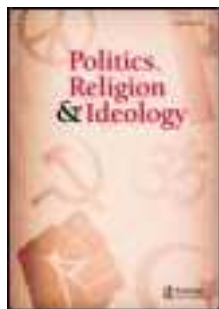


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## ‘The Million Plan’: Zionism, Political Theology and Scientific Utopianism

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**ABSTRACT** *This article analyses Israel’s first prime minister’s plan for a Jewish fast mass immigration to Palestine during World War II. The ‘Million Plan’, as it was named later, envisioned an imaginary transfer of a million Jews to Palestine in a year and a half. It was formulated with the help of a big team of experts, professionals and scientists in what is known as the Planning Committee. We will attempt to analyze the Million Plan from several interconnected perspectives: First, we will read the event as marking the beginning of the establishment of a new socio-political order which Zionist historiography calls mamlakhtiyut (statism or etatism), usually linked to the establishment of Israel a few years later. Second, we will explain the event as a new stage in the relationship between the political and professional-scientific establishments in the Zionist movement. Third, we see the Million Plan as marking a new phase in the development of David Ben-Gurion’s political theology and representing a further fusion of his political and theological visions. We suggest viewing the Million Plan as a pivotal event in ‘imagining’ the Jewish state and in secularizing the theological concept of messianism, as a ‘site of fusion’ in which the political and the theological were fused through the introduction of modern science and technology.*

David Ben-Gurion, the founder of the State of Israel and its first prime minister, is a good example of political theology. As a political leader that did not hesitate to appropriate the sacred, he mobilized hallowed myths and harnessed them to the task of state building. Ben-Gurion turned towards Promethean messianism which relied on the sovereignty of man. In contrast to transcendental messianism, in which the end of days comes about through supernatural means, in Promethean messianism, the future of mankind is the work of flesh and blood. Ben-Gurion was the most extreme expression in the Zionist movement of a leader who worked to politicize the theological.<sup>1</sup> In his political rhetoric and action there was a definite fusion between the world of the sacred and the world of the profane. In planning and founding the State of Israel, Ben-Gurion had made the most significant attempt at nationalizing the Jewish messianic concept.

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<sup>1</sup>D. Ohana, *Political Theologies in the Holy Land: Israeli Messianism and its Critics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009). D. Ohana, ‘Secular Messianism as Political Theology – The Case of David Ben-Gurion’ in C. Schmidt and E. Shenfeld (eds) *Jewish Modernity and Political Theology* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2008), pp. 204–225 [In Hebrew].

The rise of Zionism was a turning point in the transition from transcendental messianism to Promethean messianism. From the time of the Bar-Kochba revolt of 132 CE – the last act representing a fusion of Jewish sovereignty and the messianic vision before the exile – until the appearance of Zionism, the faith of many Jews for nearly two millennia was characterized by what might be termed a ‘transcendental messianism’. In this form of messianism, redemption was made dependent on a supernatural authority and the end of history was postponed. The concept of redemption was unconnected with the will or actions of men. The historical process was seen in an apocalyptic and ahistorical perspective. The end of history in this context was an event that was hidden, from the human point of view, but also predetermined.<sup>2</sup> The limited function of the Jew in the Middle Ages was to be content with hastening the redemption, but the redemption itself was in the hands of the kingdom of heaven. This situation was to change in the modern era, although the change did not take place overnight.

Zionism – the revolt against the decree of exile – sprang up within it at the time of the nineteenth-century revolutionary ideologies, which were filled with a Promethean messianism. In this form of messianism, redemption was not passive or deterministic but was carried out by a modern individual who prepared himself and his circle and claimed to form a total world within a partial reality. In the Promethean messianism, it was human action which brought about redemption.

As in the case of other ideological revolutionaries in the twentieth century, Ben-Gurion’s political theology and his attraction for social engineering went hand in hand. The purpose of the ‘Million Plan’, which will be discussed and analyzed here, was the transfer of a million Jews from Europe to Palestine in a short period of time. In this revolutionary plan – which was formulated in the midst of World War II and five years before the establishment of the State of Israel – one can trace elements of his modernistic and technological outlook and his secular messianism which was the core of his political theology.

The Million Plan has already been discussed by several researchers.<sup>3</sup> The best-known study is perhaps Dvora Hacoheh’s book, *The Million Plan*, which extensively presents the work of the Planning Committee and the details of the plan. Hacoheh also describes how after the establishment of Israel some of the plans concerning mass immigration, industry and agriculture were implemented according to the outline sketched out in the Million Plan.<sup>4</sup> Ilan Troen, in his series of articles and his book, *Imagining Zion*, also discusses the Million Plan, which he views, among other things, as a major turning point in the Zionist planning policy – moving from rural planning to that with important emphasis on urban planning.<sup>5</sup> Yehouda Shenhav in his book, *The Arab Jews*, also refers to the Million Plan, which he sees as the first time the Zionist establishment referred to Jews from Arab countries as a potential human reservoir for migration to Palestine (in light of the

<sup>2</sup>S. Rosenberg, ‘Redemption and History’, *Alon Le Moreh Hahistoria*, 6 (1997), p. 52 [In Hebrew].

<sup>3</sup>Some of the ideas appearing in this article, especially the ones concerning techno-science and the Million Plan, were formulated during a joint study by Ari Barell and Arik Krampf. They were presented in a joint lecture entitled: ‘David Ben Gurion and David Horowitz: The Leader, the Expert and the Construction of the Israeli State Ideology’ at the Conference of the Israeli Association for the History and Philosophy of Science in 2005. We wish to thank Dr Krampf.

<sup>4</sup>Dvora Hacoheh, *The Million Plan: David Ben-Gurion’s Plan for Mass Immigration in the Years 1942–1945* (Tel-Aviv: The Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 1994) [in Hebrew].

<sup>5</sup>S. Ilan Troen, *Imagining Zion: Dreams, Designs, and Realities in a Century of Jewish Settlement* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), esp. pp. 163–183; S. Ilan Troen, ‘Calculating the “Economic Absorptive Capacity” of Palestine: A Study of the Political Uses of Scientific Research’, *Contemporary Jewry* 10:2 (1989), pp. 19–38; S. Ilan Troen, ‘The Turning Point Zionist Planning Policy – From Rural Settlements to an Urban System’, *Yahadut Zmanenu*, 5 (1989), pp. 217–240 [in Hebrew].

Holocaust in Europe) and the first time all these Jews coming from different Arab and Muslim states were grouped in one category (termed 'Mizrahi Jews' or 'Sephardic Jews') thus creating the discourse about Mizrahi Jews in Israeli culture.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this literature, we believe that the existing studies have not yet grasped its full significance. We will attempt to present the Million Plan from a different standpoint. First, we understand the event as marking a crucial milestone in the construction of a new socio-political order which Zionist historiography calls *mamlakhtiyut* (statism or etatism), usually linked to the establishment of Israel a few years later. Indeed, already Theodore Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, had sketched quite an elaborate plan for a state in his book *The Jewish State* (*Der Judenstaat*, 1896) and added details in his utopist novel *Altneuland* (*Old-New Land*, 1902). Nevertheless, it was, as a matter of fact, a program of political imagination. In the context of the Jewish condition in the late nineteenth century, Herzl's political utopia was important because it enabled Jews to start viewing the idea of a Jewish state as feasible and doable. Ben-Gurion, no doubt, continued Herzl's vision, but promoted it further onto a much more concrete and realistic path: a detailed and concrete plan concerning various operational aspects of the envisioned Jewish state – aspects that will materialize in one way or another after the establishment of the state of Israel. The political revolutionary spirit which prevails in Herzl's writings was translated into an almost-real state plan by David Ben-Gurion.

In the years following Herzl's death, Jewish immigration to Palestine continued and even increased. Various self-governing and cultural institutions emerged. These institutions and activities surely would constitute the basis for the establishment of a Jewish state in 1948; however, unlike the nation-building process which occurred at this time (1904–1935), the Million Plan put forward the Jewish state as a clear and unambiguous Zionist goal. Moreover, the plan separated itself from some of the assumptions that had been underlying Zionist activity until mid-late 1930s: It had radical – even revolutionary – features, particularly the pursuit of a rapid Jewish mass immigration (including Jews from the Arab countries) – in contrast to the gradual evolutionary model that characterized the view of the mainstream Zionist establishment until then. In addition, as a result of the need to deal with rapid mass migration, the Million Plan imagined and sketched a different economic and social structure for the Jewish state. City and industry were the focus of this society and economy and not agriculture and the village. All in all, the Million Plan reflects a different cultural, social and economic logic from that which was common in the Jewish community in Palestine until then, a logic which resembles the logic of the Jewish state that was established eventually in 1948. This is why we see the Million Plan as the beginning of the establishment of a new order of the state.

