



**The Life, Times
and Work of**



**Jokūbas Robinzonas –
Jacob Robinson**

**Eglė Bendikaitė • Dirk Roland Haupt
(Editors)**

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**POLITICIAN WITHOUT POLITICAL PARTY:
A ZIONIST APPRAISAL OF JACOB ROBINSON'S
ACTIVITIES IN THE PUBLIC LIFE OF LITHUANIA**

DR. EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ

The aim of this article is to study in detail, and to unearth new insights on, JACOB ROBINSON'S ties with political movements in interwar Lithuania in general and with the political Zionism of this time in particular.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In the political climate of interwar Lithuania, JACOB ROBINSON was perceived as an emerging leader for the cause of Zionism, remote from the quagmire of political deal-making, but expressing support for balanced—at times moderately Socialist—ideas, where required by the factual and parliamentary circumstances.⁶¹ This is how his closest colleagues, collaborators and friends understood his message in the discourse of his political orientation. ROBINSON'S engagement for selected causes of the Jewish National Council and his reputation as member of the Second and Third Seimases, as well as positions taken or defended by him in

⁶¹ Cf. EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ: *ROBINZONAS JAKOBAS*; in: *Lietuvos Respublikos Seimų I (1922–1923), II (1923–1926), III (1926–1927), IV (1936–1940) narių biografinis žodynas* [Biographical Encyclopedia of the Members of the First (1922–1923), Second (1923–1926), Third (1926–1927) and Fourth (1936–1940) Seimases of the Republic of Lithuania]. Vilnius: Vilniaus pedagoginio universiteto leidykla, 2007; at p. 443.

support of the foreign policy of Lithuania (and the manner, in which he did it), earned him a public standing which entailed that he became a sought-after interlocutor for certain parts of the Lithuanian political class. Over time, his achievements in legal, political and educational areas would generate an informal status conferring on him a specific form of authority recognized—for different reasons—in the Lithuanian society on the one hand and in the Jewish community on the other.

It is a particular feature of the Zionist movement in Lithuania that it did not bring forth undisputed leaders throughout the entire interwar period in the same way and strength as this was the case in other countries—only to mention ITZHAK GRÜNBAUM (1879–1970)⁶² in Poland. For the researcher of today, but already for the interested observer of the time, some efforts need to be undertaken to distinguish the names of those personalities who really exercised leadership, and had real influence on the development, of the Zionist Organization in the different periods in interwar Lithuania.⁶³

Already the basic question of somebody's membership in the Zionist Organization of that time proves to be intricate, and no easy answer seems at hand. In the first instance, the fact that the authorities in interwar Lithuania indeed registered a variety of Jewish organizations, unions, and associations, but no political

⁶² Polish Jewish political leader, journalist. For further details see SHLOMO NETZER: *GRÜNBAUM, YITSHAK*; in: GERSHON DAVID HUNDERT (chief ed.): *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. Volume 1*. New Haven CT/London: Yale University Press, 2008; at pp. 636–637.

⁶³ Cf. EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ: *ROBINZONAS JAKOBAS*; in: *Lietuvos Respublikos Seimų I (1922–1923), II (1923–1926), III (1926–1927), IV (1936–1940) narių biografinis žodynas* [Biographical Encyclopedia of the Members of the First (1922–1923), Second (1923–1926), Third (1926–1927) and Fourth (1936–1940) Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania]. Vilnius: Vilniaus pedagoginio universiteto leidykla, 2007; at p. 443.

Jewish parties, might give rise to confusion and ambiguity.⁶⁴ This is particularly true as the Zionist Organization in Lithuania clearly was a political organization as a result of its structure, statutes and aims—and for this reason, the term “Zionist Organization” will henceforth be used in order to denominate the equivalent of a political party. In the second instance, however, also an external factor emanating from the Basle program—duly noticed and observed in Lithuania—contributed to this situation: In order to become a member of the Zionist Organization, it was sufficient to acknowledge the resolutions of the World Zionist Congresses and to buy one shekel per year as a token of membership fee.⁶⁵ Thus, there were people who bought shekels, supported the National Funds, considered themselves as supporters of the ideas of Zionism, but would not have consented to be regarded as—and, in fact, never were—official members of some particular branch of the Zionist Organization.⁶⁶

The presentation of ROBINSON'S activities in public life and their evaluation in the context of the most important ideological and political aspects of the Zionist movement in interwar Lithuania rely mainly on archival materials. In addition, the correspondence and press of the Zionist Organization were the major sources in attempting to find answers to the underlying question of ROBINSON'S connections with the Zionist Organization.

⁶⁴ For a detailed analysis of the Zionist Organization in Lithuania see EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ: *Sionistinis sąjūdis Lietuvoje* [The Zionist Movement in Lithuania]. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2006; at pp. 71–118.

⁶⁵ JAKOV ZINEMAN: *Di geshikhte fun tsonizm. Ershter band* [The History of Zionism. Volume 1]. Paris [s.n.], 1947; at pp. 278–299, and WALTER LAQUEUR: *A History of Zionism*. New York NY/Chicago IL/San Francisco CA: HOLT, RINEHART and WINSTON, 1972; at p. 106.

⁶⁶ EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ: *Sionistinis sąjūdis Lietuvoje* [The Zionist Movement in Lithuania]. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2006; at p. 73.

ENDEAVORING THE ZIONIST SYMBIOSIS

The appearance of an independent Lithuanian state on the political map after World War I launched a new period in the history of the Jewish community in this region. The revival of Jewish politics triggered a struggle for influence “oyf der yidisher gas” (“in the Jewish street”). The Zionist Organization saw a real chance to “regain” the Jewish community, *i.e.*, to replace the traditional influence of the Orthodoxy, represented by the “Agudath Israel” [Union of Israel] movement, and the reinforcing socially evolutionary ideas of the Bundists–Folkists.⁶⁷ On October 14, 1917, a Zionist meeting was held in Wilna, the main resolutions of which were—

- (i) to confirm that that Zionists did not suspend their vision of, and work towards, the establishment of a Jewish National Home even in war times, and

⁶⁷ The term “Bund” refers to the General Jewish Labor Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia, in Yiddish called “Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poyln un Rusland,” a non-Zionist Yiddishist Jewish party. A member of “Bund” is called “Bundist.” Despite the name of the party, interwar Lithuania was never a prominent locus of the Bund’s activities. For further details on Bund see DANIEL BLATMAN: *Bund*; in: GERSHON DAVID HUNDERT (chief ed.): *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. Volume 1*. New Haven CT/London: Yale University Press, 2008; at pp. 274–280.

