**Chapter 2 | 1918–1939**

**British rule in Eretz Israel \* Impact of the establishment of Keren Hayesod (Foundation Fund) \* Balfour Forest \* Leading the Lineup of Donor States \* King George V Forest \* Establishment of JNF CT \* The Outbreak of World War II**

The Balfour Declaration and the onset of British rule in Eretz Israel were milestones and important inflection points in the attitude of the community and, even more so, of its leaders toward Zionism and Eretz Israel. More and more Zionist organizations and associations began to take shape in Britain, whetting interest in establishing the National Home and amplifying the wish to be involved and contribute to the cause. In Eretz Israel, the imprints of the new era were quickly felt. In April 1918, Weizmann visited Eretz Israel accompanied by a distinguished retinue (known as the ‘committee of envoys’) of Jewish personalities from Diaspora communities, including a respectable number of representatives from Britain, to lay the foundations for cooperation with the new government in Eretz Israel. It was in the course of this visit that the ceremonial cornerstone of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem was laid in a highly impressive and well attended ceremony on JNF land.

The footsteps of the new era, accompanied by a sense of euphoria at national rebirth, signalled to the JNF that opportunities for massive land purchases would soon open up and that, in view of the new reality, it was time for the organization’s fundraising in the Diaspora to shift gears. The JNF needed to cease relying mainly on collecting small amounts here and there and no longer focus on sporadic settlement projects; instead, it should start ‘thinking big’ and make practical achievements its priority.

As London became the epicenter of Zionist Movement administration, attracting Zionist functionaries from all parts of the Diaspora, the movement proclaimed the establishment of a Preparation Fund as an ad hoc mechanism that would raise £ 200,000 in urgent donations for use in revitalizing the ruins of the Yishuv after the war. The fundraising for this enterprise coincided with heightened JNF money-raising efforts all over the Diaspora. Leading movement activists were sent to the four corners of the earth to stir donors’ willingness to step up their contributions; these included Weizmann’s close friend, the journalist and author Nahum Sokolow, who had relocated to London. Sokolow, subsequently the fifth president of the Zionist Movement, apprised Weizmann of the sums that were raised in Britain in the course of hundreds of rallies and conferences and put his finger on the main difficulty: how to explain to the donors exactly what the money was meant for.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The effects of the strenuous information efforts became evident within a year, as total JNF revenue from the Diaspora tripled. In Britain, too, after years of torpor and scanty flows of funds into the Commission’s exchequer, the new-era euphoria that gripped everybody and the intensive public relations by Sokolow and his associates all across Britain found immediate expression. In the first half of 1918, donations rose to £ 2,000. It was for good reason that the treasurer, Elija Wolf Rabbinowice, newly elected to the chair, did not hesitate to proclaim in the course of the first annual convention, held in Manchester on August 4, 1918, that the fundraising target for the coming fiscal year would be £ 5,000 (!). Simon Marks, the chair of the English Zionist Federation and a participant in the convention, boldly announced his own aspiration: raising for the JNF in Britain at least £ 20,000 per year within a few years. ‘\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’, he exclaimed from the podium of the chair to the activists at the impressive gathering—roughly a hundred heads of committees in the provinces and representatives of dozens of Zionist organizations who were associated with the four large Zionist entities of which the Jewish National Fund Commission for England was composed—the English Zionist Federation, the Order of Ancient Maccabeans, the Joint Council of Jewish Friendly Societies in Manchester, [המצאתי תרגום זה, לא מצאתי אותו במסמך רשמי] and Poale Zion.

\_\_\_\_ [מקור המובאה המופיעה כאן: באנגלית][[2]](#footnote-2)

Many British Jews responded to the call by beginning to donate in a variety of ways. While some of the proceeds were forwarded directly to the administration in Jerusalem and were not recorded as the Commission’s revenues (as happened in the case of Alfred Mond, who promised in November 1918 to donate £ 25,000 in several portions between 1919 and 1929),[[3]](#footnote-3) the Commission began to market several new programs with the encouragement of the central administration. In the Nahlah scheme—an initiative broached by the agronomist Akiva Ettinger, then director of the Agricultural Settlement Department of the Zionist Organization and the Lands Department of the JNF—it was proposed to solicit donations from British Jewry, by means of the Commission, for the purchase of five hundred dunam (ten hectares) [הוספתי] parcels of land, each costing £ 200, in the memory of Dr. Jechiel Tschlenow.[[4]](#footnote-4)

To promote this venture, David Levontin, the first director of the Jaffa branch of the Anglo-Palestine Bank, participated in a meeting of the Commission and suggested that to meet the targets of the Nahlah scheme, the Commission should set the goal of raising £ 6,000 by the end of 1919. As it was presented to the public, each donor was supposed to fund the acquisition of one dunam by contributing £ 2. The Commission adopted Levontin’s recommendation and also undertook to purchase one additional parcel in honour of Rabbi Goldbloom and his wife on the occasion of their silver anniversary. The donations that were collected in the rest of the Diaspora and from the Commission sufficed for the purchase of 66 dunams adjacent to the Hadar Hacarmel neighbourhood in Haifa to be used for a new neighbourhood that would bear Tschlenow’s name—the Yechiel Quarter.