Second, we will explain the event as a new stage in the relationship between the political and the professional-scientific establishments in the Zionist movement. We do not claim that the Million Plan represents a completely new phase in regard to science-politics relations in the Zionist context. The close affinity of the Jewish national movement to science and technology and the important place of scientists and experts in planning and implementing the Zionist project are well-known and are documented in the literature.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Yehouda A. Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 19–48.

<sup>7</sup>For literature concerning the connection of the Zionist movement to science and experts see for example: Shaul Katz and Michael Heyd (eds.), *The History of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem: Origins and Beginnings* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997). See there among others: Shaul Katz, "Pure Science" in a National University: Einstein Institute of Mathematics and Other Institutes at the Hebrew University During its Formation Period', pp. 281–308 [in Hebrew]; Hagit Lavsky (ed.), *The History of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem: A Period of Consolidation and Growth* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005); Derek J. Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy: The Engineering of Jewish Settlement*

However, we claim that during the formulation of the Million Plan one can trace a significant increase in cooperation and collaboration between the local Jewish political establishment and scientists and experts. Furthermore, the work of the Planning Committee fused the political and the techno-scientific imaginations and created a joint techno-political imagination and program. Moreover, the research carried out by the Planning Committee's various teams created the know-how that was used after the state's establishment. Many of the experts that worked on the Million Plan played central roles in the planning and administrative bodies of the young state. The Million Plan laid the foundation for what would happen in science-politics relations around the establishment of the State of Israel: an overall move toward a link-up between the political center and the techno-scientific establishments and the emergence of a new regime in science-politics relations in the Zionist context.

Third, we see the Million Plan as marking a new phase in the development of David Ben-Gurion's political theology and representing a further fusion of his political and theological visions, his national outlook and his messianic conceptions.

We maintain that these perspectives are interconnected: *mamlakhtiyut* was born simultaneously with the emergence of a new techno-political regime and with the intensification of a Zionist political theology. We suggest viewing the Million Plan – and the Planning Committee established to form it – as a pivotal event in ‘imagining’ the Jewish state, in the secularization of the theological concept of messianism, and as an important stage in the process of constructing Israeli statism. In so doing, we point to the cooperation between the political center and the experts, the merging of political and techno-scientific activities, and the hybridization of the experts' discourse with the national discourse as one of the major components of this ‘state order’ of *mamlakhtiyut*. It is also a major locus in which the political and the theological were fused through the introduction of modern science and technology.

### Zionism, Politics and Messianism

Zionism – the Promethean passion of the modern Jews – was a three-dimensional project. It was a political movement arising at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (*modernity* as a historical category) setting itself the aim of creating a nation state for the Jews dispersed in their different diasporas. It was a national ideology which was operative in all areas of Jewish art and culture (*modernism* as an aesthetic category) in Europe, in the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) in the first half of the twentieth century and later in the State of Israel which arose in 1948. Finally, Zionism developed political and

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*in Palestine, 1870–1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Mitchell Bryan Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Etan Bloom, *Arthur Ruppin and the Production of Pre-Israeli Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Uri Cohen, *The Mountain and the Hill: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem During Pre Independence Period and Early Years of the State of Israel* (Tel- Aviv: Am Oved, 2006) [Heb]; Noah Efron, *Judaism And Science: A Historical Introduction* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007); Ilan Troen, *Imagining Zion: Dreams, Designs & Realities in a Century of Jewish Settlement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Nurit Kirsh, (2003). ‘Population Genetics in Israel in the 1950s: The Unconscious Internalization of Ideology’, *Isis*, 94:4 (2003), pp. 631–655; Arie Krampf, ‘The Reception of the Developmental Approach in the Jewish Economic Discourse in Mandatory Palestine, 1934–1938’, *Israel Studies*, 15:2 (2010), pp. 80–103; Anat Leibler, ‘Statisticians’ Ambition: Governmentality, Modernity, National Legibility’, *Israel Studies*, 9:2 (2004), pp. 121–149; Tal Golan (ed.), ‘Special Issue: Science, Technology and Israeli Society’, *Israel Studies*, 9:2 (2004); Leo Corry and Tal Golan (eds), ‘Special Issue: Science in Israeli Context: Case Studies’, *Science in Context*, 23:4 (2010); Nadav Davidovitch and Shifra Shvarts, ‘Health and Hegemony: Preventive Medicine, Immigration and the Israeli Melting Pot’, *Israel Studies*, 9 (2004), pp. 150–179.

economic institutions, undertook the building of settlements and initiated scientific and technological projects (*modernization* as a sociological, economic and scientific category) in the Yishuv and in the State of Israel. The result – the state of Israel – grew out of the contexts of modernity, modernism and modernization which developed together with the Zionist movement in Europe.

The roots of Ben-Gurion's messianic idea lie deep in the biographical and Zionist milieu in which the young leader grew up and matured. In the first decade of the State of Israel, a new coherent interpretation was given, a sweeping nationalization of messianism in the form of a state ideology (*mamlachtiut*). For more than 60 years, Ben-Gurion never tired of preaching about the messianic vision of the people of Israel. As he saw it, the messianic motif, which was a kind of mobilizing myth in the building of the young nation, had no religious or transcendental content but embodied a proper moral ethos, a call for settlement, a mobilization of youth and the socialization of all the different segments of society into the sovereign mold of *mamlachtiut*. At different stages in the development of Ben-Gurion's messianic idea, different aspects were emphasized. In the 1920s the messianic idea was inspired by European socialist radicalism, whereas in the 1950s, the first years of the young Israeli state, the messianic ethos had a national content.<sup>8</sup>

When trying to uncover the genealogy of the messianic idea in Ben-Gurion's intellectual development, the year 1917 appears to be a revolutionary turning point. The Bolshevik revolution and the Balfour Declaration (the first international declaration that acknowledged the right of the Jewish people to a national homeland, made by the British government in 1917) aroused waves of enthusiasm among the workers in Europe, among the Zionist activists and among many of the world's Jews. There was also the end of World War I ('the war to end wars'), the collapse of the multinational empires and a time of grace in which the right of self-determination was granted to European peoples, thanks largely to Woodrow Wilson, and to the Zionists, thanks to Lord Balfour. These events made the people of the 'generation of 1914' feel that they were experiencing an extraordinary historical moment in which there was a sense of historical redemption, a moment in which all utopias were possible.

The common factor between Ben-Gurion and Lenin is that despite their messianic vision, they were not constrained by rigid ideological principles. Both leaders paid sufficient attention to the changing conditions of modernity. Lenin was faced with many problems: the struggle within the party, the world war, the institutionalization of Marxism, the civil war and the threat from Western powers. Ben-Gurion's problems were no less weighty than Lenin's. At the beginning of the 1920s, he had wanted to impose Lenin's avant-garde Bolshevik approach, thinking that he should take control of the party (*Ahdut Ha-Avodah*) in order that it should run the *Histadrut* as a labor movement, guide the labor faction within the Zionist movement, and finally steer the state-in-the-making toward national independence. The Jewish leader was drawn to the Russian one because of the fascination of his personality, his grasp of organization and his capacity to compromise with his Bolshevik messianism. The rising labor-Zionist leader was also drawn to Trotsky on account of his militaristic messianism expressed in a military type of communism.

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<sup>8</sup>For a detailed discussion about David Ben-Gurion's messianic approach in the state era see: S. Avineri, 'Israel in the Post Ben-Gurion Era: The Nemesis of Messianism', *Midstream*, XI:3 (1965), pp. 16–32; A. Shapira, 'Zionism and Political Messianism' in *Walking to the Horizon* (Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved, 1988), pp. 11–22 [In Hebrew]; J. Shavit, 'Messianism, Utopianism and Pessimism During The 1950s: Notes On The Criticism of Ben Gurion's Israel Messianity', *Lunim Be-Tkumat Israel*, 2 (1992), pp. 56–78 [In Hebrew]; D. Ohana, *Political Theologies in the Holy Land: Israeli Messianism and its Critics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 17–53, 120–144.

