Lucien Wolf’s efforts for the Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe*

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The diplomatic history of the Jews in Europe is a relatively new subject of study. Since the State of Israel was founded a lot of attention has been devoted to Zionist diplomacy before the First World War, leading to its culmination in the Balfour Declaration. But even more intensive study has been made of the diplomatic activities which led finally to the establishment of Israel. This has reached almost flood proportions. In comparison, other fields of Jewish diplomacy have been to a certain degree neglected.

Recently, however, renewed interest has been aroused in the political-diplomatic history of the fight for the amelioration of Jewish rights in Eastern and Central Europe during the inter-war period, resulting in a lively awareness of the diplomatic activities of Lucien Wolf on behalf of Eastern and Central European Jews.

Of late not only Anglo-Jewish historians have done considerable research on him, such as the late Redcliffe N. Salaman, the present Lord Beloff, Joseph Fraenkel and C. C. Aronsfeld, but also a gifted young Oxford historian, Mark Levene, wrote an impressive doctorate on his diplomacy at War and Peace, covering the period 1912–1919. Even a number of important scholars in America and Israel have been drawn to study some of the activities of Lucien Wolf. The reasons for all this interest in him are not too difficult to guess: which diplomacy, Zionist or anti-Zionist, offered more hope to the Jews, and which succeeded and why, or did they both succeed only in a very limited way?

In this paper, my aim is to examine Wolf’s work in connection with the attempt to help the Jews in the Ukraine, Poland, Hungary and Romania during the war and in the immediate post-war period; to see the radical shift in some of his ideological views relating to Jews; and briefly view how the Minorities Treaties, worked out at the Paris Peace Conference, succeeded in reaching their objectives or failed. Finally I will contrast the different methods and ultimate aims of diplomacy as practised by two such remarkable antagonists as Chaim Weizmann and Lucien Wolf.

Lucien Wolf was born on 20 January 1857, to a comfortable middle-class liberal family who migrated from Bohemia to England as a result of the failure of the 1848 Revolution. The motive for the emigration of the family was

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political, and this left a permanent impression on Wolf. He was brought up in three cultures: English, French and German, with an unlimited belief in progress, the spread of liberal ideas in Europe, and the inevitable triumph of broad liberal democratic principles, the breakdown of barriers between nations, and the ultimate attainment of equality for the Jews in those countries which still denied them full citizenship, equal rights and equal opportunities. As a consequence Jews would be able to go forward to integration, perhaps finally leading to full assimilation, at least in the way Jews had achieved their status in Germany, France and Great Britain. It was a simple optimistic, albeit rather naive belief in progress, such as that visualized by the French Enlightenment, according to which mankind would march towards the goal of liberty in a unilinear fashion.

The obstacles on the way were either blurred or ignored. David Mowschowitch, Wolf's highly intelligent Russian assistant, summed up Wolf's philosophy thus: 'Liberty of religious conscience and equal citizenship rights were the only planks in his programme and almost all his literary and publicistic work, insofar as it concerned Jews, was devoted to showing that his programme was not only consonant with the best ideals of civilised humanity, but also sufficient for the interests of the Jews themselves.'

Wolf's early journalistic training and his knowledge of languages turned him more and more to writing on foreign affairs. The anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia in 1881 aroused his interest in the deteriorating position of the Jews there, as well as in their treatment in Romania, especially after the Congress of 1878 received wide publicity in the Western press, and when the Romanian Government was accused of going back on its promises. This became the passion of his life, and he devoted all his considerable gifts and encyclopaedic knowledge to these topics. Even his frequent excursions in research into Jewish history revolved chiefly around diplomatic activities relating to Jews in earlier periods. He himself explained why Jews show an aptitude for diplomacy, and his note carries with it a strong autobiographical comment: 'The Jew, his personal touch with many countries, his wide linguistic range, and that natural talent for negotiation which had been developed in him by his outcast status and which was for centuries the only weapon on which he could rely to obtain for himself a qualified immunity from oppression and some measure of protection against persecution.'

Written in 1922, its tone already betrays some disillusionment with the way liberalism progressed in Eastern and Central Europe.

Soon after Herzl's appearance on the political stage, Wolf met him. They had friendly discussions, and in the end he rejected Zionism as a solution to the Jewish question, since he feared that Zionist ideology carried with it the threat of dual nationality and double allegiance, which contained within them the suspicion of divided loyalties, and as a result Jews would be accused of lack of patriotism and bad citizenship and it would constitute a partial or full apology for anti-Semitism.
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At the same time he involved himself with great enthusiasm in support for Israel Zangwill’s Territorialism. An early meeting with Baron Hirsch deeply impressed him with the efforts to settle Jews on land in Argentina.’ Though the Territorialist response to the Jewish question was a form of Zionism without Palestine–Eretz Israel—and certainly was in opposition to integrationism and full equality, yet it was in accord with some of his later views on autonomism.