“Folkists” refers to the members of “Folkspartay,” the Jewish People’s Party, a non-Zionist, mostly middle-class based liberal party in economic matters, committed to political democracy and secularism, underlining—as the “Bund”—the importance of Yiddish and its culture, Jewish autonomy based upon community, language and education; cf. EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ: *Sionistinis sąjūdis Lietuvoje* [The Zionist Movement in Lithuania]. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2006; at pp. 205–210.

- (ii) to claim that the Zionist movement, concerned about the entire Jewish nation, should win the moral right to act on the latter’s behalf.⁶⁸

The General Zionist Organization, which later was called “Zionist Organization of Lithuania,” became influential in the 1920s owing to its respectable members, intellectuals and well-known personalities, who held sway over the Jewish community and whose commitment to, and often quite advanced involvement in, the political processes of the State of Lithuania was instrumental for a programmatically moderate orientation of the policy pursued by the organization.⁶⁹ The General Zionists associated themselves with the liberal political wing rather more orientated to the right, attempting to follow a political line of compromise on the key issues of the Diaspora and of Palestine. They were particularly preoccupied with the improvement of the social and economic situation of the Lithuanian Jews. The working principle of “Gegenwarts arbeit” (“Work in the Present”) or “Here and Now,” as approved at the Helsinki Conference already in 1906, was clearly reflected in the agenda of the Lithuanian Zionists.⁷⁰

We have reasons to believe that JACOB ROBINSON was aware of the ideas of the Jewish national movement and of the Hebrew language revival movement from his early days, not least thanks

⁶⁸ *Tsyonistishe miting in Vilne* [The Zionist meeting in Wilna]; in: *Letste Nayes* [Latest News], October 16, 1917.

⁶⁹ MOSES KAHAN: *Der algemayner tsyonizm in der zelshtendiker Lite* [The General Zionism in Independent Lithuania]; in: CH. LEIKOWICZ (ed.): *Lite. Band 2* [Lithuania. Volume 2]. Tel Aviv: Y.L. PERETS, 1965 (hereinafter referred to as “2 Lite”); at cols. 76–77.

⁷⁰ MOSES KAHAN: *Der algemayner tsyonizm in der zelshtendiker Lite* [The General Zionism in Independent Lithuania]; in: *2 Lite*, at cols. 77 and 79.

to his father.⁷¹ However, he became acquainted to the preconditions and prerequisites for these movements in Lithuania first after World War I, when he gradually approached the Zionist Organization of Lithuania *via* organizations affiliated to the Zionist movement.

In 1919, after having returned from German prisoners-of-war camps and upon settling in Virbalis, a Lithuanian border town close to Germany, ROBINSON established a Jewish Hebrew secondary school (“di hebreishe gimnazie”) there; he was its principal from May 1919 to August 1922.⁷² The new school belonged to the “Tarbut” educational institutions’ network.⁷³ “Tarbut”—“culture” in Hebrew—was the Educational Department of the Zionist Organization; its goal was to give pupils a general education

⁷¹ See OMRY KAPLAN-FEUEREISEN: *At the Service of the Jewish Nation. JACOB ROBINSON and International law*; in: RAY BRANDON, MANFRED SAPPER, VOLKER WEICHEL, ANNA LIPPHARDT (eds.): *Impulses for Europe. Tradition and Modernity in East European Jewry*. Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008; at pp. 158–159.

⁷² MAURICE L. PERLZWEIG: ROBINSON, JACOB; in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica. Volume 17*. Detroit/New York et al.: MACMILLAN Reference USA, 2007 (2nd edition); at pp. 355–356, and OMRY KAPLAN-FEUEREISEN: ROBINSON, JACOB; in: GERSHON DAVID HUNDERT (chief ed.): GERSHON DAVID HUNDERT (chief ed.): *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. Volume 2*. New Haven CT/London: Yale University Press, 2008; at pp. 1567–1568.

⁷³ On the *Tarbut* (“Culture”) schools in Lithuania as integral part of the Zionist movement’s educational policy and practice see EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ: *Jüdisches Erziehungswesen in Litauen und zionistische Bewegung. Der steinige Weg zur nationalen Schule*; in: ANJA WILHELMI (ed.): *Bildungskonzepte und Bildungsinitiativen in Nordosteuropa (19. Jahrhundert)*. Wiesbaden: HARRAS-SOWITZ, 2011, at pp. 236–256, and EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ: *Žydai: Švietimo sistema ir spauda*; in: EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ/ALGIMANTAS KASPARAVIČIUS/SAULIUS KAUBRYŠ/REGINA LAUKAITYTĖ/ČESLOVAS LAURINAVIČIUS/DANGIRAS MAČIULIS/VLADAS SIRUTAVIČIUS/VITALIJA STRAVINSKIENĖ/JOACHIM TAUBER/GEDIMINAS VASKELA: *Lietuvos istorija. X tomo II dalis: Nepriklausomybė (1918–1940 m.)*. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2015; at pp. 132–137.

with emphasis on Hebrew culture and Zionist thought.⁷⁴ It expanded rapidly, and in the middle of 1920s “Tarbut” became an independent association within a separate network of Jewish schools. Under any circumstances, it remained closely connected to the Zionist Organization; its leadership was by and large identical with elected members of the central board of the Zionist Organization.⁷⁵ Since the school year 1925/1926, JACOB ROBINSON, in conjunction with RAFAEL RABINOWITZ,⁷⁶ took over the leadership for the “Tarbut” teachers’ seminary in Kaunas. In 1929, he became the chairman of the national “Tarbut” association for a number of years.⁷⁷

Being actively involved in the Hebrew cultural movement and contributing to the process of hebraization in the country

⁷⁴ *Lietuvos sionistų draugijos įstatai* [Statutes of the Lithuanian Zionist Association] 1920; in: YIVO, RG. 2, File 1098.

⁷⁵ *Lietuvos „Tarbut“ draugijos įstatų įregistravimas, 1926 m. liepos 3 d.* [Registration of the statutes of “Tarbut” Association of Lithuania, July 3, 1926]; in: LCSA, Fund 378, Inventory 10, File 886, at p. 9.

⁷⁶ The *curriculum vitae* of Dr. RAFAEL RABINOWITZ (in Lithuanian: Dr. RAFAELIS RABINAVIČIUS) is rather fragmentary. At present, it is not possible to ascertain his academic background beyond reasonable doubt. In independent Lithuania, he held leading positions in the Jewish school system as well as in training and skill enhancement of Jewish teachers. Upon his *aliyah* to Palestine in 1932, however, he practiced law in Tel Aviv. See EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ: *Sionistinis sąjūdis Lietuvoje* [The Zionist Movement in Lithuania]. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2006; at p. 121.

