which can be nailed, hammered, sawed, glued, and otherwise used as a building material.

Dr. Weizmann places his hopes in harnessing science on the efforts of a highly skilled population. He points to Switzerland as a model. "Like Israel, Switzerland is a small country," he explains. "And like Israel, it has no raw resources. It has water power, and it has a skilled population. These are its resources. Yet it has developed a first-rate agriculture, a fine dairy industry, an excellent textile industry, and a world-famous precision instrument industry."

Not only does he see Israel as a Switzerland in the industrial sense, but in a political sense as well. He would like his country to become the perennial neutral: a small nation which does not become involved in great-power politics. Integral to the problem of Israel's foreign policy is, of course, the attitude of the Arab States. Dr. Weizmann does not foresee an indefinite period of enmity between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. On the contrary, he anticipates a Middle Eastern Federation in which the two great Semitic peoples will work together. In terms of his-

tory, it may not be so strange if the bond of friendship sealed between him and the great Arab statesman, Emir Feisal, in 1918, should come to fruition.

Israel is here to stay. The Arabs have come to face that fact. Now, Weizmann feels, it is important to convince them that Israel has no designs on Arab territory. He wants them to realize that Arabs within Israel will be treated precisely as Jews within Israel. He wants the Arabs to understand that if they wish to achieve true independence — independence from foreign powers and foreign exploitation — they can follow no better pattern of social and economic reform than that presented to them by Israel.

But these questions are properly not within his province. The day-to-day conduct of foreign affairs is in the hands of Moshe Sharett, the brilliant and indefatigable Foreign Minister, who has always been close to Weizmann. And the conduct of internal affairs is in the capable hands of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, for whom Dr. Weizmann has a tremendous respect.

v

Today, at 74, Dr. Weizmann is a tall, broad-shouldered man, well over six feet, with somber dark eyes under a high, dome-like forehead, a goatee

touched with gray, and an air of infinite patience about him. He bears himself with great dignity, and is fastidious almost to a fault. He is probably the only President who has a complete wardrobe of clothes awaiting him in London, Paris, Geneva, and New York — the result of years of traveling about Europe and America on his Zionist missions.

He lives a simple life, but a gracious one. His home, which he built in Rehoveth, not far from the Sieff Institute, is one of the show places of Israel. It has a sentimental significance: it overlooks the site of the camp where Dr. Weizmann, in the midst of war in 1918, stayed as a guest of General Allenby, who was then commanding the Allied Forces fighting the Turks to liberate Jerusalem.

Mrs. Weizmann is his constant companion, the guardian of his appointment book, and a zealous buffer against the demands of the outside world. Dr. Weizmann spends as much time as he can in his laboratories. His first act after being inaugurated President was to ask his friend, Meyer W. Weisgal, executive director of the Weizmann Institute, to call together a meeting of the scientists of the Institute. He addressed them the afternoon following the inauguration, and spoke on the problems which they, as scientists, must face. His staff has never forgotten that. They con-

consider it indicative of his dual character as statesman and scientist, and proof that the line of demarcation between the two is so faint as almost not to exist.

Twice each week, Dr. Weizmann goes down to his Presidential offices in Hakirya, on the outskirts of Tel Aviv. But these are little more than token visits. For he is an elder statesman rather than a policy-making President. His personal influence is tremendous; his political power, as President, is limited. He prefers to spend most of his time at the Weizmann Institute where, he feels, he really has his pulse on the Israel of the future.

What interests him today is the fact that as the United States becomes more concerned with lifting the standards of living of depressed peoples, Israel emerges upon the world scene to sharpen and focus that interest. There is a kind of poetic justice about this. For it was American support at the United Nations which helped bring about the passage of the partition resolution, which, in turn, served as the moral authority for the proclamation of Israeli statehood.

Dr. Weizmann sees in Israel — the

only nation really called into being at the behest of the community of nations — a symbol of the unified world of the future. He believes that Israel can make a substantial contribution to human brotherhood. He points out that the world today lives on the residue, as it were, of what was created in Israel more than 2000 years ago — our entire Judeo-Christian heritage; and that the time has come for some new word to emerge from Israel to help unite all peoples.

The remnants of the Jews have been preserved for this great mission, he believes. And he goes on to observe that no one has ever replaced the Jew in Palestine. Palestine was not only a physical desert in these last twenty centuries; it was a spiritual wasteland as well. Nothing new, nothing inspiring came from it: it was derelict in more ways than one.

Now that the Jews are returning, enriched with the experience of all that is best in the Western world, he believes they may contribute greatly to the world. They may help achieve the oneness of man again. This may not be done in a decade, or in a generation; but Dr. Weizmann is a patient and a dedicated man, and he rests content.



UE: THE BIGGEST COMMUNIST UNION

BY DANIEL SELIGMAN

NINETEEN forty-eight was a year of resounding disasters for the Communists in the CIO. They were booted out of CIO national headquarters by Philip Murray. Joe Curran and Mike Quill, two of their old favorites, turned on them and threw them out of the maritime and transport unions. Walter Reuther completed the massacre of them that he had begun the year before in the United Automobile Workers. At the CIO convention in Portland last November, almost every speech became an occasion for cursing and reviling the Party-liners. President Murray used phrases like "ideological dive-bombers," "dry-rot leaders," "afflictions on mankind," and "degraded thinkers," to describe the left-wingers who had been plaguing him for the past eight years. Everywhere in the CIO, the word was out to "get the Commies."

And yet when all the shooting was over, the "Commies" were still on top in the UE. The United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of Amer-

ica, the third largest union in the CIO, had again proved too tough for the anti-Communists to crack. At the UE convention, held two months before the CIO met, the Party-liners had little trouble returning to power the same clique that had been guiding the destinies of the union since 1941. As president they had re-elected Albert J. Fitzgerald, chairman of the Progressive party conclave that nominated Henry Wallace. They were also fortunate enough to have "Fitzie" retained as a vice-president of the CIO. He is now, indeed, the only member of the CIO national board with left-wing affiliations.

With contracts covering some 570,000 workers, the UE is easily the largest Communist-dominated union left in the country. It dwarfs such Stalinist strongholds as Ben Gold's fur workers, which has 100,000 members, and Harry Bridges' longshoremen, which has only 50,000. Only a handful of unions in the country outrank it in size: the auto and steel workers in the CIO, the teamsters in

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