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Utopia in Palestine? - German Zionists and the Idea of
Verstaendigung between Jews and Arabs, from its beginning to 1948

This study preassumes that within German Zionism (here perceived as Zionism based on German language and culture), existed a respectable notion - respectable compared to Zionisms based in other countries - striving for the idea to come to a mutual understanding with the Arabs in Palestine. Verstaendigung was the often-used key-word of these German Zionists, who urged "official" Zionism to approach the Arab question. Beyond other common - and various - divisions of Zionism (in streams and affiliations) I argue that this "Zionism of Verstaendigung" was an original and autonomous version of Zionism, defining it as a Zionism that saw Verstaendigung with the Arabs as more than additional, but rather substantial. Thus, what determined Zionism of Verstaendigung and finally made it into one stream of Zionism was the combination of two general assumptions: necessity as well as possibility of Verstaendigung. Whereas mostly that stream within German Zionism is identified with the rather famous and small group Brith Shalom, I also argue that Verstaendigung was in many respects a larger phenomenon: in terms of containing more and different people, milieus, ideological backgrounds and concepts of Verstaendigung. That is also why the term "bi-national" Zionism - as it is commonly called, according to its main idea in terms of political conceptions - seems to be inadequate: The main notion of that Zionism was not necessarily and especially not for all its representatives bi-nationalism, but Verstaendigung, whereas a bi-national state was seen as a means rather than an end in itself.

The study examines this Zionism using a group-biographical approach, for which I chose fifteen people to be in the focus. These fifteen composing the study were chosen

according to the following criteria: inclusion of those people who were determining that stream of Zionism and the discussions within it most; representation of the various inner-differentiations. Thus, besides those people known for Brith Shalom (e.g. the Bar Kochba-group: Hugo Bergman, Hans Kohn, Robert Weltsch), the study includes people also rather from the middle of German Zionism and therefore another tradition of it, such as Kurt Blumenfeld, Felix Rosenbluth, Gustav Krojanker, among others.

The approach of a group-biography with fifteen personalities in its center seems to be an adequate way to write the history of an idea and its bearers and determining personalities, especially if not understood only as a rather traditional intellectual historiography. Instead, a group-biography provides the tools to examine that idea from different, social historical perspectives as well as to discuss the various differentiations among the protagonists. Therefore the following dimensions of the idea of Verstaendigung constitute the fundamental analyzing-units:

- persons and milieus,
- ideological formations and the special perspectives of Verstaendigung,
- political conceptions and
- discussions, actions, attempts for implementation.

Thus, the underlying frame-questions are about Why and How of Zionism of Verstaendigung in its different streams. Further, the dependencies between the dimensions of the idea are discussed. For example, it is analyzed, how much a general Weltanschauung and a specific perception of Zionism and its aims and values led to the idea of Verstaendigung and to what extent that was again different among the fifteen representatives. Correspondingly, in terms of their perspectives of Verstaendigung the fifteen form a spectrum between here so-called 'moderates' and 'radicals' and it is discussed in what way it is possible to draw lines between a specific position within that spectrum on the one hand and, for example, socialization in a certain and certain Zionist milieu and also political suggestions for Palestine on the other hand.

Examining that Zionism of Verstaendigung and its representatives along the above outlined questions in three chronological units - from the beginnings of that notion within German Zionism around World War I to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 - one underlying question is also about crisis, breaks and its context: how much the fifteen changed or did not change views or parts of them, even crossed the border, for example to a Zionism that saw Verstaendigung not any more as a substantial part, but rather additional, even optional.

An article presenting some outlines of the topic I published in: "Kassandrarufer? - Robert Weltsch, eine Stimme des Verstaendigungszionismus", in: Juedischer Almanach des Leo Baeck Instituts 2001, Frankfurt/Main 2000, S. 108-126.