Modern utopias as a literary genre only began to appear in the Renaissance with the decline of religious authority. Until then, the Great Ruler of the Universe ruled over the future of mankind and directed it. In the period of the Renaissance and afterwards, the utopias, despite their revolutionary character, remained within the limits of a traditional reflection on nature or on the structure of the world in which we live.<sup>9</sup> From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the utopias moved from the dimension of space, which initially characterized them, to the dimension of time. The creators of utopias wished to change this world *within* this world. Science, technology and engineering were the modernist factors par excellence to materialize this transformation.

Utopia and power are the two aspects of the revolutionary-in-action. In the revolutionary atmosphere of the beginning of the twentieth century, the view seemed justified that in order to destroy the old world and build a new national and social order, one had to use force. This was the background against which Lenin and Trotsky, Pilsudski and Ataturk operated, and Ben-Gurion as well.<sup>10</sup> Ben-Gurion, like these leaders and founders, was reared on a messianic-utopian vision which could only be realized by revolutionary means. His labor-Zionist revolutionism was refined in the Marxist crucible, and its point of departure was society as the necessary basis for change.<sup>11</sup>

When Hitler came to power, Ben-Gurion saw 'the nightmarish situation of the Jews of Poland, a situation of permanent pogrom, both political, physical, economic and moral, perhaps much worse than in Germany [ . . . ]. The poverty is alarming, the insults intolerable, and there is not the slightest hope of improvement, of self-defense. Black despair and impotence, the absence of deliverance and no way out.'<sup>12</sup> In this tragic situation of the year 1936, he perceived the negative potential of the messianic faith to lead to Jewish passivity:

There is some sort of Messianic inspiration, but in a negative way: not the reinforcement of faith by one's own efforts and a strengthening of will, but an abstract delusion [ . . . ].<sup>13</sup>

This sentiment was confirmed by his experience at a public meeting in which he spoke to the Polish Jews about the political problems and the terrible dangers 'and there was a boundless enthusiasm in the hall, as though I had announced the coming of the Messiah'.<sup>14</sup> Ben-Gurion felt frustrated: the exilic Jews were excited by rhetoric but took no concrete steps to escape their predicament. In August 1936, in a telegram to the World Jewish Congress, he remarked on the one hand about the bad political weather in Europe and the disturbances in Palestine ('Cruel oppressors with the mark of Cain on their brows and loathsome racial doctrines in their mouths have risen up against us in exile, and gangs of rioters assail our redemptive undertaking in Eretz-Israel'), and on the other, even in that difficult time, he never tired of proclaiming his messianic vision and urging greater 'efforts towards a speedy and full realization of the redemption of our people in its land'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>For a somewhat different understanding of the concept of the Renaissance and an adaptation of this concept to the revival of Hebrew culture, the Zionist revolution and to David Ben-Gurion's historic enterprise see Shlomo Aronson's book *David Ben-Gurion and the Jewish Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup>I. Kolat, 'Ben-Gurion: Ha Dmut Ve-HaGdulla [Ben-Gurion: The Figure and The Greatness], *Molad*, 4 (1973), pp. 340–351 [In Hebrew].

<sup>11</sup>S. Avinery, 'David Ben-Gurion: Assessing his Social Thinking', *Ma'ariv*, 1975 [In Hebrew].

<sup>12</sup>Ben-Gurion Archives, David Ben-Gurion's Diary, 26 June 1936.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 8 August 1936.



Ben-Gurion's calls for a 'speedy and full realization of national redemption' in the period before the outbreak of World War II were more than mere words. In those years he effected a change in the conception of *aliyah* (Jewish immigration to Israel) which he and his movement had had until then. He switched from the idea of a selective, avant-garde, pioneering *Aliyah*, which would prepare the way for an ideal society, to the concept of a mass-*aliyah* – an immediate rescue of the Jews of Europe. He recognized the harsh historical reality lurking on their doorstep; he saw its scale and changed his order of priorities. The ideal of the hoped-for utopian society gave way to the rescue of the 'human dust' of the Jewish people. The rescue of the European Jews and bringing most of them to Palestine would also strengthen Ben-Gurion's main purpose in his entire Zionist career thus far: the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Eretz-Israel.

In 1937 the recommendations of the Peel Commission for the partition of Palestine were published. At the 20th Zionist Congress, Ben-Gurion gave his reasons for supporting an emergency plan to rescue the Jews of Europe and to realize the idea of a Jewish state in practical terms even if it meant compromising the vision of a Greater Land of Israel. He recognized the fatefulness of the hour: 'I see the next congress as no less important than Herzl's first congress.'<sup>16</sup> This was a major crossroads: 'We stand on the threshold of a great disaster or on the threshold of a mighty historical conquest.' Ben-Gurion stood before a fateful decision, and understood that he was faced with a revolutionary situation, as Lenin was at the time of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The historical crisis could not be measured by normal criteria, and it had its own momentum:

We are now called upon to make our reckoning, not in accordance with normal considerations but with a revolutionary approach, the sense of a deep historical crisis passing over ourselves and the land. Historical crises have their own logic, fundamentally different from the logic of regular, normal times, and we shall miss our objective if we now measure things by our usual criteria . . . Here there are totally different dangers and also a completely new momentum.<sup>17</sup>

Ben-Gurion pushed for compromise on two binding and commonly accepted imperatives of the labor movement: the wholeness of the land and selective pioneering immigration. The two things were interdependent: the 'magic solution' of partition, which meant a decision against the wholeness of the land, provided the opportunity to work for a broad, non-selective *aliyah*. It is paradoxical that in practice these two painful compromises made possible the building of the state. It is not surprising that it was precisely at this decisive moment of historical compromise that Ben-Gurion mobilized all the messianic rhetoric at his command: the act of compromise was his and the action was messianic. The decision of partition which played an active part in history and molded it was the messianic act *par excellence*, as against waiting for the Messiah to appear at the end of history.

Unlike Yitzhak Tabenkin (1888–1971), a labor activist and the leader the United Kibbutz Movement, on one side, and Zeev Jabotinsky (1880–1940), the founder of the Zionist Revisionist movement, on the other, Ben-Gurion understood the potential of the fateful hour that came his way with the partition proposal, seeing it as a unique opportunity for *aliyah* and building up the country. In the philosophy of history he had developed there were historic leaps forward, revolutionary moments that had to be met with revolutionary means. This logic applied even more during the ever-increasing chaos of World War II. Ben-Gurion came to the conclusion that it was possible and even essential in the crisis that

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 13 June 1937.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.



was developing in the 1930s to rescue most of the Jewish people and settle them in even a small part of Palestine. In fact, the partition proposal facilitated a situation of self-reliance in which the Jewish leadership was not subjected to immigration quotas and the limitations on settlement imposed by the British. In that situation, one could make a virtue of necessity: one could rescue the Jews of Europe and found the hoped-for state. Ben-Gurion believed that the opposition to the partition proposal on the right was motivated by Revisionist adventurism, 'the worst kind of false Messianism'.<sup>18</sup> After the failure of his talks with the Arab leaders in 1933, he concluded that it would not be possible to sign an agreement with the Arabs, and he hoped to force an outcome by creating facts on the ground. The partition proposal was, so to speak, a partial solution to two problems at once: the distressful situation of the Jewish people in Europe and the blood-feud with the Arabs. The Zionist Prometheus had moved from an ideological messianism to a pragmatic messianism.

The 'bad weather' in Europe and the call for a 'new momentum' brought out Ben-Gurion's leadership, which was increasingly manifest in the following years. From 1937 to 1948 he made crucial decisions with the feeling of engineering a historic breakthrough, from the call for a mass immigration of the European Jews in the 1930s to the opening of the gates of the State of Israel in the first years of the great immigration, and from the acceptance of the Peel Commission's partition plan to the decision to declare the state. These acts of leadership appear in historical perspective to be acts of 'messianism' in the Ben-Gurion sense of the term, fulfilling some messianic dimension in political reality. At that time, he refused to oppose the terms that were offered, and in the face of the dramatic events taking place in Europe – the Nuremberg Laws, the Munich Agreement, the *Kristallnacht* – he sought to steer the course of history toward a realization of the Zionist project in a revolutionary historical situation. A year before the outbreak of World War II he wrote in his diary:

I believe in the days of the Messiah. Wickedness will not reign forever. Hitler and Chamberlain will not exist forever [ . . . ]. Righteousness, now trampled underfoot, will yet appear.<sup>19</sup>

When the skies of Europe grew overcast, Ben-Gurion did not sink into a state of depression. The meaning of his declaration 'I believe in the days of the Messiah' was that in European Jewry's darkest hour the leader placed his trust in the future. He put forward a messianic faith in a better future for humanity and the Jewish people as a value in which one should believe; in the end, human righteousness would overcome human wickedness. Two years later, his friend and colleague, the socialist leader Berl Katznelson, also spoke in messianic terms, but this time it was in order to express helplessness and despair. In 1940 Berl reported that a woman had said to a friend in the market: 'The Lord of the Universe is wrong in delaying and not sending the Messiah. What will happen if the Messiah comes and no longer finds his Jews?' When the scale of the catastrophe became clear, Ben-Gurion declared in a rough manner: 'previously, we were a people without a state, now we are a state without a people'.

