

## Wilson's Fourteen Points

In January 1918, US President Woodrow Wilson presented his "Fourteen Points", which he believed should be adopted as a framework of principles for the world to enter a just and peaceful postwar era. Although Wilson was rewarded with the Nobel Prize for his efforts at promoting peace, ten of the fourteen points did not correspond to the ambitions of the Great Powers and were discarded; among them, predictably, were the following two points:



President Wilson

"Point 5: A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined..."

"Point 12: The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development."<sup>4</sup>

## The Rising Threat of Zionism

Although Zionism had been an ambition among certain groups within the Jewish community, it was only politicized in the late 19th century. By the turn of the 20th century, this ambition had been articulated by Theodor Herzl in his *Der Judenstaat*, Zionist leaders had been brought together in the World Congress of Zionists in Basle, and a methodical strategy had been put together for the establishment of a Jewish state.



### Herzl's Formula

At the First Zionist Congress held in Basle in 1897, Herzl outlined the formula for a successful Zionist campaign:

1. The formation of a permanent organization to unite all Jews in the cause of Zionism.
2. The promotion of an organized, large-scale Jewish colonization of Palestine.
3. The acquisition of an internationally recognized legal right to colonize Palestine.

The establishment of Israel in May 1948 and the Palestinian Nakba which ensued was a landmark in a five-decade campaign for a Jewish state – a campaign that involved extensive international diplomacy, massive financial backing, the services of the British Army and, only finally, military force. Much work had been done by the Zionists by the time General Allenby marched into Jerusalem in December 1917; at that moment, Palestine came under the control of the new converts to Zionism in the British government, and the groundwork for the Nakba could begin in earnest.

<sup>4</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "Speech on the Fourteen Points," *Congressional Record*, 65th Congress 2nd Session, 1918, pp. 680-681.

The Zionist movement placed a high priority on the recruitment of Jewish millionaires into the leadership of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). It is no coincidence that the Balfour Declaration, which in 1917 completed Herzl's formula by



Herzl addresses the First Zionist Congress in Basle, 1897

securing official British support for a "Jewish homeland" in Palestine, was addressed to Walter Rothschild - a member of that same family that had sponsored the first Zionist colonies in Palestine, that had created the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association, and that had been the target of Herzl's first draft of his *Judenstaat* 20 years before.

## Jewish Immigration and Colonization

Between 1882 and 1914, an average of 2,000-3,000 Jews entered Palestine every year, bringing the total Jewish population in Palestine to 60-63,000 by the beginning of the WWI.<sup>5</sup> The majority arrived without a political ideology and was fleeing rising discrimination in the immigrants' home countries, settling in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa and Hebron. Only 5% of those arriving in this period participated in forming the early Zionist colonies, but they represented the beginning of organized Zionist land acquisition and colonization in Palestine.

The first Zionist colonies were subsidized by French millionaire Baron Edmond de Rothschild and their agricultural projects were provided with extensive logistical support to ensure their survival. In 1900, following the rise of the WZO, Rothschild transferred his plantations to the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA). By the turn of the century, 22 plantation-colonies were already operating.

Between 1905 and 1914, the second immigration wave descended on Palestine. By this time the Zionist focus on land acquisition and demographic build-up was official, and it was this second wave of immigrants that established the political leadership of the new Jewish community, founded the first kibbutzim and politicized its relationship with the pre-existing Jewish community and the Palestinian Arabs. Ottoman regulations limiting land sales were bypassed through bribery or intermediaries as Jewish financiers and the JCA spent vast sums in their quest for land acquisition. Yehoshua Khanen, head of the Palestine JCA, developed a method of acquiring land by offering large loans to Palestinian landowners and confiscating their land when they were late with repayments. Less than 10% of all the land acquired by the Zionists in this early period was willingly sold by Palestinian occupants, while sales by Turkish Ottoman landowners living outside Palestine accounted for over half of the Zionists' acquisitions.



Yehoshua Khanen

By the beginning of the WWI, at least 11,000 Jews were working on 47 rural plantations and cooperatives supervised and subsidized by the WZO. Their presence and practices upset the demographic, economic and political balance in Palestine, and contributed to a steady rise in tension and incidents of violence.

<sup>5</sup> All figures from *The Palestine Question in Maps*, PASSIA publications, 2002