⁷⁷ DOV LIPETZ: *Hebreish shul vezn un kultur bavegung in Lite 1919–1939* [Hebrew school system and cultural movement in Lithuania 1919–1939]; in: 2 *Lite*, at col. 299; *„Tarbut“ draugijos raštai Lietuvos Respublikos Švietimo ministerijai, 1929 m. gruodžio 30 d., 1931 m. lapkričio 11 d.* [Letters of the association “Tarbut” to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Lithuania, dated December 30, 1929, and November 11, 1930]; in: LCSA, Fund 552, Inventory 1, File 3, at pp. 6–7 and 14.

himself, ROBINSON pointed out three factors that contributed to the advancing of Hebrew in Lithuania:

- (i) The "Zeitgeist." The triumph of the national idea worldwide as well as on the Jewish street strongly influenced the sphere of education, while the ongoing work and the accomplished results in Eretz Israel—in the way they were presented in Lithuania—incited the Zionists to attempt exerting a direct and sustainable influence on the Jewish school system in the Diaspora.
- (ii) The host nation. The general impact of the policy of Russification on every national minority in the Tsar Empire had made that Lithuanian rulers after gaining independence were more favorable to education of national minorities in their native languages.
- (iii) The deficit in books. The lack of proper textbooks for the newly established schools forced public and private school boards to seek for possibilities to cope with this situation which led to a considerable influx of teaching materials in the Hebrew language produced in or emanating from Eretz Israel.⁷⁸

In 1926, the first congress assembling representatives of Hebrew culture from all around Lithuania took place in the town hall of Kaunas. According to the main Jewish daily newspaper *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], it attracted the attention of numerous Jewish institutions, offering them a broad forum and an unequalled opportunity for the expression of Jewish culture in great variety. The importance and the sustainable impact of this event for the future national cultural life of the Jewish community in

⁷⁸ DR. Y. ROBINSON: *Fir jor hebreyische gimnazie in Lite* [Hebrew secondary school in Lithuania for four years]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], January 5, 1923.

interwar Lithuania cannot be overestimated.⁷⁹ JACOB ROBINSON, in his capacity as one of the leading figures of the "Tarbut" movement, stressed in his short speech at the opening ceremony of congress that—

"[w]e do not need to be afraid of critics and moral attacks: We recognize that in the short period of time we had at our disposal it was impossible always to find the right ways for the education of our children that would be satisfactory to a hundred per cent. * * * In the face of the Jewish community, we are assuming the responsibility, and every day that passed entails for us a Jewish plebiscite: Day after day, thousands of parents are sending their children to our schools, and this just confirms our feeling that the nation is with us. * * * There is one matter, which is raised over any political system or economic conditions—and that is the national-moral education. We want to bring up a generation, which shall be strong physically and spiritually. We are on the eve of major changes, and we are entering the period of 'building our house.' * * * The entire Jewish nation has to participate in this construction process and to inject into future generations that they will assume responsibility for the fate of the Nation."⁸⁰

In the best meaning of the word, this is a showcase speech of that specific period of time, clearly and graphically reflecting the pattern of the political rhetoric of the Zionists, the hallmark of which was the constant focus on (i) the role of the individual in history and on (ii) the importance of the young generations,

⁷⁹ *Der hebreyisher kultur kongres in Lite* [The Congress of Hebrew Culture in Lithuania]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 28, 1926, September 29, 1926, and September 29, 1926 (Saturday edition).

⁸⁰ *Der hebreyisher kultur kongres in Lite* [The Congress of Hebrew Culture in Lithuania]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 28, 1926.

who, educated in a national spirit, will fulfill the vision of the future—for which their parents (more or less unsaid) lacked sufficient resolution.

In a paper on autonomy and Jewish schools presented later at the congress, ROBINSON, who, as only few, was well familiar with the problems and the peculiarities of the situation, articulated his concerns. In this document, he not only underlined the necessity to establish new Jewish schools, but also emphasized in particular that the enhancement of the teachers' skills deserve intensified attention in order to warrant the fulfillment of the curriculum of the Jewish subjects. The experienced policy-maker in the field of education he had succeeded to become, he also advocated a constructive and pragmatic cooperation of the Jewish National Council with the Ministry of Education for the monitoring of Jewish schools.⁸¹

ROBINSON's devoted participation in the public activities of the Jewish community in the middle of 1920s seems to have facilitated, directly and indirectly, the formation of Jewish politics in Lithuania. His name could be found among the establishers and executive board members in a number of Jewish organizations, as, for instance, in the Zionist youth movements "HaShomer HaTzair" ("The Young Guard")⁸² and "HeHalutz" ("The

⁸¹ *Der hebreyisher kultur kongres in Lite* [The Congress of Hebrew Culture in Lithuania]; in: *Idische shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 29, 1926 (Saturday edition).

⁸² *Jewish Scouting Movement HaShomer HaTzair*; in: J. ALPERT (ed.): *The Memorial Book for the Jewish Community of Yurburg, Lithuania*. New York NY: Assistance to Lithuanian Jews, 2003; at p. 391, according to which the first "HaShomer HaTzair" group in Lithuania had been established at the Hebrew Gymnasium in Virbalis on JACOB ROBINSON's initiative. Based upon his own article *Fir jor hebreyische gimnazie in Lite* (in: *Idische shtime*, January 5, 1923), a slight doubt remains whether his engagement for the benefit of "HaShomer HaTzair" really was of the scope described in the Yurburg Memorial Book.—

Pioneer")⁸³, but also in contexts considered "neutral" as they served the common interests of the Jewish community, for which the Jewish migration association "HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society]—Emigdirect" is an example.⁸⁴ Notwithstanding his committed involvement in these activities, it has also to be taken into account that ROBINSON, being a profiled and well-known member of parliament, was entered into the lists of establishers of various organizations for the sole purpose of enhancing a perception, on the part of Lithuanian authorities, of solidity of the applicants, while the registration formalities were pending.

The dominating political force in Lithuania of that time—the Christian Democrats—kept close track on ROBINSON and his activities. While there was no room for the slightest doubt in

On the Socialist-Zionist youth movement "HaShomer HaTzair" in Lithuania see EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ: *Sionistinis sąjūdis Lietuvoje* [The Zionist Movement in Lithuania]. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2006; at p. 176.

⁸³ Originally an association of Jewish youth whose aim was to train its members to settle in Eretz Israel, it eventually developed into an umbrella organization of the pioneering Zionist youth movement. On the "HeHalutz" organization in Lithuania see EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ: *Sionistinis sąjūdis Lietuvoje* [The Zionist Movement in Lithuania]. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2006; at p. 179–183.