That was the difference between Ben-Gurion and Berl. At a time when Berl, the warm-hearted Jewish intellectual, was in despair concerning the Jews of Europe, was helpless before their suffering and identified with the victims to the point of desperation, Ben-Gurion remained cool-headed and alert and statesmanlike to the depths of his being. He did not feel the horror any less than Berl did, and even saw it coming earlier than him

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 11 May 1937.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 3 October 1938.

and others. Already in 1934, on reading *Mein Kampf*, he wrote, ‘Hitler’s régime puts the whole Jewish people in danger’,<sup>20</sup> and in 1938 he made a grim forecast of the fate in store for the Jewish people: ‘[ . . . ] Hitler is not only the enemy and adversary of German Jewry. His sadistic and fanatical aim is the extermination of the Jews in the entire world [ . . . ].’<sup>21</sup> His grim forecasts did not render him helpless, and in the face of the approaching disaster he did what was best in the situation: he prepared to found a state. The path which led to independence and the realization of the vision of the National Home in Eretz-Israel was to be a tragic one. He did not look back in anger but prepared an infrastructure for the absorption of masses of Jewish immigrants.

Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust is still an unsolved riddle. The efforts Ben-Gurion made to rescue the European Jews tragically did not bear fruit. In the opinion of many, they did not display the initiative and political energy normally so characteristic of this bold leader. In the opinion of others, however, the demands of the situation were so many and the possibilities so few that the people of the Yishuv were not able with the few means they had to save the lives of their brethren and parents in Europe. Ben-Gurion’s Zionist outlook was marked by two parallel features: negation of the exilic Jewish condition and the desire to rescue the Jews by such means as the restoration of their sovereignty.<sup>22</sup>

It may be true that ‘Ben-Gurion saw rescue almost exclusively in terms of immigration to Palestine, and decided – correctly – that there was no chance of rescuing masses by this means’,<sup>23</sup> or that, as his biographer claimed, ‘Ben-Gurion could not do anything to relieve the suffering or save lives, and may therefore have preferred silence to words without actions’.<sup>24</sup> Whatever the case, he ‘called for the Zionist ideology to adapt to the difficult reality, as Zionism, in his words, was not a “metaphysical theology” but a movement of practical liberation’.<sup>25</sup> In the face of Dante’s inferno, as he called it, and in the face of the industrial extermination carried out by the Nazis, he made a radical decision: perhaps the best thing to do was to save what there was and not to concern oneself with what was lost. He started to work on a political program for the day after the war. In the Biltmore Program (May 1942), he succeeded in uniting the Zionist movement around a political plan of action which worked toward the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine after the war and called for the transference of the authority for decisions concerning immigration and settlement to the Zionist establishment. About six months later, he initiated the setting up of a national team to plan the immigration and settlement of masses of Jews from Europe. This team, which eventually came to be known as *Va’adat Ha-Tichnun* (the ‘Planning Committee’), was occupied for about two years in working out the details of the ‘Million Plan’. This plan envisaged the immigration of a million Jews to Palestine and their settlement there within an extremely short period. Ben-Gurion wrote at that time in his diary that if a million or half a million Jews were to immigrate to Palestine within a year, ‘I would see it as the coming of the Messiah.’<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Tevet, *David’s Envy*, III, pp. 68–69.

<sup>21</sup>T. Frilling, *Arrow in The Dark, David Ben-Gurion, The Yishuv Leadership and Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust* (Sede Boker: Ben-Gurion University Press, 1998), p. 24 [In Hebrew]. See also in English, T. Frilling, *Arrows in the dark: David Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv leadership, and rescue attempts during the Holocaust* (Madison, Wisconsin: Wayne University Press, 2005).

<sup>22</sup>Aharonson, *Ben-Gurion: The Renaissance Leader*, p. 152.

<sup>23</sup>T. Segev, *The Seventh Million – The Israelis and the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1991), p. 81 [In Hebrew].

<sup>24</sup>Tevet, *David’s Envy*, p. 444.

<sup>25</sup>Frilling, *Arrow in the Dark*, p. 923.

<sup>26</sup>Ben-Gurion Archives, David Ben-Gurion’s Diary, 19 November 1942.

**The Planning Committee and the Million Plan (1942–1945)**

Toward the end of 1942, Ben-Gurion returned to Palestine from the US with the Biltmore Program in his pocket. The ideas regarding forming a team of experts for researching and planning mass immigration and settlement of Jews in Palestine began to take a realistic turn. In October 1942, Ben-Gurion requested, during a Jewish Agency executive session, that he be appointed, through the Agricultural Economic Research and Experiment Station in Rehovot, to examine what needed to be done to bring two million Jews to Palestine and settle them there. The purpose of this ambitious project was to help realize the political target for which Ben-Gurion was striving – crossing the demographic threshold and creating a Jewish majority in Palestine. In the words of Ben-Gurion: ‘the meaning of a million is making the Jews the majority’.<sup>27</sup> A Jewish majority would create what he called a ‘political fact’, and lead to the establishment of a Jewish state.

Ben-Gurion’s working assumption for such a plan was that the Zionist establishment would have jurisdiction and control over immigration and settlement in the country and the required funding. To prevent his proposal remaining just a declaration, he called at the same meeting for ‘three operative decisions’ to be made, one of them being, ‘to instruct the scientific institutions to process the scientific and technical material required for a one-time settlement program on the scale of a state’.<sup>28</sup>

In an attempt to persuade his listeners of the necessity for such an ambitious settlement plan, Ben-Gurion tried to show them the great importance of the current historical moment. He claimed World War II was creating a new human and Jewish situation: the US was emerging as the main power that would shape the postwar world- order, and that such an arrangement would include a radical political plan, the transfer of populations in unprecedented numbers and large sums of money to restore Europe to normalcy after the war. In Ben-Gurion’s estimation, at the end of the war the Jewish problem would emerge in all its severity: millions of Jewish refugees would remain homeless and would need to be rehabilitated. Ben-Gurion told the members of the Jewish Agency Executive that various statesmen with whom he had spoken regarding the problem of the Jewish refugees who would appear after the war, did not see Palestine as a realistic solution to the settlement and rehabilitation of the millions of refugees due to its small size and overcrowdedness. ‘Therefore’, Ben-Gurion proclaimed to his listeners, ‘we need to create the circumstances in which Palestine will serve and be seen as a territory capable of providing a realistic solution to the settlement of the tens of thousands of Jewish refugees who will fill Europe after the war’. Ben-Gurion claimed that only through immigration and a thoroughly detailed realistic settlement program would it be possible to persuade the world – led by the US – that Palestine was indeed a realistic settlement goal. He emphasized that the settlement program in Palestine which Zionism had to provide at that time had to be ambitious, aiming at the mass absorption of Jews in a very short period of time (‘large Zionism’ as he described it). This was because if the Zionist project would not show itself capable of providing a complete (or almost complete) solution to the problem of the Jewish refugees in Europe, there was no reason for the nations of the world to adopt it or support its realization. And thus he said to the members of the Jewish Agency Executive at that session:

[ . . . ] it is only possible to gain America with ‘large Zionism’. Because they are used to large dimensions. If you say: Palestine solves the Jewish question –

<sup>27</sup>Ben-Gurion Archives, Protocol Division, Protocol of the Jewish Agency Executive session, 20 June 1944.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 6 October 1942.

then it's worthwhile. But if the Jewish question won't be solved – if it's a question of a spiritual center, of a university – for that they won't fight . . . the land is tiny – that's the great difficulty.<sup>29</sup>