The gist of that argument was that the main energies ought to be directed towards the attainment of full Jewish rights; but that a portion of East European Jews should be encouraged to settle on the land in some remote part of the world and, by reducing Jewish economic competition with Poles, Romanians, Ukrainians and Russians, prevent mass anti-Semitism from sharply erupting.

All his life he sincerely believed that the main cause of anti-Semitism lay in dominant ‘economic forces’ which produced ‘exclusively a question of European politics’. He dismissed the view that anti-Semitism ‘is the conflict of Church and Synagogue’, and argued heatedly that forces were moving in the present, and would move in the future, ‘for the tolerance of the stranger and consequently for mixed nationalities’. This progress would be achieved one day in spite of all the efforts of the anti-Semites to prevent it from happening. The way forward would partly be achieved through education; and for Wolf, as for many liberal-minded Jews, the Alliance Israelite Universelle, in its Western educational policies in the East and in North Africa was ‘contributing powerfully to the uniform outward march of the Jews all over the world’.

To achieve this he advocated quite early on that the Anglo-Jewish Association, jointly with the Board of Deputies in their Conjoint Committee, should exert strong pressures on their Government to take issue with the Russian and Romanian Governments as to full religious liberty for Jews and to fight for the abolition in all European countries of all civil and political discrimination which were based on creed and directed chiefly against Jews. Only the Conjoint Committee representing the most influential members of the Anglo-Jewish establishment could reach the set goal. Power lay in a few benevolent hands, not in mass movements. This could be reached in a number of ways. For example, leading Jewish bankers such as the House of Rothschild in Paris and in London and Jacob Schiff in New York could prevent the raising of international loans for Czarist Russia and Romania.

Moreover, for a long time Wolf campaigned against an Anglo-Russian Alliance, and wrote vigorously against Great Britain joining the Russo-French Alliance which aimed at isolating Germany.

The writings of Wolf between 1896 and 1914 made him the sharpest opponent of Russia in Britain, and he was considered by many journalists and Foreign Office civil servants as a very pro-German journalist. From 1905 to 1914 he edited the anti-Russian periodicals The Russian Correspondence (October 1905 to 1907), and, later on, In Darkest Russia (published between January 1912 and August 1914). They contained extremely detailed accounts of the
persecution of Jews in the Russian Empire. This information was supplied to him by a group of Russian liberals, among them the eminent lawyer Maxim Vinaver, the Jewish historian Simon Dubnow and especially his secretary, David Mowschowitch, later to become Wolf's chief assistant in the Board of Deputies. Many prominent members of the Bund in Geneva and in London provided very useful material for him and his periodicals. Wolf called them, protecting their anonymity, 'sympathizers with the Russian struggle for freedom'. He rapidly became England's public enemy number one of the Czarist Government.

To counter Wolf's anti-Russian activities, Count Lamsdorf—for a short while Russian Foreign Minister—proposed in 1906 to set up an anti-Semitic triple alliance consisting of Russia, Germany and France to isolate Britain. This remarkable document was for the first time published by the Soviet Government in February 1918. Lamsdorf accused Wolf of organizing the transport of arms to the Bund and 'plotting the Russian Revolution of 1905. He wrote: 'the above-mentioned wholesale importation of arms into Russia which, as it transpires from agency reports, is carried on very largely from the continent of Europe via England, becomes quite intelligible when one considers that already in June 1905 precisely in England, an Anglo-Jewish Committee for collecting donations for the equipment of fighting among Russian Jews was openly organized with the most active cooperation of the well-known Russophobe publicist Lucien Wolf'.9 The weapons, explained Wolf, were for Jewish self-defence groups against the imminent dangers of outbreaks of pogroms, though Count Lamsdorf claimed that they were for fomenting revolution. They were in fact used only for self-defence.10

