

Zionism and Nazism: Literally Two Sides of the Same Coin

In September 1934, Joseph Goebbels' propaganda newspaper *Der Angriff* (*The Attack*) launched a special feature: a 12-part travelogue by SS officer Leopold von Mildenstein describing his visit to Palestine with Zionist official Kurt Tuchler. To promote the series, Goebbels had a commemorative bronze medal struck in Nuremberg: one side bore a Star of David with the inscription "*Ein Nazi fährt nach Palästina*" ("A Nazi Travels to Palestine"), the other a swastika with the phrase "*Und erzählt davon im Angriff*" ("And tells about it in *Der Angriff*").

This medal captured a fleeting yet striking reality: Nazi officials and Zionist leaders shared an interest in Jewish emigration to Palestine. The Nazis wanted Germany *judenrein* (free of Jews); Zionists wanted to populate their future state. Their collaboration, pragmatic and opportunistic, flourished during the 1930s.

Context: European Nationalisms and Jewish Exclusion

The 19th century witnessed the rise of **ethno-nationalism** - the belief that each people (defined by ethnicity, language, and "blood") should live in its own state. This was the ideological fuel for the unifications of Italy and Germany and the nationalist uprisings across the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires.

Minority groups suffered under this new order:

- **Roma (Gypsies)** expelled, stereotyped, and later targeted for extermination under the Nazis.
- **Poles** crushed by Germanization in Prussia and Russification in the Tsarist Empire.
- **Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians, South Slavs** suppressed in Austro-Hungary.
- **Armenians** massacred and subjected to genocide in the Ottoman Empire.
- **Basques, Catalans, Bretons, Corsicans** suppressed in Spain and France.
- **Sorbs, Danes, Finns, Balts** assimilated or repressed under Prussian or Russian rule.

Most of these groups responded by fighting for rights or independence. Zionism, by contrast, argued that the solution for Jewish oppression was not equality within Europe but colonization of Palestine.

Antisemitism as a Precondition for Zionism

Antisemitism was pervasive long before the Nazis:

- **Germany:** Wilhelm Marr coined the word "antisemitism" in the 1870s.

- **France:** the Dreyfus Affair exposed deep antisemitism.
- **Russia:** pogroms (1881–1905) drove hundreds of thousands into exile.
- **Austria:** Vienna's mayor Karl Lueger built his career on antisemitism.
- **Hungary, Romania, Poland:** blood libels, quotas, pogroms.

Zionists interpreted antisemitism as confirmation that Jews did not belong in Europe. Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* (1896) concluded: antisemitism would never disappear, therefore Jews needed a state of their own.

The Zionist–Nazi Convergence

The 1933 Memorandum

On 21 June 1933, the Zionist Federation of Germany (ZVfD) sent a memorandum to Adolf Hitler. It declared:

“On the foundation of the new state, which has established the principle of race, we wish so to fit our community into the total structure so that for us too, in the sphere assigned to us, fruitful activity for the Fatherland is possible... Because we, too, are against mixed marriage and are for maintaining the purity of the Jewish group.”

The Haavara Agreement (1933–1939)

On 25 August 1933, Nazi Germany and the Jewish Agency signed the Haavara (“Transfer”) Agreement.

- **Mechanism:** German Jews deposited assets in German banks; the money was used to buy German goods, exported to Palestine. Emigrants received the proceeds in Palestine, in local currency.
- **Result:** About 60,000 German Jews emigrated to Palestine under Haavara.
- **Impact:** Boosted German exports and Zionist development, while undermining the international Jewish boycott.

Der Angriff and the Mildenstein–Tuchler Journey

In spring 1933, **Kurt Tuchler**, a Zionist official, approached SS officer **Leopold von Mildenstein** to promote emigration through positive Nazi media coverage. Mildenstein and his wife traveled with the Tuchlers through Palestine, visiting Tel Aviv, kibbutzim, the Jezreel Valley, Safad, Hebron, and Jerusalem.

The journey produced the series “*Ein Nazi fährt nach Palästina*” (A Nazi Travels to Palestine), serialized in *Der Angriff* from **26 September to 9 October 1934**.

“*Ein Nazi fährt nach Palästina*” (1934)

A Nazi Travels to Palestine and Tells About It in Der Angriff

Each installment included photos of Zionist settlements and pioneers. Below are selected excerpts.

Part 1 - *Aufbruch nach Erez Israel* (26 Sept 1934)

"At the Berlin station, Jewish youth boarded the train. They sang Hebrew songs, their voices filled with optimism. They shouted their farewell: *Shalom!* ... It was the call of a people setting out to build anew."

Part 2 - *Ankunft in Haifa* (27 Sept 1934)

"In the harbor of Haifa, Arab porters thronged about, shouting and grabbing for luggage with greedy hands. In contrast, the Jewish officials of the immigration office received us with order and discipline, their documents neatly prepared."