⁸⁴ *Prašymas įregistruoti „Hechaluc“ organizacijos įstatus, 1926 m. rugsėjo 10 d.* [The application to register the statute of the organization "HeHalutz," September 10, 1926]; in: LCSA, Fund 402, Inventory 4, File 425, at p. 1. (In 1932, JACOB ROBINSON was also among the establishers of "HeHalutz HaTzair", a branch of the organization "HeHalutz," see: LCSA, Fund 378, Inventory 10, File 886, at p. 23).—*Žydu emigracijai Lietuvoje tvarkyti draugijos įstatai, 1925 m. kovo 31 d.* [The statute of the Association for Jewish Emigration Matters in Lithuania, March 31, 1925]; in: LCSA, Fund 402, Inventory 4, File 393, at pp. 1 and 4; *Jewish Scouting Movement HaShomer HaTzair*; in: J. ALPERT (ed.): *The Memorial Book for the Jewish Community of Yurburg, Lithuania*. New York NY: Assistance to Lithuanian Jews, 2003; at p. 391.

ROBINSON'S loyalty to, and advocacy of, the independent Lithuanian State, certain circles within, or close to, the Christian Democrats considered it useful for their political agitation targeting ROBINSON to insinuate that there was a vicinity of JACOB ROBINSON'S political thoughts to Socialist or Social Democratic concepts. The clerical press organ *Rytas* [The Morning]⁸⁵ went so far as to enlist him into the ranks of loyal supporters of Socialism-Bolshevism in Lithuania, singularizing him as an example to demonstrate in whose hands the reins of the political orientation and sympathies of the entire Jewish community of Lithuania really were held together.

The Zionist Organization in Lithuania, trying to mirror all the Zionist fractions and pretending to the majority of votes of the Jewish community, looked for new forces which would want to be engaged in forwarding the Zionist ideas, thus working for the general political line of the Zionists in Lithuania, which encompassed: establishing and defending the Jewish autonomous institutions, protecting the rights of the Jewish national minority as well as the independent Hebrew educational system, and acting as trustee of the other Jewish political and nonpolitical groups.

The first time JACOB ROBINSON seriously approached the Zionist Organization in Lithuania was in the context of the elections to the Jewish National Council and to the Jewish National Convention in 1922 and 1923, respectively. We do not know for sure whether ROBINSON intended it to be so or not—but the fact remains that these political processes of paramount importance

⁸⁵ [s.n.]: *Žydų bendruomenių mokesniai ir jų darbuotė*; in: *Rytas*, July 12, 1924 (No. 155), at pp. 1–2, in particular at p. 2. See also, as critical reaction to this article, M. [author's note: the journalist's identity appears only in initialed form]: *Žydų gynėjai arba krikščioniškas krokodilas*; in: *Socialdemokratas*, July 24, 1924, at p. 2.

for Jewish political representation in the young Lithuanian democracy also triggered his political career, which was boosted by the elections to the Second and the Third *Seimas* in 1923 and in 1926 with his name appearing on the ticket of the Zionist Organization in both elections.⁸⁶

Lithuanian election legislation in force and the experience of its application to the detriment not least of the lists of the ethnic minorities should prove to be a root cause for advanced tactics for counterbalancing these effects.⁸⁷ Thus, the three Jewish lists in the elections to the First *Seimas* had to ensure that remaining

⁸⁶ Dr. MENDEL SUDARSKI: *Yidn in der umaphengiken Lite* [Jews in Independent Lithuania]; in: MENDEL SUDARSKI/URIAH KATSENELNBOGN/J. KISSIN (eds.): *Lite. Bukh 1* [Lithuania. Book 1]. New York NY: Kultur-gezelshaft fun Litvishe Yidn, 1951 (hereinafter referred to as "1 Lite"); at col. 133; LEIBL SHIMONI: *Di yidishe natsionale farzamlung in Lite* [The Jewish National Assembly in Lithuania]; in: 1 *Lite*, at col. 271; *Iš Seimo rinkimų* [From the elections to Seimas]; in: *Lietuva*, September 22, 1922; *Ale yidn geyen tsu di valn in der natsionaler farzamlung un shtimen farn tsyonistishn tsetl numer 6* [All Jews participate in the elections to the National Assembly and vote for the Zionist ticket No. 6]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 24, 1923; *Ver iz oisgeklitn in der natsionaler farzamlung?* [Who has been elected to the National Assembly?]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], November 13, 1923; *Natsionale farzamlung* [National Assembly]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], November 21, 1923; *Vi halt es mitn demokratishn val tsetl?* [How does the democratic ticket stand?]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], March 29, 1926; *Di fareynikte reshime fun di minderhayten* [The united regime of the minorities]; in: *Barikht fun der yidisher seym fraksie fun II Litvishn seym* [Report of the Jewish Faction in the Second Lithuanian Seimas]. Kaunas [s.n.], 1926; at p. 18.

⁸⁷ For an overview of the misrepresentation in the composition of the Constituent, First, Second, and Third Seimas, caused by the *Seimas* Election Act, between the share of the total votes received by the political parties and election lists and the share of the mandates attributed to them in the Seimas, see LIUDAS TRUSKA: *Parlamentarizmo I Lietuvos Respublikoje (1918–1940 m.) bruožai*; in: 2 *Parlamento studijos* (2004), www.parlamentostudijos.lt/Nr3/Isto_rija_Truska.htm [active on October 31, 2015].

votes would not be lost. The problem hence was not that there were three Jewish lists; the problem was rather how the Electoral Commission, on purpose, interpreted Section 76 of the *Seimas* Election Act in order to significantly weaken the minorities' parliamentary strength. Since the interpretation to Section 76 was still applied after the dissolution of the First *Seimas*, the only ways for the minorities to overcome this barrier was either to create a united list or to have agreements on the remainders. Both ways were used at the same time. For the elections to the Second *Seimas* in 1923, the Jewish, German, Russian, and Byelorussian national minorities—but not the Polish one—managed to agree on a common list of candidates.⁸⁸ But first a common agreement had to be reached among the different Jewish organizations. It was at that crucial juncture the Zionists had given proof of their flexibility and political maturity. Being concerned about every Jewish voice, which could be lost as a consequence of a possible split of the community—an experience bought dearly in the aftermath of the elections to the First *Seimas*⁸⁹—, the Zionist Organization was prepared for compromises. It was agreed that the top name on the Jewish list to be integrated into the United Minorities List will be the one of JACOB ROBINSON, who was not only a representative of the central board of the Zionist

⁸⁸ A. MAKOVSKI: *Di yidische fraktsie in tsveytn litvishn seym* [The Jewish Faction in the Second Lithuanian Seimas]; in: *1 Lite*, at cols. 279-280. See also the contribution by SAULIUS KAUBRYŠ: *JOKŪBAS ROBINZONAS—Member of the Second and the Third Seimas: Anatomy of Action and Experience* in the present volume at p. 22 *supra*.

