

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Review

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Published on 11 October 2010

H-Diplo Review Editor: Diane Labrosse

H-Diplo Web and Production Editor: John Vurpillat

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Diane Labrosse

H-Diplo has commissioned reviews of the Makers of the Modern World Series (Haus Publishing), which concerns the Peace Conferences of 1919-23 and their aftermath. The 32 volumes are structured as biographies in standard format or as specific national/organizational histories.
<http://www.hauspublishing.com/product/229>

Tom Fraser, Chaim Weizmann: The Dream of Zion (Makers of the Modern World: The Peace Conferences of 1919-23 and their Aftermath). London: Haus Publishing Ltd, 2010. 226 pp. ISBN 978-1905791675 (hardback, \$19.95, £12.99).

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/PDF/Haus-Weizmann.pdf>

Reviewed for H-Diplo by **Itamar Rabinovich, Tel Aviv University and NYU**

Zionism has been an amazingly successful enterprise. The notion of building a national movement for a widely dispersed partly assimilated people and of implementing this movement's vision by actually building a national state could easily be dismissed as a fantasy, as it often was. Zionism's success was facilitated by extraneous circumstances – the holocaust, the weakness and errors of its Arab antagonists, by its own innate strength and, to a large extent, by the quality of its leadership, from the original visionary, Theodor Herzl, to Israel's founding fathers, Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion. Ben-Gurion was the leader who led the Zionist movement and the Jewish community in Palestine through the final phases of the struggle for statehood and was subsequently the first prime minister who left an indelible imprint on the young Israeli state.

Chaim Weizmann, who preceded Ben-Gurion as the leader of the Zionist movement, lost the primacy to the dominant figure in the Jewish community in Palestine. He was elected as Israel's first president and head of state, but never concealed his bitterness for having to settle on a ceremonial role.

Weizmann's position declined when the center of gravity shifted from the Diaspora to the growing community in Palestine and from London to Washington. Weizmann's heyday as Zionism's leader coincided with his "British period" and with Britain's "moment" in the Middle East, when it became the paramount power in the Middle East, assumed control of

Palestine and undertook to build a Jewish "national home" in the territory assigned to it as League of Nations mandate.

Weizmann played a major role in these events. Britain's decision to take control of Palestine (contrary to its undertakings to its French and Arab allies) and to establish a Jewish national home there was motivated by complex considerations – from a desire to have a land bridge from Iraq to the Mediterranean, through the reluctance to have French presence so close to the Suez Canal, to the expectations that Jewish influence in the United States and Soviet Russia would be directed to support the war. There were also countervailing considerations and the British government's decision to issue the Balfour Declaration in November 1917 and to convert it into a Palestine Mandate could not be envisaged without the role played by Chaim Weizmann.

T.G. Fraser was commissioned to write the volume on Weizmann in the series "Makers of the Modern World" which deals with "the peace conferences of 1919-1923 and their aftermath". He thus had the pleasant task of dealing with Weizmann's heyday. The volumes in this series are slim and the series is designed for the educated lay leader. Prof. Fraser has ably captured Weizmann's charisma and charm and his ability to manipulate and influence the British ruling elite. He is also skillful in taking the reader through the maze of World War I diplomacy and its aftermath. The book is not meant to engage the academic community and is not free of inaccuracies (due largely to over-reliance on Weizmann's own writings), but as a brief engaging account of Weizmann the leader and the origins of the Jewish national home, it is an excellent piece of work.

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