During October and the beginning of November 1942, Ben-Gurion examined what had been done up until then in the field of research and planning of mass immigration and settlement and searched for a secretary to collect the material on this topic for him.<sup>30</sup> He informed the Jewish Agency Executive that he intended to devote a significant amount of his time to this issue, and even succeeded in securing a budget for this research.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, Ben-Gurion approached Arthur Ruppin, who was then also serving as the director of the Institute for Economic Research at the Jewish Agency, requesting that he convene a conference of the senior researchers, economists and scientists in order to discuss planning for settlement of two million people. Ben-Gurion even approached some of the experts himself to prepare lectures about topics of his choosing.<sup>32</sup>

On the 24 November 1942, the Institute for Economic Research at the Jewish Agency convened in Rehovot at Ben-Gurion's request. At this conference, Ben-Gurion presented the experts with the task he had designated for them: creating a practical program for the fastest possible immigration and settlement of two million Jews in Palestine. In his address before the experts Ben-Gurion repeated his two working premises, which assumed that the Zionist establishment possessed control over immigration and had funding for such a project. He claimed that presenting a reliable scientific study proving that Palestine was capable of economically supporting large numbers of Jewish immigrants was a prerequisite for the success of convincing the nations of the world. Ben-Gurion stated:

If we can invent such a plan, feasible from the standpoint of physics, chemistry and physiology, and we can show that as far as these three sciences are concerned we can transfer two million Jews in a short amount of time to the land, feed them in the country, gradually integrate them into the economy of the Land – it's true that for a short time they will need to be supported by charity, wherever they are they will need to be supported by charity, but from the physical point of view we can settle them in the Land, there is land for that, there is water to irrigate the land, and we need autonomy and money for this – we can start talking. Only on this basis can we talk; we need to start preparing the programs right now. We need to come with material, and then we can say: if you give us autonomy and money we can do it.<sup>33</sup>

Almost another year passed until the Planning Committee was actually established. The direct background of its founding was the announcement (22 March 1943) by the British high commissioner for Palestine of the appointment of Sir Douglas Harris to the position of commissioner for postwar reconstruction in Palestine. Harris was given the task of preparing a comprehensive rehabilitation program in the fields of agriculture,

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ben-Gurion Archives, David Ben-Gurion's Diary, 18 October 1942.

<sup>31</sup>Ben-Gurion Archives, Protocol Division, Protocol of the Jewish Agency Executive Session in Jerusalem, 18 October 1942.

<sup>32</sup>Hacohen, *The Million Plan*, pp. 91–100.

<sup>33</sup>David Ben-Gurion, Protocol of the Meeting of the Economic Research Institute, 24 November 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives, Speeches and Articles Division (November–December 1942).

industry, education, social and cultural services in Palestine. In his announcement the high commissioner referred to the impressive growth of industry and of the urban population in Palestine, but emphasized that it was first and foremost an agricultural country.<sup>34</sup>

Ben-Gurion viewed the British vision of an agricultural Palestine as a direct threat to the activities of the Zionist movement, and a camouflage for the continuation of the White Paper policies. He claimed that the purpose of this program was to suffocate the intensive industrial activity of the Jewish economy in Palestine which had greatly increased during World War II, and that it would be the Arabs who would primarily benefit from such a plan. He opined that this plan would damage the possibility of absorbing mass Jewish immigration into Palestine, and therefore proposed that the Jews should prepare their own plan for postwar reconstruction. The Planning Committee was established to realize this proposal, and to prepare alternative plans for the country's development.<sup>35</sup>

One of the first steps in founding the Planning Committee was to establish a steering committee (October 1943) which included Ben-Gurion himself as chairman; Eliezer Kaplan, a member of the Jewish Agency Executive and Jewish Agency treasurer, one of the leaders of Mapai (the Workers' Party of Eretz Yisrael), and later the first minister of finance; Siegfried Eliezer Hoofien, a prominent finance expert, the general manager of the Anglo-Palestine Bank and the first chairman of the advisory council to the Bank of Israel; and Dr Emil Shmorak, one of the leaders of the General Zionists Party and head of the trade and industry department at the Jewish Agency. The steering committee's role was directing, guiding and supervising the actual planning work carried out by sub-committees of experts on various topics. A short while later, the Planning Committee secretariat was founded, with the task of organizing and coordinating the actual technical work. It included David Horowitz, head of the Economics Department at the Jewish Agency, and later the first director general of the Ministry of Finance and the first governor of the Bank of Israel; Haim Margolis (Margalit) from the Anglo-Palestine Bank, who was Hoofien's right-hand man, and Dr Alfred Bonne, who was appointed after the death of Arthur Ruppin (1943) to head the Economics Research Institute of the Jewish Agency. Professor Bonne was eventually the first dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>36</sup>

Ben-Gurion set the following goals for the committee's work:

- A. Settlement of two million Jews and devising plans for this purpose. B. A pure scientific investigation of the facts pertinent to settlement, such as the quantity of water, the quality of the land, climate etc.<sup>37</sup>

Not all the committee members agreed with the radical proposal of settling two million Jews. At the next meeting of the steering committee Ben-Gurion moderated the target and spoke of two stages: fast transfer of one million Jews during the first stage, and

<sup>34</sup>Ilan Troen, 'Establishing the Social Sciences of Zionism: The Calculation of Palestine's Economic Absorptive Capacity', *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel*, 1 (1991), p. 491 [in Hebrew]. The appointment of a commissioner for reconstruction in Palestine was not an unusual step. There were similar preparations for the postwar era throughout the British Empire.

<sup>35</sup>'A reply to the ruler's speech', at the Elected Assembly in Jerusalem, 17 Adar II 5703, 24 March 1943. In: David Ben-Gurion, *Ba'ma'arkha [In battle]*, 2 (1950), pp. 212–229. Tel Aviv: Mapai (Workers' Party of Eretz Yisrael). More on the British context of the establishment of the Planning Committee see: Hacothen, *The Million Plan*, pp. 58–84, 85–116.

<sup>36</sup>The Central Zionist Archives, S53/1773.

<sup>37</sup>Ben-Gurion Archives, Special Committees Division, the Planning Committee, Planning Committee Protocol, 11 October 1943.

further settlement of an additional million Jews within several years during the second phase.<sup>38</sup> The immigration and settlement of a million Jews was designed to realize the target Ben-Gurion was striving for – crossing the demographic threshold and forming a Jewish majority in Palestine, which would create what he called a 'political fact' and lead to the establishment of a Jewish state.<sup>39</sup>

The Planning Committee formed subcommittees in the various fields, such as agriculture, land, water (irrigation plans), public works, settlement, industry, housing, funding, transportation, etc. These committees were staffed by teams of the leading experts in the Zionist establishment in economics, banking and finance, industry, agriculture, settlement and science. They also included hydrologists, geologists, planners, architects, engineers, sociologists, transportation experts and so on. The practical work began in October 1943 and continued unceasingly until the beginning of 1945 (March). During this period the steering committee headed by Ben-Gurion would meet weekly.<sup>40</sup>

Figure 1 provides a schematic description of the structure and composition of the Planning Committee.

Ben-Gurion showed an interest in, and control of, almost every single detail of the work of the various committees. He took an active role in the sessions and would invite the teams of experts who had formulated the plans to clarify specific questions or to direct the continuation of the work. Ben-Gurion would ask questions, comment, argue and correct during the committee's discussions, and demonstrated proficiency in the fine details of the reports which the experts had worked on.<sup>41</sup>

In accordance with Ben-Gurion's guidelines, the Planning Committee, along with its various subcommittees, addressed the preparation of an operational plan for the economic absorption of one million immigrants. The plan addressed three areas: transferring a million Jewish immigrants to Palestine and arranging their initial integration in transit camps; a plan for the comprehensive economic absorption of a million immigrants (housing, employment, services); preparation for transition from a war economy to a peacetime economy.<sup>42</sup>

In the first area, the Committee made plans for bringing in tens of thousands of new immigrants, and their initial housing in temporary camps. It examined the type of medical care, nutrition and clothing which would be given to the immigrants and the social welfare, education and professional training they would be provided with in these first stages. In the second area of the total absorption of a million immigrants and their economic integration, the committee set about preparing a plan for development of a large and varied economy with many industries in which the masses of new immigrants would later be absorbed.<sup>43</sup> The plans included national building projects, development

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 18 October 1943.

<sup>39</sup>In the words of Ben-Gurion: 'the meaning of a million is making the Jews the majority', Ben-Gurion Archives, Protocol Division, protocol of the Jewish Agency Executive Session, 20 June 1944.

<sup>40</sup>Ben-Gurion Archives, Inventory of Planning Committee Files.