⁸⁹ See SAULIUS KAUBRYŠ: *JOKŪBAS ROBINZONAS—Member of the Second and the Third Seimas: Anatomy of Action and Experience* in the present volume at pp. 21-22 *supra*.

Organization, but also endowed with a mandate of trust by the Jewish craftsmen.⁹⁰

ROBINSON, being a gifted speaker and a skilled fighter for the interests of the Jewish national minority, was elected chairman of the Jewish faction and of the parliamentary group of the United Minorities List alike. While being one of the most active members of the Jewish faction,⁹¹ his interventions on the necessity, scope and contents of the Jewish national autonomy witness of a remarkable depth in his argumentation, most notably in the fields, of which he at that period had a masterly command: civil law, constitutional law, and practical legal reasoning.⁹²

⁹⁰ For the term of the Second *Seimas* see ARKADIJUS BLIUMINAS: *Žydu frakcija Lietuvos Seimuose 1920-1927 m.* Vilnius [: s.n.], 2003; at pp. 38-40, and DANUTĖ BLAŽYTĖ-BAUŽIENĖ: II *Seimas* (1923-1926); in: *Lietuvos Respublikos Seimų I (1922-1923), II (1923-1926), III (1926-1927), IV (1936-1940) narių biografinis žodynas* [Biographical Encyclopedia of the Members of the First (1922-1923), Second (1923-1926), Third (1926-1927) and Fourth (1936-1940) Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania]. Vilnius: Vilniaus pedagoginio universiteto leidykla, 2007; at pp. 62-63.

For the elections to the Third *Seimas* 1926 see *Tsunoifgeshtelt yidisher demokratischer kandidatn tsetl* [List of Jewish democratic candidates composed]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], March 29, 1926; *Endgiltik tsunoifgeshtelt yidisher demokratischer tsetl* [List of Jewish democratic candidates ultimately composed]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], April 2, 1926.

⁹¹ See SAULIUS KAUBRYŠ: *JOKŪBAS ROBINZONAS—Member of the Second and the Third Seimas: Anatomy of Action and Experience* in the present volume at pp. 37-38 *supra*.

⁹² For further details see EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ: *ROBINZONAS JAKOBAS*; in: *Lietuvos Respublikos Seimų I (1922-1923), II (1923-1926), III (1926-1927), IV (1936-1940) narių biografinis žodynas* [Biographical Encyclopedia of the Members of the First (1922-1923), Second (1923-1926), Third (1926-1927) and Fourth (1936-1940) Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania]. Vilnius: Vilniaus pedagoginio universiteto leidykla, 2007; at pp. 442-446.

At the same time, while ROBINSON was representing the interests of the entire Jewish community in the *Seimas*, he also became a co-editor of the main Zionist press organ—*Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], which was published in the Yiddish language, with a Lithuanian-language supplement entitled *Mūsų garsas* [Our Voice]. It was the first daily Jewish newspaper in Lithuania and appeared without any break until World War II. Initially it was published by the General Zionist Organization in Lithuania, but after a while, wishing to speak on the behalf of the Zionist Organization of Lithuania, also other Zionist fractions were integrated, and the newspaper was managed by an editorial board. At the end of 1921, however, the “media peace” between right and left wings in the Zionist movement was over, and the newspaper returned to the General Zionists’ realm.⁹³

From November 2, 1923, until December 1, 1927, ROBINSON was one of the four coeditors of *Idishe shtime*, even if in reality RUVIN RUBINSHTEIN (1891–1967)⁹⁴ had become the only working editor already in 1925. It would appear that the Zionist Organization, appointing the chairman of the Jewish faction in *Seimas* to the editorial board, once again used his standing and authority for their particular purposes. The articles written by JACOB ROBINSON at that period of time—with the signature line rarely bearing his

⁹³ YUDEL MARK: *Yidishe periodishe oysgabes in Lite* [Jewish periodical publications in Lithuania]; in: J. SHATZKY (ed.): *Zamlbukh le-koved dem tsvey hundredt un fuftsikstn yoyvl fun der yidisher prese, 1686–1936* [Jubilee Volume in Commemoration of the Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Yiddish Press, 1686–1936]. New York NY: Amaptayl fun Yidishn Vışenshaftlekhn Instițut, 1937; at pp. 252–253.

⁹⁴ See BORIS KOTLERMAN: *RUBINSHTEYN, RUVN*; in: GERSHON DAVID HUNDERT (chief ed.): *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. Volume 2*. New Haven CT/London: Yale University Press, 2008; at p. 1603, and AVRAHAM LIS (ed.): *Sefer RE’UVEN RUBINSHTEIN* [RE’UVEN RUBINSHTEIN Memorial Book]. Tel Aviv: Association of the Lithuanian Jews in Israel, 1971.

full name, but more often his journalistic monogram “ע.ב.” (hereinafter quoted as “E.B.”) or, in Lithuanian-language periodicals, his illustrative pseudonym “Dzūkas” which alludes to the Southern province of Lithuania called Dzūkija, where he was born and where he grew up—were mostly in close connection with his political duties and of a rather “neutral” character, dedicated to international Jewish matters, to the realia of parliamentary work or to the status of Jewish national autonomy.⁹⁵ On rare occasions, such as the publication of Nos. 1000 and 2000 of *Idishe shtime*, he contributed with articles, mostly in conjunction with other leaders of the Zionist Organization, on topics currently on the Zionist agenda,⁹⁶ writing, however, from time to time for Hebrew periodicals.

⁹⁵ E.B. [i.e., YA’AKOV ROBINZON]: *A minderhaytn-ministerium* [A Ministry for Minorities]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], June 26, 1923; *Der hurbm fun undzer avtonomie* [The destruction of our autonomy]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 23, 1924; Dzūkas [i.e., JOKŪBAS ROBINZONAS]: *Naujasis Sekmadienio poilsio įstatymas* [The newest Sunday rest legislation]; in: *Mūsų garsas* [Our Voice], October 28, 1924; Dzūkas: *Apie kultūringumą, ekonomiją ir kitas dorybes* [About culture, economics and other virtues]; in: *Mūsų garsas*, April 7, 1924; Dzūkas: *Antpuolis prieš mokyklų autonomiją* [A strike against the autonomy of the schools]; in: *Mūsų garsas*, May 1, 1925; E.B.: *Nomen un inhalt* [Name and content]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], June 27, 1926; Y. ROBINZON: *Rekht un privilegies* [Law and privileges]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], July 1, 1926; Y. ROBINZON: *Erev dem minderhaytn-kongres* [On the eve of the Minorities Congress]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], August 30, 1926; Y. ROBINZON: *Yidn afn minderhaytn-kongres in Zheneve* [Jews at the Minorities Congress in Geneva]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 3, 1926.

