LONDON JEWS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR
We Were There Too

Moses Sclare – a forgotten Zionist

In 1915 Moses Sclare made a unique contribution towards obtaining the Labour Party's support for Zionism and the establishment of Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Moses Sclare was born Moses Sklarewsky in Elizabethgrad in Russia on 29 July 1867. He emigrated to Britain and by 1891 he was working in Glasgow as a steam engine fitter where he became an official of the Glasgow branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, one of the oldest and most influential trade unions in Britain.

In 1906 he moved with his wife and three daughters to Leeds, his wife's home town, to become the full-time General Secretary of the Leeds Amalgamated Jewish Tailors', Machiners' and Pressers' Trade Union and went on to represent his union at TUC Congresses from 1906 until 1922 where he spoke regularly about improving workers' rights and working conditions in the clothing trade for Jews and non-Jews. His union had a unique record amongst Jewish trade unions as it only one which attended every TUC Congress between 1895 and 1915 with only one exception in 1898. In 1916 his union merged with the Tailors and Workers Union.

As a Jewish trade unionist in Leeds, Sclare was exposed to the ideas of the Poale Zion (the Workers of Zion) movement which the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe had brought with them. The ideology of Poale Zion was a blend of socialism and Zionism aimed at persuading Jewish workers to support Palestine as a Jewish homeland as well to campaign Jewish equality in all countries. One of Poale Zion's aims was to build links with the British labour movement so that by 1915, Leeds had forty members, which almost certainly included Sclare, and was well established by then as one of the two main Poale Zion centres in Britain.[1] After the outbreak of the First World War, Poale Zion began to campaign for the civil and political rights of the Jewish people.

The general feeling at the TUC's Annual Congress held in Bristol in in September 1915 was one of support for Britain's war effort. It was against this background and to support Poale Zion's campaign that Moses Sclare moved his union's resolution *'Political and Civil rights for Jewish people'* which called for the granting of

[1] Gideon Shimoni, 'Poale Zion: A Zionist Transplant in Britain (1905-1945)', in Studies in Contemporary Jewry Vol. 2, ed. by Peter Y. Medding, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 231.

political and civil rights to the Jewish people in countries where these common rights were currently being denied. He spoke about the plight and maltreatment of the Jews in Russia and Romania as well as 'the one million Jews' who were fighting in the war on the side of the allies. He urged the TUC's Parliamentary committee to petition the Government to obtain these common rights for these disenfranchised Jews. [2] Sclare was cheered by his fellow delegates when he returned to his seat at the end of his speech with the result that the resolution was adopted unanimously. He returned to Congress the following year with a similar motion which again called on the British Government to ensure that any place treaty at the conclusion of the war would include a guarantee for the civil and political rights for the Jews.[3] Once again Congress adopted his motion unanimously.

What had made his 1915 resolution unique was that this was the first time anyone, albeit a Jew had ever spoken, at a TUC Congress about the civil and political rights of the Jewish people.

Sclare's 1915 Congress resolution had echoed these demands which presented them to a much wider audience. Within days of Sclare returning home after moving his resolution at the TUC Congress, the Poale Zion backed 'Workers League for Jewish Emancipation' held a conference of Jewish labour organisations from all over Britain, in Leeds which called for 'free immigration and colonisation in

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[2] For details of the resolutions and the debate see 1915 TUC Congress motion: *'Political and Civil rights for Jewish people'* - 'That this Congress fervently hopes that civil and political rights will be granted to the Jews of those countries where these common rights are at present denied to them, in recognition of the great sacrifices the best manhood of Jewry is making on the side of the Allies in our common fight for the liberties of the world, and that the Parliamentary Committee shall petition the British Government to use its good offices in that direction when the opportunity will arise', TUC Congress proceedings 1915, pp.306-7

[3] 1916 TUC Congress motion, *'Political and Civil rights for the Jewish People'* – 'That this Congress expresses its emphatic condemnation of the continued oppression and discrimination of the Jewish people, and regrets that in some countries the Jewish people are still deprived of elementary political and civil rights. This Congress, therefore, requests the British Government to urge upon our Allies and the Governments of neutral nations to cease all such discriminations wherever they exist and now practiced against the Jewish people. And further, requests that the British representatives shall endeavour to include in the Peace Treaty, wherever the terms and peace conditions for the conclusion of the present war will be discussed a guarantee for civil and political rights to the Jews and other nationalities who are subjected to such disabilities', TUC Congress proceedings 1916, pp.405-6

Palestine and other lands'.[4] Shortly afterwards Sclare presided over the first meeting of the Leeds branch of this organisation.[5]

'As there are a few Poale Zion records which have survived from the period connecting Moses Sclare to Poale Zion it confirms that Poale Zion was the driving force behind the resolutions which he moved at the TUC Congresses and were part of their campaign for the acceptance and support of Zionism by the British Labour movement. '

Two years later, in August 1917, three months before Lord Balfour's letter to Lord Rothschild, the Labour Party published their War Aims memorandum. The memorandum set out a Socialist and Labour vision for the future once peace had been achieved which included; making the world safe for democracy, proposals on territorial questions and the establishment of the League of Nations. The section on territorial questions proposed a solution the civil rights for the Jews and their right to live in Palestine.[6] Zionist leader Chaim Weitzman believed that Poale Zion had been '*responsible for the favourable declaration of the Labour Party*'[7]. Moses Sclare played an important part in their campaign as he was the first trade union leader to speak out on the civil and political rights of the Jews. He died in Leeds on 8 September 1949, a year after the establishment of the State of Israel.

Dr. Ronnie Fraser

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[4] Gideon Shimoni, 'Poale Zion: A Zionist Transplant in Britain (1905-1945)', in Studies in Contemporary Jewry Vol. 2, ed. by Peter Y. Medding, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp.230-1

[5] Jewish Chronicle, 24 September 1915

[6] The section in the memorandum on the Jews and Palestine read: *"The British Labour Movement demands for the Jews in all countries the same elementary rights of tolerance, freedom of residence and trade, and equal citizenship that ought to be extended to all the inhabitants of every nation. It furthermore expresses the opinion that Palestine should be set free from the harsh and oppressive government of the Turk, in order that the country may form a Free State, under international guarantee, to which such of the Jewish People as desired to do so may return, and may work out their salvation free from interference by those of alien race or religion". Labour Peace Aims, The Times, 11 August 1917.*

[7] Letter from Weitzman to Brandeis, 5 March 1918, Weitzman archives, Israel.

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