<sup>41</sup>For example, during the series of meetings which took place in the summer of 1944 on the topic of irrigation plans and to which the various water experts were invited: (The Central Zionist Archives, S25/8023, Planning Committee Protocols, 12 June 1944; 18 June 1944) as well as the industry subcommittee session which was held in November 1944 (The Central Zionist Archives, S25/8024, Planning Committee Protocols, 6 November 1944). These are just a few examples of the extensive involvement by Ben-Gurion, obvious in many of the protocols and the correspondence in the Planning Committee files in the Ben-Gurion Archives and the Central Zionist Archives.

<sup>42</sup>This last task was extremely topical and therefore occupied the Jewish Agency economists in any case. In its time, many people saw it as the Planning Committee's only practical contribution. I will not expand on this topic in this article.

<sup>43</sup>Hacohen, *The Million Plan*, pp. 117–118.

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| <p><b>Higher Steering Committee</b></p> <p>David Ben-Gurion (chairman), Eliezer Kaplan, Siegfried Eliezer Hoofien, Dr. Emil Shmorak</p> <p><b>Secretariat</b></p> <p>David Horowitz, Haim Margolis, Dr. Alfred Bonne</p> <p><b>Public Council</b></p> <p><b>Professional bodies connected with the work of the committee</b></p> <p>The Economic Research Institute of the Jewish Agency</p> <p>The Palestine National Water Company</p> <p>Agricultural Research Station of the Jewish Agency</p> <p>The Jewish Agency Settlement Department</p> <p>The Jewish National Fund (JNF)</p> <p>The Association of Engineers and Architects in Palestine</p> <p>The Jewish Industrialists Association</p> <p><b>Professional committees</b></p> <p><b>Immigration</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Land</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Agriculture</b> subcommittee (agricultural planning and development)</p> <p><b>Water sources development</b></p> <p><b>Industry</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Urban planning</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Housing</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Financing</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Compensation</b> issues subcommittee</p> <p><b>Transportation</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Railways</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Maritime issues</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Craftsmanship issues</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Trade</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Tourism</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Professional training</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Transition period</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Jerusalem issues</b> subcommittee</p> <p><b>Haifa issues</b> subcommittee</p> |
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Notes: The information in the figure is based on various documents from the Planning Committee files in the Ben-Gurion Archives, Special Committees Division, Planning Committee.

Figure 1. Planning committee – schematic structure

Notes: The information in the figure is based on various documents from the Planning Committee files in the Ben-Gurion Archives, Special Committees Division, Planning Committee.



of industries, the creation of agricultural settlements throughout the country, the building of cities and the establishment of an infrastructure of roads, transportation and water supply. Several water diversion programs were examined, eventually forming the basis of the Israeli National Water Carrier. In addition, the committee examined the possibilities of financing such a plan and outlined general guidelines for a tax system for the future state, for the international loans that would be asked for, and even for the war compensation (reparations) that would later be demanded from Germany – all this even before the war was over.

As to the Palestinians, the desire to create a Jewish majority in Palestine was, as mentioned, one of the rationales of the Million Plan. The plan assumes, however, the continuation of Palestinian presence in Palestine, and tries to prove the case that it is possible to carry out mass Jewish immigration and large-scale settlement in Palestine – without harming the local Palestinian population. However, as mentioned earlier, one of the plan's working assumptions was that the Zionist movement will have the political authority to conduct its own affairs independently in regard to unrestricted immigration and land settlement. During the committee's discussions, Ben-Gurion stressed that there is no intention to deprive Palestinians of their land, 'The assumption is that the number of Arabs living now on the land will continue doing so in the future,<sup>44</sup> but made it clear that in his opinion in the lands under Zionist control it would be possible to introduce intensive farming instead of the Palestinian extensive farming (and thus he instructed the committee members, experts and planners to do so in their calculations)<sup>45</sup> and to carry out land reforms which would allow a redesign of the map of agricultural settlement, including Arab-owned lands.<sup>46</sup>

Analyzing Ben-Gurion's activities and statements during these years, especially with regard to the work of the Planning Committee, provides a glimpse into the formation of Ben-Gurion's idea of a Jewish state; into the development of his attitude to science and technology, the development of his political theology, and his role in the ever-increasing interrelationship between the political, the techno-scientific and the messianic spheres.

### **Mamlachtiyut, Statism and Revolutionism**

Already in the discussions at the Rehovot conference, Ben-Gurion had introduced a revolutionary and an etatist (statist) approach. The Million Plan, which dramatically exacerbated the problem of the absorption capacity of Palestine, marks the transition to revolutionary patterns of thinking and action. As noted, the plan's original premises included the assumption of a reduced territory (not all of Palestine would be in the hands of the Jews), the assumption of a very large Jewish immigration to Palestine (tripling the population), and the assumption that this immigration would take place rapidly. In other words, the plan attempted to promote a very swift Jewish mass immigration into a very small area, and tried to envisage and create the conditions for an almost unlimited absorption capacity in Palestine.

The political reality that would allow such a process was a Jewish state, or in other words, *mamlakhtiyut*. Despite the fact that autonomy did not yet exist, Ben-Gurion (and later, also the Planning Committee experts) assumed a state as a premise of the Million Plan. As mentioned, Ben-Gurion instructed the experts to assume that (1) The Zionist establishment had

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 141

<sup>45</sup>Extensive farming (in contrast to *intensive* farming) is the cultivation of large areas of land with minimum labor and capital.

<sup>46</sup>Hacohen, *The Million Plan*, pp. 139–148.

the authority to control Jewish immigration and Jewish settlement in Palestine ('rule'); (2) The Zionist establishment had the necessary financing to realize this plan ('money').<sup>47</sup> This was in fact a 'de facto sovereignty', a kind of a 'de facto state'. Ben-Gurion asked the experts to have a 'statist imagination', to think and plan in terms of a state—in which entire populations are managed according to the prior plan of a central authority.

I say: with the capacities of a state, not according to the wishes of each individual, but with a calculated plan for the needs of great masses, with the capabilities of a state, with the means of a state.<sup>48</sup>

In the discussions on the Million Plan, the state was essentially structured as a *revolutionary institution*. This is what Ben-Gurion said at the Rehovot conference:

Everything will change, because the reality is totally different; in other words, I say that we should look at these things as the products of the war. There is a war not just to kill people, but also to save people. We make great national efforts. [ . . . ] Individual wishes do not determine things during a war, nor do the usual economic laws determine things.<sup>49</sup>

The model Ben-Gurion had in mind was the model of the fighting nations during World War II. According to Ben-Gurion's analysis, the war period was characterized by a situation in which states concentrated in their hands great power and acted in a systematic way to plan and execute strategic moves. In this way, even the capitalistic Western countries harnessed their entire economies to the war effort to face the German threat, and thereby created a new economic model of a planned capitalist economy. In this model there was no place for private enterprise in shaping economic life. In the light of this economic reality of 'state plans' – which encompassed Nazi Germany as well as the West fighting it – Zionism needed to create a *Zionist state plan*. Just as the fighting nations harnessed all their resources to achieve the primary national task – contrary to all former economic conceptions – so could the Zionist movement concentrate all its resources to carry out the radical 'state plan' of a swift population transfer. Ben-Gurion therefore promoted a revolutionary outlook which made state power the central historical force.

### Techno-Scientific Utopianism

The political revolutionism which Ben-Gurion sought to promote relied on a utopian view of science and technology, and on viewing them as revolutionary instruments. This utopian outlook was inspired by Ben-Gurion's basic technological optimism and the scientific and technological developments of the 1930s and 1940s, especially those related to World War II. This period increased the Zionist leader's recognition of the importance of science and technology and their decisive role in modern society, and attracted his attention as to how countries could make far-reaching uses of these resources. In this period, we can find elements of scientific and technological utopianism in the views of the Zionist leader who believed that the scientific and technological innovations had created a revolution, and that, thanks to them, humanity stood on the threshold of a new era. Therefore, at

<sup>47</sup>David Ben-Gurion, Conference of the Economic Research Institute, 24 November 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives, Speeches and Articles Division, November–December 1942.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

the end of 1942, a short while after Ben-Gurion returned from an extended visit to the US and as part of his attempts to promote the Million Plan, he said in a speech at a Mapai Party meeting:

We are living in a generation of technical revolutions, and the best way to describe them is a miraculous leap in distance and time. [...] The postwar world will not revert to being the pre-war one. [...] The technical revolutions and great changes in the relationships between peoples [...] open up unimaginable channels for new [political] orders and produce undreamed-of powerful means of implementation.<sup>50</sup>

It is worth mentioning that Ben-Gurion uses the Jewish mystical term 'Kefitzat Haderech', which means a miraculous travel between two distant places in a short time and which involves the use of magic or divine intervention. This is another expression of the way in which politics, theology and science interact in Ben-Gurion's cosmos.