⁹⁶ DR. Y. ROBINZON: *Fir jor hebreishe gimnazie in Lite* [Hebrew secondary school in Lithuania for four years]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], January 5, 1923; YA’AKOV ROBINZON: *Tsyonizm un land-politik* [Zionism and Politics at National Level]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], May 18, 1926.

But ROBINSON did not entirely refrain from polemics. Particular note has to be made of his series of articles criticizing the major political opponent of the Zionists—the “Folkistishe teoretikes” (“the Folkist theorizers”) as ROBINSON expressed it himself. The reason for unsheathing the journalistic sword is a preceding series of articles by YUDEL MARK (1897–1975),⁹⁷ the key figure of the Lithuanian Folkists, on Jewish national autonomy in Lithuania, which he published in the renewed weekly newspaper of the Folkists—the *Nayes* [News]. This exchange of views reveals a side of JACOB ROBINSON, which was seldom displayed in public—an instance of agitation, of usually well controlled feelings running high, which suggests that the writings of YUDEL MARK could have been the straw that broke the camel’s back. In addition, this dispute was not unavoidable, as it remained unclear until the end, whether MARK really had represented the political position of the Jewish People’s Party or merely his personal views, thus bypassing the responsibility of the editorial board of *Nayes*. ROBINSON decided to stand up “in order to defend our, the Zionists’, position.”⁹⁸

Within a short interval, ROBINSON published seven separate articles, in which he analyzed the conditions put forward by the Folkists for the existence of Jewish autonomy in a legal, sociological, and historical context.⁹⁹ He called MARK and his comrades

⁹⁷ Yiddish linguist, educator, and political activist. For further details on see GENNADY ESTRAIKH: MARK, YUDEL; in: GERSHON DAVID HUNDERT (chief ed.): *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. Volume 1*. New Haven CT/London: Yale University Press, 2008; at pp. 1130–1131.

⁹⁸ E.B.: *Di folkistishe atake* [The Folkist attack]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 16, 1926.

⁹⁹ E.B.: *Di folkistishe atake* [The Folkist attack]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 16–29, 1926.

“a small group of intelligentsia, which has no sense for the realities of the Jewish community.”¹⁰⁰ The articles were published between September 16 and 29, 1926—hence after the 1926 *Seimas* elections—, *i.e.*, after the right-wing political dominance having been replaced by a center-left government, in which the Zionists had vested a certain hope for a restoration of autonomy, and only three months apart from the *coup d’état* in December 1926, which put a definite end to aspirations of this tenor. ROBINSON availed himself extensively of the opportunity both to present a coherent ideological position to be assigned to the Zionist Organization and to thoroughly examine and evaluate political activities which he deemed harmful to the Jewish nation. A perseverative topic in his ideologically orientated reflections and comments, to which he constantly recurs, is the concept and policy of Jewish national autonomy, which he discusses in the articles from institutional, political, and strategic perspectives. Throughout the entire series in *Idishe shtime* of September 1926, ROBINSON left no doubt that, according to his conviction, the Lithuanian Zionists were at the same time the true supporters of the concept of Jewish national autonomy since the very beginning and its executors, ideologists and defenders, both while it was in function and especially after its liquidation. In the initial article, ROBINSON underscores that national autonomy was the municipal form of choice—the constitutional implementation of an obligation under international law—for realizing Jewish self-rule, which should be replenished with Zionist content.¹⁰¹

The Zionists and Folkists had diverging visions of the model for political and social development of the Jewish community in the Diaspora. The model of centralized autonomous institutions

¹⁰⁰ E.B.: *Di folkistishe atake* [The Folkist attack]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 16, 1926.

¹⁰¹ E.B.: *Di folkistishe atake* [The Folkist attack]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 16, 1926.

as favored by the Zionist Organization was heavily criticized at the Second Convention of Jewish Communities in 1922. Disputing on what the concept of the national autonomy encompasses, the representatives of the General Zionist wing consequently defended the policy of autonomy which was practically implemented until then.¹⁰² The Folkists' argument that the Zionists' work for the wealth of Palestine is incoherent with the work for the Jewish community in the Diaspora was found by ROBINSON to be—

“ * * * as new as the Gaon [i.e., very old; the author], because they disregard the facts about the involvement of the Zionists in the establishment of the Lithuanian State and in the representation of the interests of the Jewish community at present time” [emphasis added].¹⁰³

Several months earlier, in his article entitled *Tsyonizm un land-politik* [Zionism and Politics at National Level], ROBINSON had already explained the adapted Zionist priorities after World War I and added that—

“[t]he love for Jerusalem cannot weaken the Zionists' joy of working for Lithuania, of giving Zionist impulses via common civil activities.”¹⁰⁴

The Folkists' principle of “Here and Now”—or “doikayt,” as they used to call it in Yiddish—is, according to ROBINSON,—

“ * * * based on the Jewish community as one single unit whose authority terminates at the borders of the country

¹⁰² LEIBL SHIMONI: *Di yidishe natsionale farzamlung in Lite* [The Jewish National Assembly in Lithuania]; in: *Lite*; at cols. 258–259.

¹⁰³ E.B.: *Di folkistishe atake* [The Folkist attack]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 29, 1926.

¹⁰⁴ YA'AKOV ROBINSON: *Tsyonizm un land-politik* [Zionism and Politics at National Level], May 18, 1926.

and on an imagined promise to be bound to the place of residence. It is, however, ignoring the emigration on the one side and the general bonds of the Jewish nation in the world on the other.”¹⁰⁵

ROBINSON underlined the necessity to distinguish between (i) the relations of the national minority with the State of residence, (ii) the relations of the national minority with the majority of its own nation elsewhere, and (iii) the relations with the State, which is that nation's fatherland.¹⁰⁶ The conditions for autonomy as defined by the Folkists—secularity, “galuthism” (i.e., the priority of Jewish life in the Diaspora),¹⁰⁷ Yiddishism (i.e., the priority of using the Yiddish language), and the revolution on the Jewish street—were judged by ROBINSON as “autonomy without Orthodoxy, Hebraists, and Zionists, and with an absolute majority of *petty bourgeoisie*.”¹⁰⁸ According to him, reasoning on the concept of autonomy did not have any theoretical or empiric background and was “merely the reflection of the political program of the Folkists, with simplification and confusion of social and legal phenomena being characteristic for the Lithuanian Folkism.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ E.B.: *Di folkistishe atake* [The Folkist attack]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 29, 1926.

¹⁰⁶ E.B.: *Di folkistishe atake* [The Folkist attack]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 29, 1926.

