Zionism bills itself as the ‘anti-anti-Semitism’, but the reality is very different. As Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, frequently noted, the purpose of the new movement was not to combat anti-Jewish hatred, but to employ it as a lever with which to bring about the Jewish state. Zionists may not have exactly approved of anti-Jewish violence, but they welcomed it to the degree that it allowed them to drive home their point that anti-Semitism in the Diaspora was inescapable. Since anti-Semitism could not be defeated in situ, they maintained, the only solution was to dissolve the Diaspora by transferring the Jewish population en masse to Palestine and getting on with the construction of a Jewish state.

‘The anti-Semites will be our most loyal friends,’ Herzl declared, ‘the anti-Semitic countries will be our allies’.¹ In an important 1983 study, Zionism in the Age of the Dictators, Lenni Brenner, an independent Trotskyist, based in New York, showed in relentless detail what this moral and political inversion meant from the 1890s through to World War II. In 1903, for example, Herzl believed he had found an anti-Semitic ‘friend’ in Vyacheslav von Plehve, the Czarist minister of the interior who, a few months earlier, had helped organise a pogrom in Kishenev that had killed forty-five people and injured hundreds more. Plehve once told a Jewish delegation: ‘[W]e shall make your position in Russia so unbearable that the Jews will leave the country to the last man.’² Now, after meeting with the great man, Herzl triumphantly announced that Plehve had agreed to back the creation of a homeland for those Jews in fifteen years, if during that time ‘Jewish revolutionaries cease their struggle against the Russian government’³ – in fifteen years, of course, the Czarist government would no longer exist. A few months later, the well-known author Max Nordau, a recent convert to Zionism, told Eduard Drumont’s rabidly anti-Semitic newspaper La Libre Parole that Zionism was ‘not a question of religion, but exclusively of race, and there is no one with whom I am in greater agreement on this point than M. Drumont’.⁴

¹ Segev 2001, p. 21.
² Baron 1987, p. 56.
In April 1933, *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* went on to note, the German Zionist newspaper *Rundschau* said of the anti-Semitic measures that Hitler had just instituted:

Because the Jews did not display their Jewishness with pride, because they wanted to shirk the Jewish question, they must share the blame for the degradation of Jewry.5

If Jews had displayed proper racial consciousness, in other words, the oppression being heaped upon them would not have been necessary. Referring to the six-pointed star that German Jews were now obliged to wear, the *Rundschau* advised: ‘Wear the Yellow Badge with Pride’.

*Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* caused a stir on both sides of the Atlantic. It was praised by the *London Times* and *Izvestia*, attacked in *The New Republic* by the dean of Zionist historians, Walter Laqueur, and served as the inspiration for Jim Allen’s *Perdition*, his play about Zionist dealings with the Nazis, which was suppressed in 1987 under fierce pressure from Britain’s Zionist establishment. In 1984, Brenner went on to write *The Iron Wall*, published by Zed Books. It was a study of the right-wing ideological current known as revisionist Zionism, and two works dealing with American politics. Now, he has returned to his old haunts with *51 Documents: Zionist Collaboration with the Nazis*. Brenner’s latest volume does not add anything fundamentally new to our understanding of Zionism and anti-Semitism, but it does flesh out many of the details.

Despite the title, *51 Documents* does not limit itself to the Nazi period, but begins with Herzl’s founding manifesto, *The Jewish State*, published in 1896. Where Zionists like to think of themselves as sounding the alarm while everyone else sleeping, Brenner reprints a section of Herzl’s booklet assuring readers that ‘governments will never take action against all Jews’ because emancipation and equality ‘cannot be withdrawn where they have once been conceded’ (p. 4). Where modern Zionists bristle at the charge of racism, he reprints a 1904 letter by the Vladimir Jabotinsky, founder of revisionist Zionism and ideological precursor to today’s Likud, declaring that ‘national ego is deeply ingrained in a man’s “blood”; in his racio-physical type, and in that alone’ (p. 10). He quotes Chaim Weizmann telling British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour in 1914 that

> we too are in agreement with the cultural anti-Semites . . . that Germans of the Mosaic faith are an undesirable, demoralizing phenomenon. (p. 22.)

The anti-Semitic stereotype of the pale, neurotic Jew, overly intellectual and prey to every new radical theory, was not incorrect, according to the Zionists. The answer was to return him to a homeland of his own, where, in contact with his native soil, his racial genius could once again emerge.

5 Brenner 1983, p. 50.