

Sharon's Other Fascist Precedent: 'Vlad Hitler'

by Harley Schlanger

Opposition is growing to the adoption, by Ariel Sharon and the Israeli Defense Forces, of measures to crush the Palestinian Authority, which are taken from the precedent of Nazi control and deportation of the Jewish population in the Warsaw Ghetto. It is worth noting that Sharon's party, the Likud, emerged from a movement founded by a man openly called "Vladimir Hitler" by David Ben Gurion, the Founding Father of Israel.

Vladimir Jabotinsky founded the World Union of Zionist Revisionists, and its youth movement, Betar, in 1925, in a rejection of "mainstream" Zionism. Opposed to the partition of Palestine, into a Jewish and a Palestinian Arab state, Jabotinsky's party adopted a "maximalist" strategy for the creation of Israel. This strategy was described by the party's newspaper, *National Front*, as one which "laid claim to all of Palestine, including Transjordan and the Syrian Desert."

The editor of *National Front*, which was founded in 1931, was Abba Achimier, who called himself a fascist.

On March 30, 1933, shortly after Hitler's seizure of power in Germany, an editorial in *National Front* expressed support for Hitler: "The various socialists and democrats are of the opinion that Hitler's movement is just a shell, but we believe it has both shell and substance. The anti-Semitic shell must be disposed of, but not the anti-Marxist substance."

The self-designation as fascist was not unusual among Jabotinsky's minions. An attorney in his Party, Eliyahu Zvi Cohen, elaborated upon this editorial opinion: "Were the Hitlerites to remove their hatred of the Jews from their program, we, too, would stand by their side. Had the Hitlerites not risen in Germany, it would be lost. Yes," he added, "Hitler saved Germany."

Betar youth members wore brown shirts, like the Nazis, and were organized into street-fighting gangs modelled on Mussolini's *squadristi*.

Ben Gurion vs. Jabotinsky

Jabotinsky deployed his brownshirts against the major Zionist organizations in an effort to destroy them. In November 1932, he authorized strike breaking against the Histadrut, the Zionist labor organization. He declared it to be a "gross cancer in the body of the Yishuv [the Jewish community of Palestine], growing ever more malignant," adding, "We will wage war against this malignant growth until the end."



Lt. Ze'ev Vladimir Jabotinsky in 1917: called "Vlad Hitler" by David Ben Gurion, he founded the Zionist faction which liked everything about Nazism except its hatred of the Jews of Europe. That tendency became the Likud party.

As this battle escalated, Ben Gurion responded. At a mass meeting in February 1933, he referred to Jabotinsky as "Vladimir Hitler," and warned Mapai (the major Zionist party) not to "underrate the severity of this Hitleristic peril in the Jewish, Zionist street."

He reiterated this again, at a rally in support of the Histadrut on March 15, 1933, when he said it was time to declare war against "our own Hitlerites. . . . We face a war of life and death."

This call to self-defense against the Jabotinskyites by Ben Gurion was not a spur-of-the-moment judgment, an instant of emotional hyperbole. He had been studying closely both Jabotinsky and the Nazis. As early as September 1930, he had compared Jabotinsky to the Nazis. Commenting on Jabotinsky's newspaper at that time, he said that, while in Berlin, "I read . . . Hitler's organ, and it seemed to me that I was reading Jabotinsky in *Doar ha-Yom*. Same words, same style, and same spirit."

This phase of the battle between Ben Gurion and Jabotinsky reached its peak on June 16, 1933, when Ben Gurion's ally, Chaim Arlosoroff, who was the head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, was murdered by operatives of the Revisionist party.