¹⁰⁷ The term is derived from the Hebrew noun for “exile”—“galuth”—, denoting figuratively the Jewish Diaspora.

¹⁰⁸ E.B.: *Di folkistishe atake* [The Folkist attack]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 28, 1926.

¹⁰⁹ E.B.: *Di folkistishe atake* [The Folkist attack]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], September 20, 1926.

To deem from secondary sources—original sources do not seem to have survived so that we mainly have to rely upon information by the correspondent of *Idishe shtime*—ROBINSON seems not to have looked any more favorably on the other political opponent of the Zionists, the orthodox “Agudath Israel,” either. It was reported to the readers of the newspaper that, on the occasion of the 11th Session of the Jewish National Council, ROBINSON took the floor late in the evening and thus managed to bring back discipline to the hall. The journalist noted that ROBINSON, with great pathos, delivered a speech on the Jewish national autonomy, stressing its vitality as much as the detrimental influence of “Agudath.”¹¹⁰

THE TOP PERSON OF THE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The common ground of what has been said so far could be described in terms of a symbiosis: ROBINSON, on the one hand, was in more than one respect beneficial for the Zionist Organization, which he substantially helped to become, and remain, assertive toward the main Jewish political forces as well as popular among the Zionists on the Jewish street; on the other hand, he was himself in need of a platform for his own political and public activities. The Zionist Organization was the most visible and influential party among the Jewish social groups in Lithuania, and the ideas of Zionism largely matched his own values. Even more than that, ROBINSON was convinced that fulfilling the main goal of Zionism would warrant the future of the Jewish nation:

¹¹⁰ *Di 11-te sesie fun natsional-rat* [The 11th session of the National Council]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], July 8, 1923.

*“Eretz Israel is connected with Jewish life and with the wide masses. * * * Eretz Israel is not somebody’s caprice, but rather the life question for our present and future.”*¹¹¹

Also he was convinced that wherever the Jewish modern politics was made and designed for a larger scale, the Zionists should be at its forefront.¹¹²

ROBINSON had returned to recently independent Lithuania, when the German administrative officer Sergeant MARTIN COHN, still residing in Kaunas, received a telegram from the World Zionist Organization, in which he was requested to forward to ROBINSON an offer to fill a vacancy at the World Zionist Organization’s bureau in Copenhagen¹¹³—where the main office of the organization was located during World War I. Most probably ROBINSON had already established contacts with the World Zionist Organization in Copenhagen during the period he spent in German prisoners-of-war camps. Based on available archival sources we can today neither ascertain whether the message was received by ROBINSON nor provide an answer to the question on what was his reply. The circumstantial facts prove that he stayed in Lithuania and that he maintained close contacts with representatives of the World Zionist Organization. While ROBINSON continuously would send news on the situation of the Zionists in Lithuania to the World Zionist Organization, he would receive words of acknowledgment for his efforts and proposals for initiatives to stimulate Zionist activities in Lithuania. ROBINSON paid particular attention to acquiring relevant literature for the local

¹¹¹ LEIBL SHIMONI: *Di yidishe natsionale farzamlung in Lite* [The Jewish National Assembly in Lithuania]; in: *Lite*; at col. 266.

¹¹² YA’AKOV ROBINSON: *Tsyonizm un land-politik* [Zionism and Politics at National Level], May 18, 1926.

¹¹³ Telegramm an Herrn Unteroffizier MARTIN COHN, Kowno, 19. Mai 1919; in: CZA, Fund Z3, File 136.

Zionists and solicited permissions to distribute articles from “Jüdische Rundschau”¹¹⁴ translated to Hebrew or Yiddish for such purposes.¹¹⁵

ROBINSON participated in the Second Annual Zionist Conference in Kaunas in 1920 as the representative of provincial branches of the Zionist Organization.¹¹⁶ Referring to the general correspondence of the Zionist Organization in Lithuania, in 1922, on the development of the organization and the support from around the country, we can directly deduce that ROBINSON was mentioned as activist No. 1 among the most strenuous fellows of the Zionist Organization in the province.¹¹⁷ After moving to Kaunas, he attended the meetings of the local branch of the Zionist Organization, giving lectures and delivering speeches on Jewish politics in Lithuania as well as on internal organizational matters of the Zionist Organization.¹¹⁸

Interestingly enough, however, JACOB ROBINSON advanced to leading positions of the Zionist Organization of Lithuania first after his political career as a member of parliament was over. From 1927 to 1935, he was a member of the Central Committee

¹¹⁴ *Jüdische Rundschau* was the largest and most important Zionist weekly newspaper in Germany. It was published from 1902 until its ban in 1938. As official press medium of the Zionist Federation of Germany, the newspaper was a leading forum for significant debates on the role and purpose of Zionist politics and theory. From 1933, it helped organizing the emigration of Jews living in Germany.

¹¹⁵ Brief an Herrn Dr. J. ROBINSON per Adr. Herrn PH. BRAUNSTEIN, 23. Juni 1919; in: CZA, Fund Z3, File 136.

¹¹⁶ *Di tsveyte tzyonistishe konferents in Lite* [The second Zionist conference in Lithuania]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], January 4, 1920.

¹¹⁷ *Reshimot haHaverim* [Lists of Fellows], June 8, 1922; in: CZA, Fund Z3, File 42409.

¹¹⁸ *Tzyonistishe algemayne farzamlung* [General Zionist assembly]; in: *Idishe shtime* [Jewish Voice], June 15, 1923.

of the Zionist Organization of Lithuania, and in 1930, he is elected as one vice-chairman among several.¹¹⁹ In 1927, JACOB ROBINSON was commissioned by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Zionist Organization of Lithuania as corporate attorney for all civil law cases of the Organization before any court.¹²⁰

In the late 1920s, need arose for a reorganization in the Lithuanian Zionist movement, partly as a consequence of inner splits in separate Zionist fractions. Furthermore, after the *coup d'état* in 1926, a systemic consolidation of institutional powers—hereby adhering to a conception of Lithuanization—was speeded up considerably as a matter of State policy, which eventually led to the ban and dissolution of various organizations in Lithuania, among which the Zionist Organization of Lithuania. Often, dissolved organizations could be replaced by new ones under different titles, but with similar, or largely retained, scope and aims. As to the Zionist Organization of Lithuania, however, this strategy worked only incompletely. One of the attempts to unify the Zionist Organization of Lithuania and to consolidate the position of the Zionists in the Jewish community was made through the establishment of the “Union of the Zionist Associations” in 1928. The stated aim of the Union was primarily to coordinate and unite the work of its member organizations, acting for the benefit of the idea of Zionism. Among the cofounders of the Un-

¹¹⁹ *Pranešimai Kauno miesto ir apskrities viršininkui* [Communications to the Mayor of the City of Kaunas and to the Chief Officer of the District of Kaunas], October 20, 1930, March 24, 1932, and November 23, 1933; in: LCSA, Fund 402, Inventory 4, File 4; at pp. 62, 66, and 75.