This early involvement with Dubnow, Mowschowitch and the Bund would later lead Wolf to change many of his earlier ideological views, and to move towards accepting some of the theories of cultural autonomy for East European Jews. This will be examined later. In 1905–6 Wolf still shared the belief that the fate of Russian Jewry was indissolubly linked with the future of liberalism in Russia. 'The Russian Jews', Wolf wrote in The Times in August 1905, 'are resolved to sink or swim with their Russian fellow citizens with whom they have in recent years fought shoulder to shoulder in the general struggle'.11 Later events would modify this view. What is far more surprising is that the ardent English liberal, intimate friend and adviser to the Jewish establishment in England, should develop profound sympathies for the Bund—the militant Jewish social-democratic party in Russia, and would later campaign on its behalf.12

On the outbreak of the First World War, Wolf immediately suspended his periodical In Darkest Russia, though a cloud hung over his head for having been too violently anti-Russian. Some anti-Semitic journalists like Captain Maxse, Wickham T. Stead and Comyns Beaumont, accused him of being a German agent paid for 'by a most influential and wealthy international house in the city'.13 Because of the War, all the work of the Conjoint Committee to
advance the rights of Jews in Russia became unnecessary and irrelevant, since the British Government would not tolerate criticism of an important ally.

In spite of the War and the Alliance with Britain and France, the Czarist Government’s repression of the Jews did not decline and indeed increased in severity. Over 600,000 Jews were deported at very short notice inside Russia, where they were normally not permitted to live. They were allowed to take very few of their belongings with them. Jews were accused of being German spies and many were shot on the flimsiest of pretexts. Yiddish and Hebrew publications were banned and there were open accusations that the Jews were actively pro-German, ready to betray Russia.

Because of the war, the Jews in Britain and France were paralysed and had to keep silent. But in America, before she entered the war, many well-known Jews such as Abraham Kahan, editor of the Jewish Daily Forward, the banker Jacob Schiff, the lawyer Louis Marshall, and others, conducted a vigorous campaign against American participation in the war so long as Jews were oppressed in Russia. American Jewry was split on the question. As the war was going very badly for the Allies, it became extremely vital for their survival that America should enter the war. For this purpose the Zionists, with Weizmann and Justice Brandeis at their head, were urged to mount a counter campaign and demand that America enter the war. Promises were made that once the war was over the Jews in Russia would be given full freedom and equality: they should just wait patiently for the outcome of the war. No one doubted that victory would be with the Allies.14

Britain and France turned their diplomatic attention to the future of the Near and Middle East once hostilities would cease and the Ottoman Empire would no longer exist; in other words, how to plan the division of that key strategic area. A number of options were examined, some of them deeply in conflict with others. One was the idea of collaboration with the Zionists with regard to the future of Palestine. From 1915 on, Herbert Samuel, a member of the Government, Haham Moses Gaster and particularly Chaim Weizmann, became extremely active in putting forward ideas for a Declaration in favour of Palestine becoming a National Home for the Jews. In return the Jews would work very hard for the war effort. Weizmann, who until then was hardly known in England, and who even to Jews was known as a provincial chemist and a relatively ‘minor’ leader of the Zionist Movement, became in a very short time a key figure in Government war planning. Weizmann clashed with the Anglo-Jewish establishment and especially with Lucien Wolf.

The Zionist-Government negotiations took place in the strictest secrecy. In the first period, between January 1915 and the end of 1916, the discussions were partly abstract and few detailed ideas were worked out in final draft form. The anti-Zionists in the Jewish community slowly became aware of the goings-on behind the scenes, in the corridors of power. They therefore tried to torpedo the manoeuvres of Weizmann and his associates, and they turned to Wolf to present to the Government counter-proposals to those discussed by
Weizmann and others. Surprisingly for such an acute political animal as Wolf, he underestimated the growing importance of the Russian Jew Weizmann, and was unaware of how much he himself was not trusted by the Foreign Office staff. Though he was supported by many influential Jews, like Edwin Montagu in the Cabinet; Claude Montefiore, the President of the Anglo-Jewish Association; L. Alexander, the President of the Board of Deputies; and Leopold Rothschild, he lacked the ear of the Prime Minister.15

In March 1916 Wolf submitted a memorandum in which he formulated his and his associates' ideas of a future Palestine. It is important to examine in detail his proposals and compare them with the Zionist plan.

Wolf wrote: 'In the event of Palestine coming within the spheres of influence of Great Britain or France at the close of the war, the Governments of these Powers will not fail to take account of the historic interest that country possesses for the Jewish community. The Jewish population will be secured in the enjoyment of civil and religious liberty, equal political rights with the rest of the population, reasonable facilities for immigration and colonisation and such municipal privileges in the towns and colonies inhabited by them as may be shown to be necessary.'16 Nowhere did Wolf mention the idea of a Jewish National Home which might ultimately lead to the establishment of a Jewish State, or that the Jews would one day form a majority in the country. He saw them exclusively as a religious minority, remaining in such a position permanently, enjoying civil and religious rights. Some restricted opportunities would be given to Zionist dreams of future immigration and colonisation, but Palestine could not and should not become the ultimate goal of Jewish aspirations. He did envisage limited self-governing autonomous units of Jews in Palestine, to be controlled by the powers that be, but without specifying who they might be.

