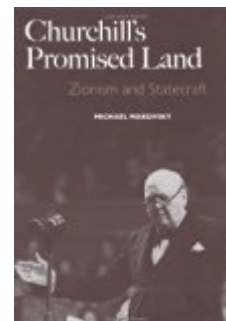


Michael Makovsky. *Churchill's Promised Land: Zionism and Statecraft.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007. xv + 342 pp. \$20.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-300-14324-9.



Reviewed by Jerry Brookshire

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Churchill was a great statesman and Zionism was a great cause. With those as his basic premises, Michael Makovsky carefully examines their intersection during Churchill's long and complicated career. Trained as an American diplomatic historian, Makovsky has comprehensively examined Churchillian and Zionist primary and secondary sources, and provides extensive endnotes as well as a comprehensive bibliography. He excels in exploring Churchill's generally consistent support of Zionism. Unfortunately, Makovsky is unsure of the British political context, which will be irritatingly apparent to readers who consult H-Albion reviews. A few such examples are found in Makovsky's condensed but confusing or misleading coverage of the 1922 formation of the Bonar Law government, the 1929 and 1931 formations of governments, and the Labour party throughout. Perhaps based on Churchill's own rhetoric, Makovsky not only uses "socialist" as a generic term but also capitalizes Socialist party and Socialist government, resulting in separate index entries for "Labour Party (Britain)" and "Socialist Party (Britain)."

Makovsky's focus is to understand Churchill's mind concerning Zionism, and from that perspective, the author produces a sustained study. Although Makovsky's own interpretations on broader issues are evident throughout, he did not design this book to explore the complexities of Palestine, Israel, the Middle East, or British national security interests during Churchill's long career. Specifically concerning Churchill's views toward Zionism, however, Makovsky has written a well-crafted book in which he presents his themes and interpretations clearly in his preface, introduction, and conclusion, as well as within brief introductions and conclusions for each chapter. Churchill's mindset was based on his own personal character and experiences as well as on his fundamentally English and European/Western perspective. As Makovsky carefully demonstrates, Churchill lacked a profound knowledge of Palestine and the Middle East, although he was deeply impressed by his brief 1921 visit as colonial secretary to the emerging Palestine mandate (most of the book's pictures are of that trip). Zionism was never his overriding interest, as at various times were Nazi Germany and Communist Russia/Soviet

Union. Zionism, though, was a longer lasting interest, and Churchill's perspective was generally consistent. Sentiment was his core concern, sometimes countered by and sometimes supported by Churchill's advocacy of British power. Truly, Churchill's multifaceted interest in Zionism involved "racial, ideological, civilizational, humanitarian, paternal, personal, historical, romantic, mystical, and religious" concerns (p. x). While clearly recognizing some wavering, Makovsky considers Churchill a great and significant supporter of the Zionist "Promised Land."

Makovsky emphasizes Churchill's personal support of Jews, beginning early with his father's friendship with Jews and with both father's and son's admiration of Benjamin Disraeli, the mid-Victorian Jewish-born prime minister. Within Britain, the younger Churchill openly courted the Jewish vote in his first parliamentary election, and he personally considered the Jewish people as a great race with a history important to the development of Western civilization. On that point he never wavered. He was early impressed with Zionism, considering it a long-term aspiration, although during World War II he became excitedly optimistic projecting an independent state of Israel in the near future.

A Jewish homeland and then a state would not be a rejection of Europe but a way to advance Western civilization and introduce progress into the backward Middle East, Churchill claimed. He was unsparing in his racist/cultural criticism of Arabs, their society and their premodern economy, a prejudice reinforced by the progress of Jews seen in his 1921 visit to the dynamic pioneer city Tel Aviv and nearby agricultural settlement Rishon Lezion. Makovsky amply discusses Churchill's enthusiasm for Jewish immigrants in spreading civilization (with more than twenty-eight indexed references). This emphasis on "civilization" clearly demonstrates Churchill's views, views that may be starkly controversial among current readers.