¹²⁰ *Lietuvos sionistų organizacijos centrinio komiteto prezidiumo įgaliojimas* [Mandate of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Zionist Organization of Lithuania]; in: LCSA, Fund 402, Inventory 4, File 4; at p. 47.

ion was the plenipotentiary of the Zionist Organization of Lithuania, JACOB ROBINSON.¹²¹ Even more, he became the Chairman of the Provisional Council of the Union, and at the congress of the representatives of the Union, which took place in Kaunas on December 9 and 10, 1928, ROBINSON was elected Chairman of the Union.¹²² Later, in 1931, he stepped down from this position, but retained the office of a deputy chairman of the Union until it was dissolved in 1937.¹²³

In a letter dated February 6, 1931, MAX SOLOVEITCHIK, from April 1919 to February 1923 Minister of Jewish Affairs without portfolio in Lithuania and one of the leaders of the Zionist movement in Lithuania in the early 1920s, witnessed that he himself had observed the strong positions taken by JACOB ROBINSON in the Zionist Organization of Lithuania. Residing in Berlin and concerned about the weakened positions of the Jewry in the Presidium of the Minorities Congress, SOLOVEITCHIK intended to make use of his contacts within the Zionist Organization of Lithuania in order to move the Zionist cause forward in that region. Thus, SOLOVEITCHIK addressed ROBINSON in Kaunas for help, urging him to take part in common actions to regain positions formerly held. He motivated

¹²¹ *Prašymas įregistruoti „Lietuvos sionistų draugijų sąjungos“ įstatus* [Application to register the statutes of the “Union of Zionist Associations of Lithuania”], June 21, 1928; in: LCSA, Fund 402, Inventory 4, File 558; at p. 1.

¹²² *Pranešimai Kauno miesto ir apskrities viršininkui* [Communications to the Mayor of the City of Kaunas and to the Chief Officer of the District of Kaunas], November 9, 1928, and April 26, 1929; in: LCSA, Fund 402, Inventory 4, File 558; at pp. 10 and 12.

¹²³ *Pranešimai Kauno miesto ir apskrities viršininkui* [Communications to the Mayor of the City of Kaunas and to the Chief Officer of the District of Kaunas], January 8, 1931, and September 16, 1937; in: LCSA, Fund 402, Inventory 4, File 558; at pp. 15 and 18, and 26, and *Pranešimas Kauno policijos II nuovadai* [Communication to the Second Precinct of the Kaunas Police Department], August 6, 1931; in: LCSA, Fund 402, Inventory 4, File 558; at p. 21.

his choice by stressing that ROBINSON was the real authority in Lithuania, who guaranteed success, all of which had contributed to the excellent reputation of the latter.¹²⁴

JACOB ROBINSON continued to be involved in the increasingly difficult tasks of the Zionist movement. After World War II had broken out and Polish Jews kept fleeing to Lithuania, Jewish organizations in Lithuania tried to organize help for the refugees. The Zionist Organization of Lithuania intensively looked for possibilities to reduce the number of homeless Jews by stimulating emigration. ROBINSON as representative of the Zionist Organization of Lithuania was asked to try to convince the World Zionist Organization to agree to a redistribution of immigration certificates to Palestine, hence assigning a larger quota to Lithuania.¹²⁵

IN LIEU OF CONCLUSIONS

The archival materials, the notorious facts as well as ROBINSON's own thoughts and actions constitute comprehensive evidence of his capacity and prominent role as committed Zionist, as an engaged member of the Zionist Organization of Lithuania and as one of the most influential leaders of the Zionist movement in interwar Lithuania. A solid rootedness in Zionist ideas and tireless efforts to strengthen the Zionist positions on the Jewish street were integral parts of ROBINSON's life and identity.

¹²⁴ Brief an Herrn JAKOB ROBINSON von Dr. M. SOLOWEITSCHIK, 6. Februar 1931; in: CZA, Fund A409, File 5.

¹²⁵ *Šifruota telegrama iš Kauno Lietuvos pasiuntiniui Londone* [Enciphered telegram from Kaunas to the Lithuanian Envoy in London], April 6, 1940; in: LSCA, Fund 648, Inventory 1, File 450; at p. 15, and *H. RABINAVIČIAUS pro memoria užsienio reikalų ministerijos politikos departamentui* [Pro memoria of H. RABINAVIČIUS addressed to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], April 16, 1940; in: LSCA, Fund 383, Inventory 7, File 2279; at pp. 11–12.

As to JACOB ROBINSON, the analyzed materials suggest clear answers, but leave us with a few questions of significance for the understanding of his *vita*:

- (i) What effects, if any, on the Zionist convictions of ROBINSON did it have when he left the “Lithuanian period” of his life behind him?
- (ii) Did the Zionist linkage continue to be of the same preferential relevance for him after the main goal of Zionism was reached, *i.e.*, the State of Israel was established in Eretz Israel?

In this respect, some of the subsequent contributions in this book will provide additional answers, while the case has yet to be kept open for further completion or even for reassessment as new sources on JACOB ROBINSON might become available.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Professor Dr. SHABTAI ROSENNE ש"ת, the eminent expert in international law, diplomat and mentoree of JACOB ROBINSON in the latter's function as Counselor at the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations, had stated in conversations with jur. lic. DIRK ROLAND HAUPT, co-editor of the present volume, that—

“[t]here is no doubt about the Zionist affiliation of ROBINSON; but he was not a member of any party. Speaking about his ideological orientation, he was sympathizing with democratic Socialist, or moderately leftist, ideas. However, he was not a member of Bund.”;

in: Personal files of DIRK ROLAND HAUPT, to which the author had access.— This statement was reconfirmed orally by Professor ROSENNE to the author during a personal meeting in Jerusalem on January 25, 2009.

The author wishes to comment that in her study of archival sources, she has not been able to trace any proof or indication in support of the second and third sentences in the statement by Professor ROSENNE quoted *supra*, while the findings in this article verify the first sentence of Professor ROSENNE's statement. Against this background, the author finds sound from a historiographical point of view not to attribute to JACOB ROBINSON the political views which Professor ROSENNE conveyed to her.

In 1997, he was awarded by the Jerusalem Municipality the title of "Distinguished Friend of the City of Jerusalem," and in 2005, the "Organization for the Furtherance of Proper and Decent Government" awarded him the title of "Knight of Proper and Decent Administration."

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