Contrast this even with the final draft of the Balfour Declaration, with its stress on the National Home and 'best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object'. The British Government did make one concession to Lucien Wolf's group by underlining 'that nothing shall be done which might prejudice...the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country'.

Wolf and his powerful group were annoyed and angry that a Russian Jew had become so influential, not merely with officials like Mark Sykes, but even with the Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and the Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour. In a letter to Baron Edmond de Rothschild, Wolf complained that Weizmann and his friends had completely ignored him and the official leaders of Anglo-Jewry. The Zionists were 'taking advantage of our courtesy to push forward their plans without reference to us'.17 He was literally horrified when he learnt from an important French friend that Lloyd George actually 'assured Weizmann...that Great Britain will grant a charter to the Jews in Palestine in the event of that country coming within the sphere of influence of the British Crown'.18
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Events and circumstances of the war at that moment favoured the Russian-born Chaim Weizmann as against the patriotic, Anglicized Jews. Weizmann took full advantage of the fact and the first round went to him. The second and decisive clash occurred in 1917. Russia was in the turmoil of revolution, with the Provisional Government locked in a life-and-death struggle with the Soviets—the new spontaneous body where the Bolsheviks led by Lenin were rising to a dominant position. The great question facing the Allies was: will Russia remain in the war, or would those forces opposed to the war win the day and sign a separate peace treaty with the Germans.

One must remember that the German army was occupying large areas of Russia. The Bolsheviks were bitterly opposed to the fighting, which they called 'an Imperialist war', and they demanded that Russia should get out of it. The defeats suffered by the Russian army demoralized the soldiers, who were voting with their feet. Thousands deserted from the army, running to cities such as Petrograd, Moscow and Odessa, swelling the growing support for Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

The British Government, and especially the normally sceptical Foreign Office, became convinced that the Zionists exercised a decisive influence on Russian events, and that they could help in an affirmative way to keep Russia in the war. Top officials in the Foreign Office urged the Government speedily to issue a declaration favouring a national home for the Jews in Palestine, in order to show concretely to Russian Jews that the British Government was serious in its policies towards Palestine. A popular belief spread through the press, which had strong anti-Semitic undertones, that the Jews controlled and were the driving force of the Revolution. Wolf and Claude Montefiore argued fiercely with the Foreign Office that the Zionists were losing ground, that the Bund was the most influential body in Jewish public life in Russia and that the Zionists did not carry a lot of weight. Wolf, normally extremely well informed on Russia, pestered the Foreign Office with his opinions. But he was under strong suspicion of having a pro-German stance, so the Foreign Office completely ignored his advice. By a hair's breadth Weizmann won. The Balfour Declaration was published on 2 November 1917. Lenin and the Bolsheviks seized power on 7 November and very soon after opted out of the war altogether. But even more important, America had entered the war in April 1917. The Zionists won the second round and obtained the Balfour Declaration—the charter about which Herzl had merely dreamt, but which was now a reality. It was Weizmann's masterly, almost Machiavellian tactics that won the day. Wolf, the Anglo-Jewish Association and the leadership of the Board suffered a humiliating defeat. For the first time, an East European Jew, believing with all his fervour that the Jewish people were behind his efforts, emerged victorious over well-established, entrenched, powerful Anglo-Jewish leadership.

Defeated, but not crushed, Wolf turned his great talents and vast experience in diplomacy to plan the Jewish participation in the inevitable Conference to promote the fight for civil rights of the Jews in post-war Europe. He
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showed extraordinary elasticity of mind by making profound adjustments in his ideological world outlooks, and shifted from his early assimilationist integrationist attitude to accept a nearly Dubnowian autonomist view. All the same, he remained a convinced anti-Zionist, and he realized that he had to play his cards with extreme caution.