Part 3 - *Tel Aviv, die jüdische Stadt* (28 Sept 1934)

"Here only Jews live, here only Jews work, here only Jews trade, bathe and dance. The language of the city is Hebrew - an ancient tongue, revived - yet the city itself is modern and Western, with broad streets and attractive shops. Everywhere construction rises to meet the swelling population."

"The great majority of Jews in Palestine are optimistic, hard-working, idealistic people who intend to build the land with their own sweat - the exact opposite of the stereotype usually applied to Jews."

Part 4 - *Die Kibbuzim und das Land* (29 Sept 1934)

"On the kibbutz, every hand works: men, women, and children alike. The swampy ground is drained, orchards planted, barns raised. Here a new type of Jew is born - rooted in the soil, close to the earth."

Part 5 - *Ben Shemen und die Jugend* (30 Sept 1934)

"In the youth colony of Ben Shemen, young pioneers are trained not only in study but in labor. They till the ground, care for livestock, and march with discipline. In their eyes shines the spirit of the future."

Part 6 - *Die Jezreel-Ebene* (1 Oct 1934)

"In the Jezreel Valley I met Ben-Gurion, a leader among the settlers. Around us, what was once swamp and wilderness has become fertile farmland. The settlers here live communally, sharing all, with the conviction that they are forging a new nation."

Part 7 - *Arabische Düfte* (2 Oct 1934)

"Some old women sit opposite me. The very old are no longer veiled, though one would wish they were... and these dirty children. The bus rocks miserably. A little girl becomes carsick. There were already Arab odors surrounding us, but now it becomes unbearable. We too hang our heads out of the window."

Part 8 - *Safad und der Norden* (3 Oct 1934)

"In Safad the atmosphere is tense. Arabs demonstrate against the British, waving fists and shouting. The Jews, in their small quarter, remain behind guarded doors. Here one sees clearly: the Arab resists progress."

Part 9 - *Hebron und die Vergangenheit* (4 Oct 1934)

"We passed through the burnt-out Jewish quarter of Hebron. The ruins stood as a reminder of the bloody days of 1929, when the Arab mob fell upon their neighbors. Stones blackened with fire, empty houses, silence where once Jewish life had thrived."

Part 10 - *Jerusalem und die heiligen Stätten* (5 Oct 1934)

"At the Wailing Wall, Jews murmured prayers. Arabs walked by and mocked, shouting and jeering, disturbing their devotion. In the evening, I attended a gathering of Jewish writers in Jerusalem - a salon alive with conversation, where old tradition met youthful renewal."

Part 11 - *Die Zukunft des Landes* (6 Oct 1934)

"Palestine has the capacity to receive many more thousands. The progress already achieved shows what can be done when idealism and work unite. But the British hesitate, fearing unrest, and the Arabs grow restless."

Part 12 - *Eine Lösung der Judenfrage?* (9 Oct 1934)

"In Palestine, the Jewish question finds its solution. Here the Jew becomes productive, creative, tied to the land. The problem that burdens Europe finds healing in the soil of Erez Israel."

From Mildenstein to Eichmann

By 1935, Adolf Eichmann joined Mildenstein's department. He studied Herzl's *Der Judenstaat*, learned Hebrew and Yiddish, and described himself as a "Zionist" - not from belief, but as a means of promoting emigration as the solution to the "Jewish problem."

Evian, Failure of Emigration, and Radicalization

In July 1938, the Evian Conference gathered 32 countries to discuss Jewish refugees. Most refused to increase immigration quotas; only the Dominican Republic offered land for 100,000, though only a few hundred were settled.

Nazi propaganda gloated: "Jews for sale - nobody wants them." Zionist delegates focused exclusively on Palestine, rejecting other destinations. The failure of emigration contributed to the Nazi shift from expulsion to extermination.

The Eichmann–Haganah Contact

In 1937, Haganah agent Feivel Polkes met Eichmann and Herbert Hagen. Polkes requested arms and Nazi assistance against the British, framing Britain as a common enemy. Eichmann and Hagen traveled to Palestine under false identities, were expelled by the British, and met Polkes again in Cairo. No agreement was reached, but the episode illustrates the pragmatism - and desperation - of both sides.

Shadows of the Past

Before genocide, Nazi policy involved:

- **Systematic dispossession** (Aryanization of Jewish property).
- **Loss of citizenship** (Nuremberg Laws).
- **Dual legal systems** (Jews vs. Aryans).
- **Arbitrary detention** (early camps).

Observers note structural parallels in Israel/Palestine today: dispossession of land, denial of citizenship, separate legal systems for settlers and Palestinians, and administrative detention.

Conclusion: Two Faces of Racial Nationalism

Zionism and Nazism, though opposed in outcome, shared a common framework: both were ethno-nationalist projects that rejected assimilation, glorified separation, and defined identity biologically.

The *Der Angriff* medal with its swastika and Star of David is more than a collector's curiosity - it is a reminder that European antisemitism was not resolved in Europe but exported to Palestine, where Palestinians became the victims of a "solution" devised by two racial-nationalist ideologies.

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