ZANGWILL, Israel (1864, London, England-1926, Midhurst, Sussex, England)

Israel Zangwill was a British-Jewish author, journalist, and activist. His best-known literary works are a novel, *The Children of the Ghetto* (1892), and a melodrama, “The Melting Pot” (1908). In Jewish political circles, Zangwill was known for his role in the Zionist movement and as the founder of the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO). Like other modern Jewish thinkers, Zangwill pursued a Jewish identity that balanced the twin forces of tradition and assimilation. Initially attracted to the Zionism of Theodore Herzl, Zangwill later founded the ITO, which sought a Jewish home in any plausible location, following the Kishinev pogroms of 1903, Britain’s subsequent offer of an autonomous Jewish home in Africa (the Uganda Plan), and Herzl’s death in 1904. But Zangwill also argued that the newly important American Jewish community should become a cultural center of Jewish life through the creation of a vibrant, evolutionary Jewish religion and culture, uniting Jewish history with American creativity. Zangwill eventually abandoned both Zionism and America as solutions. In a 1923 address to the American Jewish Congress that alienated many listeners, he pronounced political Zionism dead, arguing that the restrictions of the Balfour Declaration and the demographic superiority of the Arab population would doom the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine—a prediction that resonates today. Zangwill also criticized the American Jewish community for its failure to demand social justice in the political arena. After 1923, Zangwill was a marginal figure in Jewish discourse, though today there is renewed scholarly interest in his work.

Bibliography: Rochelson, Meri-Jane, *A Jew in the Public Arena: The Career of Israel Zangwill*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2008.

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