President Wilson, in his address to the Senate on 22 January 1917, a few months before America entered the war, raised some important questions to which he provided some answers, later to be brushed aside. Wilson said: ‘Is the present war a struggle for a just and secure peace, or only for a new balance of power? If it be only for a new balance of power, who will guarantee, who can guarantee the stable equilibrium of the new arrangement? Only a tranquil Europe can be a stable Europe. There must not be a balance of power but a community of power; not organized rivalries but an organized common peace.’ He expressed his wish that the coming peace would be ‘without victory’. He prophetically saw that ‘victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor’s terms imposed upon the vanquished. It would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, at an unbelievable sacrifice, and would leave a sting, a resentment, a bitter memory upon which the terms of peace would rest, not permanently, but only as upon quick sand’.22 He proceeded to express his hope that when the war would be finished ‘there should be a united, independent and autonomous Poland’, and concluded with the optimistic belief ‘that henceforth inviolable security of life, of worship and of industrial and social development should be guaranteed to all peoples who have lived hitherto under the power of Governments devoted to a faith and purpose hostile to their own’.23 He refrained from outlining in detail the sort of State Poland should be, whether it should follow the frontiers before the partitions of 1772, 1792 and 1795. Nor did he elucidate the difference between ‘independent’ and ‘autonomous’ which were by no means synonymous. Nor did he spell out the nature of minority rights.

Wilson’s speech was a genuine expression of a European and American liberalism which was nearing its end. Between this speech and his next one, containing the famous Fourteen Points, the Russian Revolution had broken out, which for good or bad changed not only the character of Russia, but brought about the most profound changes in Europe, exceeding in their significance even the French Revolution. The First World War and the Russian Revolution are the great watersheds of Europe. Old humanist values declined or disappeared. Militant internationalism clashed with rabid chauvinism which aimed to trample on any national minority standing in its way. For many of those who were deeply liberal in their convictions the world was collapsing in darkness all around them. The collapse did not come in a single explosion, but slowly it became evident that pre-war Europe was lying in ruins. On 8 January 1918 President Wilson delivered his famous address to Congress which outlined the Fourteen Points on Europe. After the conclusion of the war, he emphasized the need to have ‘a free open-minded and absolutely impartial
adjustment of all colonial claims’; he demanded the independence of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and he underlined particularly that ‘an independent Polish State should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indubitably Polish populations which should be assured a free and easy access to the sea’. The formulation was nebulous, as it omitted to specify the national minorities within a resurrected Poland, such as the Jews, the Ukrainians, Lithuanians, White Russians and others. Nor was it clear where the territorial limits should be. When speaking of the Turkish Empire, Wilson was even more blurred in his outline: ‘The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty’. It was clear that at the coming Peace Conference there would be a great deal of work to be done in clarifying the difficult problems facing the European nations and states. The map of Europe would be changed beyond recognition.

In expectation of the coming conference, Wolf threw himself into a frenzy preparing some of the ground relating to the rights of the Jewish minority in Eastern and Central Europe. At the beginning of 1918 no one yet realized fully that the bulk of Russian Jewry would be cut off from the rest of Jewry. Distorted reports were reaching England that in the Ukraine a democratic government was set up with a special ministry for Jewish autonomy, realizing the dreams of Dubnow and the autonomists and the aspirations of the Bund. At the same time, disturbing reports came of violent anti-Jewish pogroms carried out by White Russians, Ukrainian Nationalists and gangs out to kill and loot.

Following these conflicting reports, Lucien Wolf was faced with these questions: how far were his earlier views on the ‘national postulate’—as he called it—still valid? At the beginning of the century Wolf was strongly opposed to separate national demands for Jews. He believed in human civil rights, equality and full citizenship. He almost shared the view of the Romanian Prime Minister, Srurdza, who told him in October 1908 that ‘if you have a nationality how can you come to us and say you want to be Romanian citizens?’ But sometimes Wolf tended to accept the notion of nationality as an ethnic and cultural status which might apply to certain groups of Jews without hurting them as citizens of a non-Jewish State. Essentially he held contradictory points of view on that issue, and he was not the only one to do so. We often find in his writings and utterances conflicting ideas that sometimes border on sheer political expediency of the moment. Already at the end of October 1917, Wolf formulated his first ideas on the future of the Jews in post-war Romania and Poland, which he would somewhat modify later on.

The new situation in Europe, particularly after the Russian Revolution, posed new challenges and required different responses from those of the earlier period. Wolf wrote in the report of the Anglo-Jewish Association of 25 October 1917, that ‘the committee is now confronted by demands which go far beyond the old situations based on simple equality of political and civil rights’.