Churchill the statesman had a long and complicated political career, variously holding important domestic and national security governmental offices. Significantly, that never included the foreign office, for no prime minister wanted to risk having him there. Usually while in office, Churchill often tried to influence policy within someone else's portfolio unless he realized his own political weakness (as during David Lloyd George's coalition governments). Even as prime minister, Churchill sometimes had to face political realities and bowed to resistance within his government or to face international realities of reduced British power and the increased need to work with the United States during World War II and the Cold War. Out of office, he was in the wilderness in the 1930s and was an odd opposition leader in 1945-51, often discouraged or out of the country and ignoring the proper role of an opposition leader. Makovsky is usually presciently attuned to those political and national security considerations as Churchill tried to adjust his strong support of Zionism to such constraints affecting his own political situation and British international power. Makovsky successfully explains Churchill's private and public positions within the political and international context, a few examples of which will be mentioned below.

Makovsky attributes Churchill's lack of concern in 1917 about the Balfour Declaration to Churchill's existing weakened political position and attributes his odd 1920 article "Zionism versus Bolshevism" to his preoccupation as secretary of war in 1919-21 with Communist Russia, thereby in this article overstressing Jewish connections with bolshevism. In 1921, upon becoming colonial secretary, he rashly approved his civil servants' recommendation to divide the large Palestine mandate into Transjordan and Palestine. Overall, Makovsky considers this as the period when Churchill's Zionism was weakest. But shortly thereafter, inspired by his Middle East trip, Churchill reverted to his Zionist positions, later proudly recalling his pro-Zionist policies. In his

confidential testimony to the 1937 Peel Commission, Churchill stressed that Britain must maintain its resolve and reassert its commitment toward the Jewish homeland, and he publicly criticized proposals for limited immigration and for a truncated Jewish state through partition. As wartime prime minister, Churchill initiated cabinet discussions and the Morrison Committee report proposing a (albeit) small Jewish state once the war ended, and Churchill advocated establishing it, even by British force if necessary. Ultimately, Churchill postponed and then shelved final cabinet consideration, due to other more pressing wartime issues and to the Stern Gang's assassination of Churchill's friend, Lord Moyne, British minister of state in the Middle East. As the new 1945 Labour government struggled unsuccessfully for a partition plan acceptable to both the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine, Churchill as leader of the opposition was relatively restrained in his comments, which Makovsky attributes to Churchill's overall political maneuvering and to his personal and political discouragement. However, this reviewer considers Churchill's few quoted statements to reflect a better understanding of Palestinian complexities than does Makovsky's own analysis, which harps on the "failure" of the Labour government's policies. After Israel's establishment, the delighted Churchill championed Israel as a key Western ally in the Middle East, one that would help block Soviet penetration during the Cold War. According to Makovsky, from 1937 onward, Churchill linked two great causes, Zionism and British national security.

Makovsky depicts Churchill as generally strongly Zionist. Some readers may disagree, and they may accent Churchill's actions or nonactions concerning his relative silence at the time of the Balfour Declaration, his separation of Transjordan from the Palestine mandate, his wartime failure to disrupt the Holocaust, his inattention to the postwar Labour government's efforts for a small Israel through a partitioned Palestine, and other matters. In brief discussions of those matters,

Makovsky also is critical but somewhat understanding, based on Churchill's personal position or other international considerations. Makovsky's interpretation basically follows and his book greatly expands on Norman Rose's excellent 1993 essay, with Rose's being more balanced and nuanced.[1] As Makovsky stated in his preface, the subject of his book is the exploration of Churchill's mind concerning Zionism, not of his actions. As such, this is the most comprehensive and coherent examination of Churchill's support of Zionism.

Note

[1]. Norman Rose, "Churchill and Zionism," in *Churchill*, ed. Robert Blake and William Roger Louis (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1993), 147-166.

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