Just a few years later, a short while after the establishment of the State of Israel, and in the midst of the war, Ben-Gurion said:

[...] We are living in a generation of scientific revolution – in the generation of the discovery of the atom, its amazing composition, and the incredible abilities involved in its splitting and inspiration. Almost infinite stores of energy have been given to man. We are living in an age of a wondrous leap in time [...].<sup>51</sup>

Signs of these utopistic trends can be traced back at least a decade earlier. At the end of 1933 Ben-Gurion traveled to London. This was the first time he had flown to the British capital by air and he arrived in the record time of four days. During the journey he purchased and read the book *The Time Machine*, written by the British author H.G. Wells, one of the fathers of science fiction.<sup>52</sup> He wrote to his wife, Paula:

I am certain that the time will come when they will invent a connecting device like these, and there will be no need to travel at all. You will sit in your room and press a button and you will see who you want to see at the other end of the world, and speak to him as people speak in the same room. And maybe not only on earth, but also on Mars. It's very possible that this will happen long before we suppose.<sup>53</sup>

Technology (and science) was perceived by the Zionist leader as a revolutionary agent, as a mean of revolution which would facilitate the political revolutionism for which he strove. The choice of the option of immediate mass immigration therefore relied heavily on science and technology. The belief that an almost unlimited economic absorptive capacity was possible increased the importance of techno-scientific research and of experts and scientists as the people who could create the unlimited absorptive capacity and the breach of the geographical and economic limitations. In other words, the political revolutionism which Ben-

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<sup>50</sup>David Ben-Gurion, Lecture at the Fifth Mapai Conference at the Third Sitting in Kfar Vitkin, 25 October 1942, p. 28, Ben-Gurion Archives, Speeches and Articles Division.

<sup>51</sup>David Ben-Gurion, 'Be-mah nekabel pnei habaot' [With What Will We Face the Future?] [at the Conference of the Members of Kibbutz Hameuhad, Haifa, 11 September 1948] in *When Israel Fights* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1957), pp. 236–237 [in Hebrew].

<sup>52</sup>H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (New York, NY: Berkley Pub. Corp, 1963). This book was first published in 1895. *Kinat David [David's Zeal]*, Volume 3 (Tel Aviv: Shoken Publishing House, 1987), pp. 74–75 [in Hebrew].

<sup>53</sup>Ben-Gurion Archives, Correspondence, Letter to Paula, 27 November 1933.

Gurion strove for was linked to an increasing reliance on science and technology as force multipliers, as elements that could facilitate the revolutionary process and create a historic breakthrough. The techno-scientific optimism, which characterized him from the beginning of his political activity was transformed in these years into a techno-scientific utopianism.

Ben-Gurion expressed his outlook on the increasing importance of science and technology to the Zionist project in a number of public statements during this period. For example, in October 1943, on the eve of the establishment of the Planning Committee – with implied reference to its research efforts – Ben-Gurion claimed that science was one of the three important means which the Jewish community in Palestine possessed in its struggle against the severe restrictions placed on it by the British Mandatory government (the other two were ‘work’ (settlement activities) and ‘courage’ (security activities)). Ben-Gurion said:

How will we stand? With these three things: science, work, and courage! [ . . . ] We need a new ‘wisdom of Israel’ now. Not rummaging through books but rummaging through the earth of the homeland, its rocks, its mountains, its springs, its streams and its rivers. We need physical and chemical, geological and meteorological studies which will reveal the secrets of the homeland, the inner riches hidden in its depths, which will examine the air of its land and its rains of blessing, the flow of its waters and the productivity of its earth. Which will expose its qualities and its deficiencies, its capabilities and its defects, and note how to make it bloom and rehabilitate it. We need engineers and nature researchers who will plan on the basis of our experience in Palestine and the experience of other lands, restoring the ruins and making the desert bloom, on the scale of a national state, so that we can do to all the available and infertile land what we have done with the six percent we have conquered so far. [ . . . ] Let the sages of Israel – the sages of earth and rain and plants – reveal to the sages of the nations the new truth from Eretz-Israel: the truth of a desolate land waiting for redemption.<sup>54</sup>

In many respects, the Million Plan and the key role devoted to science and technology during the stage of its planning and execution greatly recall the use made of science and technology by a different Zionist leader, Theodor Herzl, in his utopian book *Altneuland*. For Herzl too, science and technology were supposed to facilitate a revolutionary process and generate a historic breakthrough in the form of the establishment of the Jewish state. The political revolutionary spirit based on technological utopianism which prevails in Herzl’s *Altneuland* was translated into an almost-real state plan for David Ben-Gurion, a plan combining statism, revolutionism, messianism and techno-scientific utopianism.

### State, Political Theology and Scientific Utopianism

The Million Plan was not an intellectual project or an abstract utopia with merely propagandist goals. It was a strategic move with extremely ambitious national, political and techno-scientific goals, while being specific and concrete at the same time. This project, which impressively expresses the utopian-messianic vision of David Ben-Gurion, was

<sup>54</sup>David Ben-Gurion, ‘The Burden of the Wilderness’, at the JNF Conference, 11 October 1943. During *The voice of the land* days [11–12 Tishrei 5704 – 10–11 September 1943], the Jewish National Fund, Jerusalem.

integrally linked to the national vision he developed and the political moves he envisaged. It was simultaneously a techno-scientific and a political undertaking and an important milestone in the construction of the Israeli state ideology (*mamlakhtiyut*) and the State of Israel.

Despite the fact that the Planning Committee’s recommendations were not implemented in the years following World War II due to the British refusal to accept the Zionist program for mass immigration,<sup>55</sup> there were several ways in which the techno-scientific and utopian project envisaged by the Planning Committee participated in the construction of Israeli statism. Firstly, as part of the discussions leading to the establishment of the Planning Committee, and as part of the actual research project, the concept of a Jewish state was formulated and imagined. This was expressed in Ben-Gurion’s demand that the experts should think and plan on a state-like scale, that they should ‘see like a state’.<sup>56</sup> Later on, this embryonic concept of a Jewish state emerged and stabilized in the process of gathering the information needed for compiling the studies, in the formation of networks between experts in various fields, in the creation of a common language through these networks, in the committee’s material output (experts’ reports) and in the fostering of ties between politicians and experts. All these simultaneous factors contributed to the emergence of a new ‘thought collective’ – the thought collective of a state.<sup>57</sup>

Secondly, the research carried out by the Planning Committee’s various teams created the know-how that was used after the state’s establishment. An important part of the Planning Committee’s plans and recommendations were implemented after the establishment of the State of Israel. The committee’s first working premise – a rapid Jewish mass immigration – was indeed implemented immediately after the establishment of Israel, as well as its recommendations concerning the setting up of immigrant camps, and the request for compensation (reparations) from Germany. The Planning Committee’s work also served as a basis for some of the State of Israel’s initial plans and development projects such as the National Water Carrier and the first National Outline Plan.<sup>58</sup> Many of the experts that worked on the Million Plan played central roles in the planning and administrative bodies of the young state.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Despite Ben-Gurion’s wishes, the work of the Planning Committee was not implemented in the postwar years. The British, guided by strategic considerations, saw the preservation of good relations with the Arab world as a matter of political value of the first order, and therefore, had no desire to accept a Zionist plan for mass immigration. The main use of the Planning Committee’s findings made by the Zionist establishment in the postwar years (1945–1947) was political-propagandist, when appearing before various international conventions (Hacohen, *The Million Plan*, pp. 219–233).

<sup>56</sup>Scott, *Seeing Like a State*. A remarkable example for this can be found in the words of David Ben-Gurion at the meeting of the Economic Research Institute of the Jewish Agency when he urges the economic experts to think and plan in terms of a sovereign state (David Ben-Gurion, Protocol of the Meeting of the Economic Research Institute, 24 November 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives, Speeches and Articles Division (November–December 1942)).