Wolf was moving towards sharing the views held by the Bund, Simon Dubnow, the Folkspartei and the Seimists or Farainigte—namely that the Kehila
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or community organization should be self-administering, having the rights of taxation at the local Kehila level. Yiddish was to be the official language of the members of the Kehila, applying to legal documents, courts and even government organs, and the curricula of schools should also be in the hands of the Kehila. The Kehila itself should be secularized. There were differences between the above-mentioned groups, but there were also objectives which they shared.28 Under the influence of Dr Mowschowitch, Wolf moved to reconcile the autonomist views with his earlier ideas of civic rights in the Western emancipatory attitudes.

Even during the war itself, in 1916–17, the German High Command in Poland recognized Polish Jewry as a nationality and Yiddish as one of the official languages. It even published an official seven-language dictionary for the Polish territories, which included Yiddish.29 Likewise, the Austrian social democrats fought valiantly from 1897 onwards to save the multi-national Austrian Empire by offering cultural national autonomy to the various nations living within the Empire.30

Some of Wolf’s closest friends, among them Claude Montefiore, were opposed to the autonomy idea and preferred their emancipationist views. Wolf agreed with Mowschowitch that the Jews did not need to be Russified or Polonized, but ‘events have shown that it is much safer for the Jews in Poland to be simply Jews’.31 As a result of President Wilson’s Fourteen Points, Wolf agreed to demand a guarantee of Jewish national rights in a restored independent Poland. He was soon to grasp that to champion autonomy was one thing, but to enforce a policy guaranteeing national rights was a very difficult task indeed. The Polish liberal politician, Zaleski, a future Polish Foreign Minister, told Wolf already in July 1917 that the official use of Yiddish in an independent Poland ‘would not find favour with any section of the Polish people.’32 The more nationalistic Poles, like Roman Dmowski, the leader of the anti-Semitic National Democrats (the Endeks), were altogether opposed to giving any special rights to the Jewish minority. He even threatened to repeat his famous economic boycott of the Jews which he successfully launched in 1912. Wolf was faced with an embarrassing problem, because the British Government tended to support Dmowski’s anti-Semitic Polish National Committee, and if he were to denounce it, Wolf would appear disloyal to the Government. He hesitated, and retreated from openly attacking it. This was the first of many similar conflicts and contradictions that developed in his policies. Yet he continued to champion national minority rights. There was a much greater difficulty ahead: was he authorized to speak on behalf of Polish Jews? Who gave him that authority? Furthermore, how did one know whether Polish Jews wished to have national autonomy rights? They might opt for Polish citizenship and play their part as Poles of Jewish origin. The same difficulties would apply to Romanian and Hungarian Jews.

The assimilationists claimed in these countries that their influence was growing and becoming decisive. The religious Jews, the Hasidim, members of
the Agudas Yisroel, preferred religious toleration and political rights and were against the autonomy and secularization of the Kehila. Then the Zionists would assert that the Jews were a nation. Examining all the options, Wolf was persuaded by Mowschowitch to give full support to the national autonomy concept, and, ironically, the assimilated Jew championed Yiddish. Wolf wrote: ‘However much we may despise the jargon, as it is called, it is after all the vernacular of six million Jews, the growth of seven hundred years of separate Jewish history, the medium of a considerable and highly respectable Jewish literature, the spontaneous dialect of the Polish Jew in his home and in the market place and an indispensable element in the intricate social and economic relations of the Jewish community which lives in great masses and which would be completely disorganized without it.’

In consequence he formulated a short programme of four points demanding:

1. the recognition of Jews as Polish citizens;
2. repeal of the 1862 linguistic provisions recognizing only Polish and Russian;
3. autonomous management of the Kehila, and, finally,
4. Saturday rest and the right to work on Sunday.33

Wolf’s defence of Yiddish would be welcomed by every lover of the Yiddish language and literature. He had hoped that this would be the minimum required to conciliate all the different sections of Polish Jewry. But the Zionists accused him of stark betrayal, the assimilationists of extremism, and only the Bund and the Agudah supported parts of his proposals. There was no general consensus among the Jews.

At last the war was over and the Peace Conference met in Paris. There the official British delegation confirmed the Balfour Declaration, which thereby became a legitimate international diplomatic charter, but it had strong reservations on Jewish autonomy, for the reason that it would be extremely difficult to enforce. News reached the Conference of a wave of pogroms sweeping the Ukraine and East Galicia, especially in Lvov, inspired and instigated by Polish and Ukrainian nationalists. The Poles tried to deny the occurrences by blaming the press for spreading such stories, while Lewis Namier confirmed the accuracy of the reports.34 John Maynard Keynes, referring to these events at the time, wrote a memorable phrase: ‘Poland is an economic impossibility with no industry but Jew-baiting’.