Apart from the Nahlah scheme, the Committee set several additional objectives and plans for fiscal 1919. One was the establishment of a Pioneer Fund at the behest of the Poale Zion association in England, whose representatives, as stated, were on the board of the Commission; its purpose was to raise £ 1,000 for assistance to the farmers of the Yishuv. Another program was the Palestine Settlement Fund, which encouraged self-taxation as a permanent obligation, evoking the biblical tithe, of the sum of £ 10 per year; a third scheme was a campaign that would encourage every Jewish community in the UK to contribute toward the planting of a hundred trees. In addition to these new initiatives, the first annual convention resolved on the establishment of procedures for the emptying of collection boxes twice a year, the publication of a weekly Jewish National Fund Bulletin in English and Yiddish, and an annual conference that would take place in a different main province of Britain each time. At the end of the gathering, representatives of the provincial committees were summoned one by one to announce their fundraising targets and a statement was released assuring the Commission’s maximum support for the JNF: ‘\_\_\_\_’.[[5]](#footnote-5) [מקור המובאה—באנגלית] The Commission managed to meet most of the targets that it set in the course of the gathering except for the regular publication of the bulletin due to the rather steep printing and distribution costs that the project would entail. In subsequent years, several additional attempts were made to find a way to issue the publication on a regular basis.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In July 1919, the Zionist Organization put out a call for the establishment of an additional ad hoc Zionist fund, the Palestine Restoration Fund, whose purpose was to galvanize the building of the Yishuv. The sums of money that Diaspora communities were expected to donate to help (in fact, to fund) the purchase of land in Eretz Israel and to build and revitalize the Yishuv grew steadily, forcing the Commission not only to compete with parallel Zionist funds but also to struggle on additional fronts. Despite the general euphoria that accompanied the national revival and the steep increase in fundraising revenue, British Jewry’s indifference to Zionism remained strongly evident. Another challenge that made it hard for the Commission to meet its ambitious targets had to do with its organizational structure, which in greater part, as mentioned, was based on volunteer work by both the board and the provincial committees. This hardship was manifested mainly in faltering communication with the chairs of the far-flung committees and difficulty in finding funds with which to invite prominent speakers to visit remote communities and campaign among them for Zionist goals generally and those of the JNF particularly. For example, when the committee in Glasgow asked Rabbi Goldblum, then deputy chair of the English Zionist Federation, to visit that city at its expense to give sermons in two synagogues on the anniversary of Herzl’s death, with the proceeds going to the JNF, they noted, ‘\_\_\_’.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Another conspicuous problem was the large-scale turnover of personnel in the Commission’s board. In the course of 1918, three secretaries succeeded each other until it was determined that Percy P. Baker, owner of a brushmaking factory, would receive the post. In September of that year, a decision was made to relocate the Commission offices from Fulbourne Street in the East End to central London, where the Commission would share an office with the English Zionist Federation at 119–120 London Wall.

After Dr. Max Bodenheimer resigned from the JNF helm in September 1919, the banker Nehemia de Lieme was named his successor. De Lieme’s tenure lasted only one year; then he, too, resigned due to a disagreement about buying land in the Jezreel Valley. Amid this instability at the JNF board, the English Commission carried on its routine, holding annual assemblies, setting budget targets, promoting high-visibility projects as focal points of its fundraising activity, and attempting to recruit more and more volunteers for fundraising activities and, above all, for keeping track of and emptying the Blue Boxes. Some of these volunteers, Zionist activists in Britain, occasionally allowed themselves to pursue independent initiatives and forward their proceeds to the Commission. For example, Sir Lewis Bernstein Namier, a professor of modern British history from an assimilated Jewish family and a familiar and much-respected figure in Conservative Party circles developed an original fundraising method when he joined the English Zionist Federation. He would regularly buy crates of Adin bath soap from the Shemen plant in Haifa, sell the contents to friends and acquaintances, use the proceeds to buy new crates at once, and send the difference to the Commission.[[8]](#footnote-8)

1. [??] ג"ו 3-444, Sokolow to Weizmann, August 8, 1918. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. National Library of Israel 1918:1 PC 6047. Report of the First Annual Assembly of the Jewish National Fund Commission for England, August 1918. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sir Alfred Moritz Mond (1868–1930), Lord Melchett was a British industrialist, financier, and politician, a Zionist philanthropist, and a close associate of Weizmann who headed the Palestine Economic Council for the economic development of the Yishuv. The town of Tel Mond is named for him. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Jechiel Tschlenow (1863–1918), a doctor and a Zionist leader, chaired the All-Russian Zionist Conferences for many years and was a member of the Jewish Colonial Trust and the Jewish National Fund. On the eve of World War I, he, together with the Zionist Executive, moved to London, where he died. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. National Library of Israel 1918:1 PC 6047. Report of the First Annual Assembly of the Jewish National Fund Commission for England, August 1918. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In 1923, for example, the bulletin went over to a monthly format and the possibility of printing it in Germany was considered. Another attempt to distribute it was made by publishing it in the *Zionist Review*; this format, too, however, was discontinued in 1926. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Central Zionist Archives A61/71, JNF committee in Glasgow to Goldbloom, 2 June 1918. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Leopold Schen memoirs, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)