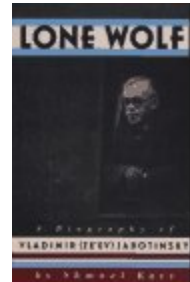


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Shmuel Katz. *Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky*. New York: Barricade Books, 1996. 1855 pp. \$100 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56980-042-3.

Reviewed by Paul Radensky (Jewish Theological Seminary of America)
Published on H-Judaic (July, 1997)



Zionism's Other Voice

Vladimir Jabotinsky has been reviled by his opponents as the sinister dark horse of Zionism. Although some of his actions, such as his opposition to a class-based Zionist politics, or his establishment of the military-oriented Betar youth movement, earned him the opprobrium of his fellow Zionists, Jabotinsky nevertheless was one of the most important Zionist thinkers in the pre-state period. If his contemporaries refused to heed many of his urgings, in hindsight a good number of these are striking in their prophetic clarity.

Born in 1880 and raised in Odessa by a formerly well to-do merchant family, Jabotinsky came to Zionism in the wake of the disastrous 1903 Kishinev pogrom. Although Jabotinsky was a talented Russian language journalist, during the First World War he created what was at first a Jewish transport brigade in the British army, the Zion Mule Corps, but later became the Jewish Legion, which played a role in driving the Turks from Palestine in 1918.

After the war, Jabotinsky settled in Jerusalem and fought (unsuccessfully) with an increasingly unsympathetic British administration in order to maintain the Jewish Legion as an officially recognized unit entrusted to defend the Jewish community in Palestine. The Arab riots of 1921 confirmed for Jabotinsky the importance of such a Legion, but by that time, the original unit had been disbanded. In its absence, and at the urging of other Zionist leaders, Jabotinsky organized a self-defense organization for the Yishuv, which later became nucleus of the Haganah.

For this Jabotinsky was arrested and sentenced to fifteen years of prison. Herbert Samuel, the new civilian High Commissioner for Palestine had Jabotinsky released almost immediately. Samuel, however, had some of the Arab perpetrators of the riots freed as well. Jabotinsky understood that Samuel's actions foretold of his extensive efforts to placate the Arab population of Palestine, often at the expense of the Jewish community. Jabotinsky's demands that the Zionist establishment publicly protest Samuel's behavior and that of other British officials were rejected by Chaim Weizmann, then head of the Zionist Executive.

For the most part of the next eighteen years, Jabotinsky continually argued that the British administration's growing hostility to Zionism must be loudly denounced by petitions and Jewish mass mobilization. The Zionist Organization persistently ignored Jabotinsky and this led him ultimately to create his own organization within Zionism, the Revisionist movement, in 1925. The new party's program faithfully reflected Jabotinsky's political demands: mass immigration (in order to create a Jewish majority in Palestine), a democratically elected Zionist executive, the creation of a Jewish military force under the British, and after 1929, the establishment of a Jewish state, as opposed to a "Jewish National Home" as the official Zionist Organization had been advocating.

In 1930, while Jabotinsky was visiting South Africa, the Colonial Office of the British Government informed him that he would not be allowed to return to Palestine. From then on, Jabotinsky's influence in Palestine

could only be felt through his followers. For example, the smear campaign that was launched against the Revisionists following the murder of Chaim Arlosoroff demonstrated the fear the Labor movement had for their opponents. Moreover, former Betar members were responsible for substantial illegal immigration to Palestine during the thirties. Later "Betari" formed the core membership of Irgun Zvai Le'umi (National Military Organization), which carried out an effective terror campaign against the British in the immediate pre-state period.

Despite the fact that Jabotinsky was barred from Palestine, he continued his work. He fought (unsuccessfully) for a world-wide Jewish boycott of German goods after the rise of the Nazis in 1933, he negotiated with Ben Gurion to institute better relations between the Labor movement and Revisionism, and in perhaps one of the best known attempts to save a part of Polish Jewry before the Second World War, Jabotinsky devised a scheme for the partial "evacuation" of Jews from Poland. In connection with this plan, he enlisted high ranking officials in the Polish government to pressure the British into opening the doors of Palestine to Jewish immigration, but this, too, came to naught. Jabotinsky died in 1940 during a visit to a Betar camp in Hunter, New York.

Shmuel Katz has written an intelligent, journalistic account of Jabotinsky's life. Like Joseph Schechtman, whose two volume biography of Jabotinsky (1956, 1961) had been the standard account, Katz writes from "the inside" in that he also was a member of the Revisionist movement (although not nearly so highly placed as was Schechtman). Katz differs from Schechtman in that the former has had the advantage of writing at greater

chronological distance from his subject, and was able to use a substantial amount of previously unavailable material, particularly British archival documents. Although Katz clearly has tremendous respect and affection for Jabotinsky, he does not hesitate to criticize him, for example, for his ineffectiveness as a fundraiser, or for his nomination of Revisionists who personally opposed him on the Revisionist executive.

Lone Wolf's greatest strength is its comprehensive breadth. Every major event and many minor incidents are extensively covered. Furthermore, Katz has taken the rather unorthodox move of including verbatim large sections of Jabotinsky's original speeches and writings. Generally, such practice would not add to a book, but in the case of Jabotinsky, whose writing still sparkles fifty seven years after his death, it is a forgivable transgression. The work's biggest weakness is its somewhat near-sighted perspective. Katz depicts Jabotinsky well, but the motivations for his opponents, especially Weizmann, are not as clearly spelled out as they should have been. Similarly, Katz's presentation of the Russian Jewish context in which Jabotinsky was raised could have been much stronger and more precise.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Shmuel Katz's *Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky* remains an useful contribution to the biographical literature on Jabotinsky. Scholars and especially lay-people will be able to read it profitably.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-judaic>

Citation: Paul Radensky. Review of Katz, Shmuel, *Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. July, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1093>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.