Two spectres haunted Wolf and his associates: 1 the widespread accusation that Bolshevism was Jewish dominated; and 2 Zionism and its drive to turn Jews towards Palestine. Many people, including Churchill, thought bad Jews turned to Bolshevism and good Jews to Zionism.35

Already at the Peace Conference the Zionists argued that Wolf did not represent the East European Jews. He angrily retorted that the Zionists represented only themselves. For this he received the support of the leaders of the Agudah. Radical Zionists such as Leo Motzkin, Yitzhak Grybaun and Joshua Thon demanded the formation of a Jewish parliament which would
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represent the Jewish nation to the League of Nations through a World Jewish Congress.

Wolf continued with his struggle against the Zionist claims and tried to neutralize them, but to no avail. As long as the British Government fully supported the Zionist cause, Wolf was isolated in the corridors of power.

News of pogroms spreading not only in the Ukraine but also in Poland, Hungary and Romania were of a very grave nature. Jews were removed from important positions and a violent campaign against their economic activities was mounted. The liberal dream of democratic states arising in Eastern and Central Europe did not materialize. Instead, unstable governments came and went, moving towards Fascism and semi-Fascism. Extreme nationalists looked on the Jews not only as economic rivals to their own people, but as aliens and enemies of the State. They deliberately and defiantly ignored the minorities treaties which were confirmed at the Paris Peace Conference. The autonomous institutions were undermined in Lithuania, completely crushed in the Ukraine and of no consequence in Poland, Hungary and Romania.37 Poland and Romania went out of their way to seize parts of other territories, thereby making a mockery of Wilson’s idea of self-determination for nations. Already at the Peace Conference itself a leading official of the Quai d’Orsay, Euguene Sée, told a meeting of Western Jewish delegates that ‘the business of the Conference is to create a Sovereign State for Poland, not for the Jews’.38

Amid the gloomy reports reaching Paris, Wolf confided in his diary his deep pessimism regarding the future. He summed up the dilemma and tragedy from which he could see no way out: ‘For us to give any advice to the Jews of the Ukraine is impossible. We cannot advise them to be good Ukrainians without the risk that we are setting them against the Entente and asking them to be traitors to Russia. We cannot ask them to support an undivided Russia without pillorying them as enemies of their country’s national cause. We cannot recognize them to be neutral without recognizing a Jewish nationality and setting both Russians and Ukrainians, and probably also Bolsheviks, Poles and Rumanians against them…. It shows how dangerous it is to mix up raison d’État with a politique des principes.’ The words were prophetic and show clearly that the world of liberal dreams and hopes was in ruins. But Wolf persevered in organizing whatever aid could be rendered to obtain concessions on behalf of the Eastern and Central European Jews. He was in contact with most of the leading Jews in these countries, with the exception of the Zionists, and pleaded with governments to keep to the minorities treaties. He urged the British Government to take up their defence. He became deeply involved in helping Jewish refugees from Russia and courageously took up the struggle to ameliorate the position of the Jews in Romania and Hungary. As Secretary of the Joint Foreign Committee of the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association, he literally became the Board itself. His diplomatic correspondence was extremely wide ranging. But he could do little to stem the deterioration of Jewish economic positions.39
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To add to his difficulties, in spite of the worsening position of the Jews, the assimilationist Jews in Poland and Hungary were very annoyed at the Board and the Alliance Israélite Universelle for taking up their causes with the British and French Governments, and protested 'we do not consider ourselves a national minority, seeking the protection of Geneva'. In 1929, ten years after the Paris Peace Conference, the situation of the Jewish minorities in various States of Eastern and Central Europe was summed up in a memorandum of the Council for the Rights of Jewish Minorities, thus: 'It is regrettable a well-known fact that the rights secured to the Jews in the Peace Treaties have mostly not been realized till now. In various countries these rights are still today an object of a continuing struggle of the Jews to achieve civic, political and ethnic equality.' Between 1919 and 1920 Lucien Wolf produced thirteen enormously detailed lucid and very informative reports on the problems of the Jews in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Jewish refugees from Russia and even on the Marranos in Portugal. His successes were very limited. But the reports remain a quarry for students of history.