<sup>57</sup>This is evident throughout the material the Planning Committee had produced. See Ben-Gurion Archives, Special Committees Division, the Planning Committee. We have chosen to specifically use the earliest terminology already created by Ludwik Fleck in the mid-1930s, in his book *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*. One could also use Kuhn’s concept of ‘paradigm’ (Kuhn was inspired by Fleck’s terminology) or Foucault’s concept of ‘episteme’.

<sup>58</sup>Troen, ‘Establishing the Social Sciences of Zionism’; Hacohen, *The Million Plan*, esp. pp. 234–242.

<sup>59</sup>For instance: David Horowitz who was a very dominant actor in the Planning Committee and served in its secretariat later became the first general manager of the Ministry of Finance and later the first governor of the Bank of Israel; Simcha Blass, an engineer and a water expert who advised the committee on water issues after the establishment of Israel became a leading figure in Israel’s governmental water institutions; Roberto Bachi who advised the Planning Committee on demographic issues became after the establishment of Israel the head of the Central Bureau of Statistics; Leo Picard who advised the committee on water issues became the head of Israel Geological Survey; Ludwig Grienboug (Ga’aton) an economist that was involved in the work of the Planning Committee after the establishment of Israel held various positions in the prime minister’s office and in the Bank of Israel.

Thirdly, the Million Plan aided in creating a revolutionary and a rational-bureaucratic-scientific political ethos at one and the same time. This ethos, as noted above, saw the state as the central driving force in history, and laid the foundations for changing the Zionist movement from an elitist, avant-garde project into a national grass-roots popular revolution of the entire Jewish nation, while using techno-scientific terminology, theories and practices. In other words, the new order the Million Plan aimed at, focusing on Jewish mass immigration, transformed Zionism into a *state project*. The Planning Committee translated the revolutionary messianic vision into a rational, instrumental, scientific and bureaucratic project. It transformed the ideological formula ‘from class to nation’, which Ben-Gurion and Berl Katznelson had already coined in the late 1920s, into a practical, realistic endeavor.<sup>60</sup>

The transformation of the state into the central driving-force of history (as manifested in the techno-political conception of the Million Plan) was not just a political move, but, in the Jewish context and especially in the apocalyptic-catastrophic era of World War II and the Holocaust, was seen as a theological move. It replaced divine theological power with human political power; the modern state equipped with scientific knowledge and technological innovations replaced the ancient God as a transformative historical force. Unlike the Jewish scholar Gershom Scholem, who sought to separate the theological dimension (the a-historic sphere) from the political Zionist dimension (the historic sphere), Ben-Gurion strove to combine the two. For the political leader, the Zionist ‘return to history’ was not followed by a separation of the theological from daily life, from politics. For him, re-entering history meant connecting the theological to the political while changing each of them: politics was to become sovereign and independent while theology was to be secularized. In so doing, Ben-Gurion secularized the messianic concept, replacing God with the modern state and religious salvation with political redemption: utopia portrayed in realistic colors, with the help of science and technology.

Thus, in one of the speeches around the time of the launch of the idea of the Million Plan (October 1942) Ben-Gurion, in the same speech, referred to the twentieth century as ‘an age of technical revolutions’ and ‘miraculous leap in distance and time’; called for a rapid transfer of a million Jews to Palestine after the end of the world war and tried to excite his listener’s imagination by portraying fantastic technological projects, including a Mediterranean–Dead Sea canal that would enable, he said, the settlement of an additional five million Jews(!) in Palestine. Referring to the role of the Zionist movement in the postwar era in light of the tragedy of European Jewry, Ben-Gurion slipped naturally into using theological language:

In the world that will rise on the ruins of Hitler, the Jewish community in Palestine – if it so desires – will be a moral, political and colonizing power that equals or even exceeds any other power in Palestine. And the terrible disaster of our people in the Diaspora – can be turned into a tremendous lever of redemption. A disaster of millions is also a redeeming power of millions. And the mission of Zionism – if it doesn’t intend to suffice only with words – is to cast the great Jewish tragedy in the mold of huge schemes of redemption.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>See for instance one of the final reports of the Planning Committee: David Horowitz, “Absorption of One Million of Jewish Immigrants in Palestine”, 12 October 1945, The Central Zionist Archives, S90/662; or a list of more than 80 reports and studies on various aspects of postwar planning: ‘List of Publications and Studies in Connection with Post War Planning’, The Central Zionist Archives, S90/847.

<sup>61</sup>David Ben-Gurion, Lecture at the Fifth Mapai Conference at the Third Sitting in Kfar Vitkin, 25 October 1942, p. 30, Ben-Gurion Archives, Speeches and Articles Division.

The new order which the Million Plan promoted challenged some of the long-time Zionist premises. It assumed the existence of rapid mass immigration rather than the gradual and selective immigration of chosen groups; it had an American, rather than British or Soviet, orientation; it envisaged an economic order that placed the city and industry at the center of economic life rather than a socialist-agrarian one. It challenged the main ideological direction and power-centers in the Zionist workers' camp, and eventually caused a split in this camp.

The work of the experts and the techno-scientific apparatus created by the Million Plan were crucial resources in the politicians' (Ben-Gurion's) struggle to establish the new order for the Jewish state. The experts provided 'objective' reports loaded with facts, numbers and graphs substantiating the Zionist national claim, as well as the status of the political Jewish leadership in Palestine, in the face of various opponents: In the face of *the nations of the world* (particularly the US), these reports strengthened the Zionist demand for free immigration, for (at least partial) autonomy and for funding this ambitious immigration project; in the face of *the British and Arabs*, these reports strengthened the Zionist assertion that the Palestinian population would not be harmed by the Jewish immigration by presenting an alternative to the British argument concerning Palestine's limited absorptive capacity and the agricultural model proposed for its development; in the face of *world Jewry*, these reports strengthened the Zionist movement's demand for hegemony in solving the 'Jewish problem', aiding its efforts to change the balance of power in the Jewish world. It helped the Zionist movement to create a 'Copernican Revolution' in which Eretz-Israel (Palestine) would become the center of gravity of world Jewry (as Palestine is the solution to the Jewish problem, we need to take the Jews there and not to the US or back to Europe); in the face of *those opposing the process in the labor party (Mapai) and on the Zionist left*, these reports provided ammunition in the ideological dispute about the political logic of mass immigration, and about the adoption of the idea of the partition of Palestine (proving that immediate mass immigration, planned capitalism and settlement on a reduced territory, was possible).

The experts played a critical role in this process by showing it to be possible and feasible, but to no less an extent they intrinsically influenced the character of the planned state. Through their involvement in the Million Plan, the planners, engineers, experts and scientists therefore played a major role in shaping the face of the State of Israel. The Planning Committee constitutes an important phase in the convergence of the experts and the politicians. The emergence of this collaboration, in connection with the state project, can be described as a process of mutual co-production<sup>62</sup> in which the experts translated the national goals into techno-scientific language, thereby contributing to creating the conditions for augmenting the powers of persuasion and control of the political center and reinforcing the hegemony of the national institutions. At the same time it strengthened their own status in the governmental system and built up their own autonomy.

Not only was the status of the politicians and the experts constructed as part of the work on the Million Plan, but also the character of Palestine-Eretz-Israel. Palestine was 'reinvented' by the Planning Committee as a territorial space with a dynamic and almost unlimited absorptive capacity. This flexible absorptive capacity allowed Palestine to dramatically increase the size of its population, almost independently of its (small) physical boundaries and (limited) natural resources, depending mainly on the quality of the 'human factor'. Israel was constructed as a modern, industrialized, urban state. In such a country, it

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<sup>62</sup>Sheila Jasanoff (ed.), *States of Knowledge: The Co-Production of Science and Social Order* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).



should be noted, experts and scientists play a central role, and the leader, relying on techno-science, has a powerful status.

The Million Plan was therefore what Andrew Pickering called a 'site of fusion',<sup>63</sup> in which the political, the scientific and the theological were fused to create the Israeli state ideology of *mamlachtiut*. Does the assumption of historian Mark Lila that 'we find it incomprehensible that theological ideas still stir up messianic passions, leaving societies in ruins,'<sup>64</sup> stand on solid ground? The combination between redemption and technology, catastrophe and messianism, utopia and state, theology and politics are set side by side in the Million Plan in an effort to imagine a future for Jews after World War II. It seems that the Zionist example is a fascinating case study to examine political theology in the twentieth century.

### Notes on Contributors

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<sup>63</sup> Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice : Time, Agency, and Science* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>64</sup> Mark Lila, 'The Politics of God', *New-York Times*, 19 August 2007.