To the end he was the Western World's Ambassador-in-Chief for the Jewish people. He died in 1930, when Hitler was on the horizon, but had to wait three more years to come to power. The shadow was already there. If one compares him with Weizmann as a diplomat, he was undoubtedly the better informed, was extremely well versed in diplomatic history and brilliant in drafting memoranda. But he was and remained the ideal civil servant. He lacked statesmanship and great vision, and, most important, he lacked roots in the Jewish people. He remained a brilliant outsider, a wanderer between two worlds. Weizmann was a statesman of great daring and vision, a supreme architect of policy with profound roots in Russian Jewry. When he spoke to other statesmen it was as an equal, addressing others of the same rank; and he was supremely confident that he spoke for the true interests of the Jewish people as a whole. Civil servants, however brilliant, lack the qualities which make for real statesmanship.

NOTES

1 The literature on the Balfour Declaration and Zionist diplomacy leading to the establishment of the State of Israel is enormous. The most important studies are: L. Stein, The Balfour Declaration (London 1961); M. Verete, 'The Balfour Declaration and its Makers', Middle Eastern Studies 6 (1970) 48–76; Dvorah Barzilay, 'On the Genesis of the Balfour Declaration', Zion (Jerusalem 1966, Hebrew) 200ff; C. Abramsky, War, Revolution and the Jewish Dilemma (London 1975); Ben Halpem, The Idea of the Jewish State. Practically everyone who was connected with the Balfour Declaration wrote important memoirs. The literature dealing with the establishment of the State of Israel is outside the scope of this paper.

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4 Ibid. 15.

5 Ibid., see the bibliography of his writings, pp. 37–47, especially Sir Moses Montefiore (London 1884); The Resettlement of the Jews in England (1887); Cromwell’s Jewish Intelligence (1891); Menasseh Ben Israel’s Mission to Oliver Cromwell (1901); Menasseh Ben Israel’s Resettlement Tracts (1900); Notes on the Diplomatic History of the Jewish Question (1919); The Jew in Diplomacy (1923).

6 Ibid. 387.

7 Ibid. 60–3 and 460, written in 1896 after the death of Hirsch.

8 Ibid. 414ff. (written in 1911).


12 Wolf (see n. 3) 16 note 1.


14 Buchanan to Grey, March 10 1915, FO 800/74 (Grey Papers, quoted in Mark Levene, see n.2) 94.

15 See Wolf to Leygues, Draft March 3 1916. FO 371/2817/42608, quoted in Leonard Stein, Balfour Declaration, 222; C. Abramsky (see n.14) 12–16, and notes 31–43, 30–1, and the literature mentioned in n.1 of this paper.

16 Wolf to Edmund de Rothschild, 14 February 1916. Also quoted in Mark Levene (see n.2) p. 144.

17 Ibid. 144.

18 Ibid. 151–2.

19 Abramsky (see n.15) 15–16, and notes 34–43, 31.

20 Ibid. 16.

21 Stein (see n.15) in many sections of his book.


23 Ibid. 24.

24 Ibid. 40–1.


26 Interview between Sturdza and Wolf, Jewish World, October 16 1908, quoted in Mark Levene (see n.2) 166.


28 Shmuel Ettinger (see n.2).


31 See Mark Levene (see n.2) 253.

32 Interview between Wolf and Zalewski, 6 July 1917. Mowschowitch Papers, Yivo, New York 16133/9, also Levene (see n.2) 258.

33 Mowschowitch Papers, Yivo, New York 11205–12, 1918, also used by Levene (see n.2) 275–6.

34 Levene (see n.2) 296, notes 25–8.

35 See John Maynard Keynes, The Economic Consequences of the Peace (London 1920) 273.

36 See C. Abramsky (see n.14) 24–7; Idem. Lenin and the Jews (London 1970); Idem.

37 See Ettinger, mentioned in n. 1.

38 See Wolf's diary (University College, Mocatta Library) 31 March 1919, 93–5; and 13 August 1919.

39 There was an imbalance in the Jewish role in the economy of Hungary in 1938 (the same is equally true of the 1920s, when nearly half of all Hungarian Jews were self-employed in commerce, 54.2 per cent of all physicians, 49.2 per cent of lawyers, 37.5 per cent of chemists and engineers, 31.7 per cent of journalists, and more than 20 per cent of all those engaged in sciences, literature, art, music and the theatre. See I. Vegházi, 'The Role of Jewry in the Economic Life of Hungary', in *Hungarian Jewish Studies II* (New York 1969) 66–8. Similar situations existed in Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and even in Czechoslovakia.

40 See Nathaniel Katzburg, 'The Jewish Question in Hungary in the Inter-War Period: Jewish Attitudes', in Bela Vago and George Mosse (eds) (see n. 2) 116.

41 Ettinger (see n. 40) 33.


43 The literature on Chaim Weizmann is quite enormous and is outside the scope of this paper.